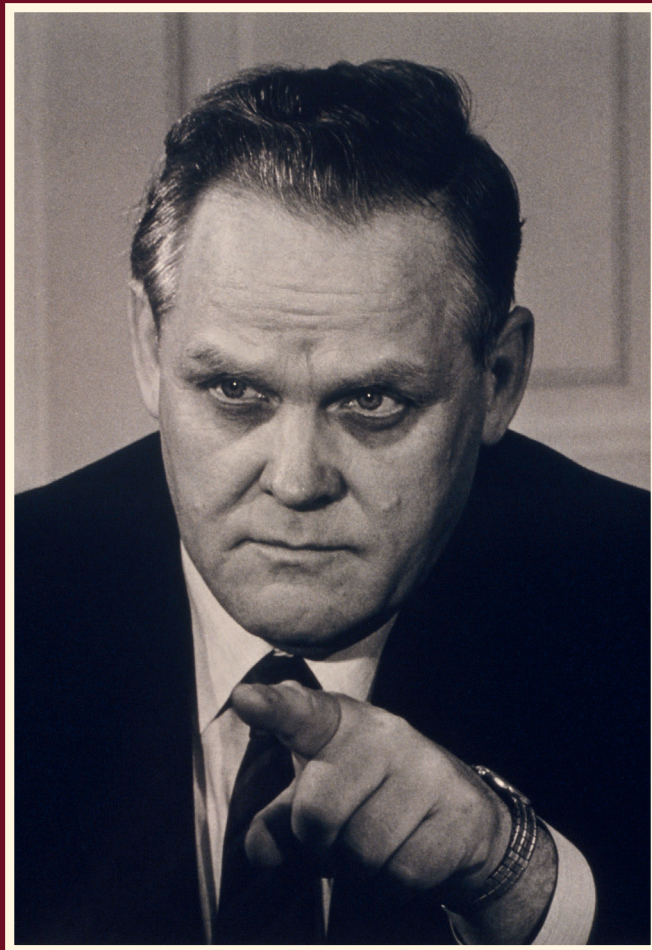


**Tuomas Savonen**

**MINNESOTA, MOSCOW, MANHATTAN**

*Gus Hall's Life and Political Line Until the Late 1960s*



COMMENTATIONES SCIENTIARUM SOCIALIUM

79

**Tuomas Savonen**

**MINNESOTA, MOSCOW, MANHATTAN**

*Gus Hall's Life and Political Line Until the Late 1960s*



Academic dissertation

To be presented for public discussion with the permission of  
the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Helsinki,  
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2020 at 12 o'clock noon

THE FINNISH SOCIETY OF SCIENCES AND LETTERS

HELSINKI 2020

Editor: Jan Sundberg

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and

The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters

Cover design by Nord Print

Cover photo: All Over Press

The series

Commentationes Scientiarum Socialium

is part of the publishing cooperation between

The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters and

the Finnish Academy of Sciences and Letters, established in 1996.

This book has received a subsidy

granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture

distributed by the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies

Distributor:

Bookstore Vetenskapsbokhandeln

Snellmansgatan 13, FIN-00170 HELSINKI, Finland

[tiedekirja@tsv.fi](mailto:tiedekirja@tsv.fi)

[www.tiedekirja.fi](http://www.tiedekirja.fi)

ISSN 0355-256X

ISBN 978-951-653-451-3 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-951-653-452-0 (pdf)

Oy Nord Print Ab

Helsinki 2020

*To the two wonderful women in my life,  
Tuuli and Aava*

## Summary

This study examines the life and political line of Gus Hall (1910-2000), the long-time general secretary of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). The study consists of two main parts. The first main part studies Hall's Finnish American background and his life until 1959 when he became the general secretary of the CPUSA. The information has been gathered from various sources, including Hall's own autobiographical writings which have been studied – like all other sources – critically.

The second main part focuses on the 1960s and looks closely at Hall's political line during the first decade of his general secretaryship. The primary source material of the second main part consists of intelligence documents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In its Operation Solo, the FBI managed to infiltrate two of its informants into the CPUSA's top leadership. The informants followed the party's general secretary closely, creating a collection of more than 21 000 pages of documentary material during the first decade of the operation. As the informants were responsible for the CPUSA's relations with the Soviet Union, the Operation Solo material includes a wealth of behind-the-scenes information concerning the international communist movement and the Soviet Union's financial support for the CPUSA.

By 2020, the FBI has only published the documents from the first ten years (1958-1968) of Operation Solo. As a consequence, this study is limited to examining Hall's activities only until the end of the 1960s.

The study shows that Gus Hall's political line went through several major changes over the decades. Young Arvo Halberg – as Gus Hall was then known – joined the Communist Party in 1927 when Joseph Stalin was gradually tightening his grip on the Soviet party and the international communist movement. Young Arvo had become aware of the special role of the Soviet Union already in his childhood when he followed, with avid interest, the occurrence of the October revolution in Russia. Arvo Halberg's Stalinist upbringing was perfected in Moscow's International Lenin School where he studied in the early 1930s.

As a hot-tempered young man in the 1930s, Halberg – who in the mid-1930s changed his name to Gus Hall – was sometimes ready to resort to violence in order to improve the conditions of the working class. Such an orientation may have at least partly reflected the fact that his father – like many other Finnish Americans in Northern Minnesota in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – had belonged to the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in which sabotage was seen as one possible means of influence.

In the early 1940s Hall gave his support to the Americanized communism of the CPUSA's general secretary Earl Browder. In the mid-1940s, as the party went through a dramatic leadership change, Hall re-invented himself as a supporter of the more Soviet-minded communism of the new party leadership. Such re-invention was helped by the fact that during the leadership change Hall was fighting against the Japanese in the Pacific Ocean and not taking part in party politics.

In the late 1950s Hall once again re-invented himself as the party went through a tumultuous change following Nikita Khrushchev's revelations concerning Stalin and the Hungarian uprising. As Hall was in Leavenworth federal penitentiary during the most heated phases of the CPUSA's infighting, he was able in 1959 to enter the leadership race as a fresh face, untarnished by the recent clashes within the party. Instead of being a Soviet-minded admirer of Stalin, Hall now represented himself as a moderate centrist who was ready to reform the CPUSA.

Reforms were few, however, during Hall's first decade as general secretary. As the Operation Solo documents and other sources show us, the party continued closely following the political line of the Soviet Union. As a consequence, the party was not considered to be an interesting alternative for the young radicals of the 1960s, most of whom saw the Soviet Union as a staid and stodgy bureaucracy. They rather supported the youthful revolutionaries of Fidel Castro's Cuba or Mao's China – both of which Gus Hall abhorred. Similarly, Hall had a highly negative attitude towards the political line of the Italian Communist Party, which many Hall's critics within the CPUSA saw as a viable alternative for the American party.

Hall's Soviet-minded line was best exemplified by the CPUSA's reaction to the Warsaw Pact occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The CPUSA was one of the few Western Communist Parties which wholeheartedly accepted the Warsaw Pact measure. As this study shows, the party's line was not unanimously accepted among the membership, as many CPUSA members left the party following the occupation.

As Hall's political line changed several times during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s he can be accused of opportunism. In the 1960s, however, his line was consistent. It can be best described with the concept of proletarian internationalism. In the language of the international communist movement, proletarian internationalism self-evidently included the idea of the Soviet Union's unchallenged leadership. The Soviet Union was, after all, the first socialist country which could serve as a guiding star to all other countries despite cultural, historical and social differences.

## Preface

Working in a news agency is fast-paced and versatile work, and as such, it is often superficial. A news agency journalist rarely has time to get to know his or her topics even a little more thoroughly. This may start to feel trite over time, especially if the journalist has an inherent tendency to dig deeper into things. As a counterbalance, the journalist may begin to yearn for a project in which he or she can immerse himself or herself in all the branches and details of the matter under investigation, without any hurry whatsoever.

This is what happened to me. As I am writing this, I have been on the payroll of Finnish News Agency STT for almost 20 years. Although it has been fascinating – and even addictive – to live in the midst of the busy stream of the latest news, it has been a blessing to have a peaceful getaway to which one can retreat: the intriguing world of American communism.

Due to the hobby-like nature of this project, the work proceeded at a leisurely pace for many years. Especially in 2009-2012, during my three years as the Brussels correspondent of the STT, very little progress took place in my Gus Hall research. I did travel to the United States annually on my summer holidays, spending weeks in the heart of Greenwich Village studying the massive CPUSA-related collections at the New York University's Tamiment Library. But very little happened research-wise during the winters as I was caught up in covering the financial crisis in the EU. Things started really moving only in 2013-2014 when I was able to take a study leave from news agency work with the help of Koulutusrahasto's adult education support.

Over the years, several organizations have supported my project, for which I am truly grateful. In Finland I received travel grants for my research trips to the United States from the WSOY Literature Foundation, the Finnish Institute of Migration and the Finnish National Doctoral Program for History. In addition, the journalist associations Helsingin Seudun Journalistit and Taloustoimittajat ry helped me to finance my transatlantic travels. In the United States I received travel grants from the Immigration History Research Center of the University of Minnesota, the Finlandia Foundation and The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives of the New York University.

Most of this dissertation was written during the two study leaves in 2013-2014 and in 2016 which were made possible by the Koulutusrahasto. The remaining parts were written in 2019 when the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Helsinki benevolently employed me for seven months to complete my dissertation. In this connection I want to thank my employer Finnish News Agency for being most flexible in the arrangement of my study leaves.

In addition to these organizations, I have of course been helped and supported by countless individuals over the years. I have been lucky to have three outstanding experts on communism as my supervisors. My first supervisor was Professor Seppo Hentilä who jovially encouraged me to go further although my project hardly proceeded during its first years. After him I was supervised by the excellent duo of Professor Kimmo Rentola and Senior Lecturer Tauno Saarela. Tauno's careful attention to details was complemented by Kimmo's ability to

encourage. Kimmo's phrase "Yes, this will become a dissertation all right" ("Kyllä tästä vielä väitöskirja tulee") still echoes in my ears.

Over the years the participants of the political history research seminar patiently read and commented my numerous seminar papers, often providing valuable tips for further reading. With Miwako and Takehiro Okabe, I have had the pleasure to continue our discussions also outside the university premises, often enjoying Japanese delicacies.

One of my most rewarding research contacts has been Dr. Barbara J. Falk from Toronto, Canada. Her expertise on the so-called Smith Act trials – in which Gus Hall was one of the many defendants – does not cease to amaze me. I probably discussed my dissertation more with her than with anyone else. She kindly read through the dissertation manuscript in its last phases and profusely commented on it during our series of hours-long Zoom discussions in the summer and early fall of 2020. It has truly been a pleasure to cross paths with another CPUSA history buff.

During my travels in the United States I was also helped by numerous people. One of my most memorable contacts in this regard was Gus Hall's niece Kristin Koskela who kindly showed me around Gus Hall's birth place Cherry, Minnesota and the surrounding areas. Gary Kaunonen was very helpful when I visited the archives of the Finlandia University in Hancock, Michigan. Going to sauna at Gary's house in Tapiola, Michigan was one the highlights of my visit to the Upper Peninsula. In another part of the United States, Professor Harvey Klehr was equally helpful during my two visits to Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, where I was able to study his wide collections of CPUSA-related material. During my repeated visits to New York University's Tamiment Library I was assisted by many of its staff members, perhaps most memorably by Kevyne Baar, whose friendliness and sense of humor made me feel welcome in New York City.

In Finland, I have been greatly assisted by countless librarians in the National Library of Finland, in the Labor Movement Library in Helsinki and in the library of the Finnish Institute of Migration in Turku. In the final phase of my dissertation project, Tania Moilanen's meticulous language revision essentially helped me to improve the linguistic appearance of the dissertation. Without her contribution, the dissertation would indeed be missing hundreds and hundreds of 'thes'.

To the Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters and Professor Emeritus Jan Sundberg I am grateful for publishing my dissertation in their publishing series.

Some of my thanks go back several decades. The Archer family – who as American diplomats lived next door to my family in Helsinki the early 1980s – I want to thank for expanding my understanding of American culture and society. I am grateful to Ed and Linda Archer also for accommodating me in their beautiful house when I was working in Stockholm, Sweden in the winter of 1988-1989. It may well be that without their early influence, this dissertation would never have come into existence.

I would also like to thank my friends Sanna Kangasharju and David Van Ongevalle for their wonderful hospitality during my visit in Washington D.C. in November 2013. Thanks to Sanna, I was able to join the Diplomatic Sauna Society of Washington D.C. The Sauna Society diploma is one of my great treasures, comparable perhaps only to my doctoral diploma.



Likewise, I want to thank Peter Paik, who accommodated me during my visit in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Without his gumption, I would not have found Gus Hall's grave when we visited Waldheim Cemetery in Chicago in August 2008.

As my research project continued for 15 years, my closest friends were repeatedly exposed to endless monologues on Gus Hall and the fascinating history of the CPUSA. For this I have to apologize. In addition to that, I want to thank my friends for their help and support during this lengthy project. A couple of friends must be mentioned specifically. Anu Piippo, the passionate philologist, was always available when I needed some consultation concerning the wonders of English grammar. With Ilkka Luukkonen I had numerous fruitful discussions on the art of writing in the Hiihtäjätie sauna, although Ilkka's line of writing differs somewhat from academic writing. On our annual kayaking and cycling trips, Joonas Pörsti bravely withstood my thorough reports on the latest developments in Gus Hall research. I was happy to see that Joonas finally started working on his own dissertation just when I was on the final stretches of my work. With Kai Huotari, I had numerous lengthy discussions – both in Helsinki, Finland and in Berkeley, California – on the content of the dissertation. I perhaps never learned to love Gus Hall, as Kai suggested I should do, but surely these discussions helped me to develop a more multidimensional picture of Gus Hall. Visiting the Huotari family in the “People's Republic of Berkeley” in August 2010 was indeed a memorable experience. The evening view from their terrace, with the sun setting behind the San Francisco Bay and Golden Gate Bridge, is forever etched in my mind.

My parents Erkki and Kirsikka Savonen, my sisters Tuttu Sillanpää and Tuuli Burman and their spouses Seppo Sillanpää and Thomas Burman have constantly supported me in realizing my project although the history of American communism is perhaps not among their top fields of interest. In addition to them, I want to thank my wonderful partner Tuuli Muraja for her endurance in living with a maddeningly absent man whose mind was, especially during the last phases of the project, increasingly fixated upon the twists and turns of American communism. It is difficult to love someone who is completely immersed in another world, but Tuuli has proved it is possible.

Our darling daughter Aava, born two years before the completion of the dissertation, provided me extra motivation to finish the project as from now on, I can spend more time in her delightful company. I want to thank her for teaching her father what is really essential in life.

As I am writing these words in the midst of an untiring global corona pandemic, my highly enjoyable visits to New York City, California and the Finnish American areas in Minnesota and Michigan seem like a faraway dream. I am grateful for having been able to live through such experiences and most certainly hope that some day the world can return to life as it used to be.

In Herttoniemi, Helsinki on October 28, 2020

Tuomas Savonen

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. A cool September day in Moscow

The Moscow weather in mid-September 1981 was cooler than usually at that time of the year, but Gus Hall, the general secretary of the American Communist Party, was enjoying his visit in the Soviet capital. Before coming to Moscow, Hall had visited Athens, Greece, where he had been the main speaker at a massive rally of the Greek communist party. Hall was visiting Moscow together with his wife Elizabeth and a Chicago communist couple Jack and Sue Kling, who were long-time party members and their close friends. In Moscow the two couples spent their days sightseeing and shopping. The joyous mood of the visit turned sour, however, when the Americans received dramatic news from their home country. Gus Hall was brought a copy of a newspaper article and when reading it, his face turned grave. “Has someone died”, Sue Kling asked. Hall’s answer was curt. “Worse”, he said.<sup>1</sup>

The newspaper article in question contained information on two brothers, Morris and Jack Childs, who had been close associates of Hall ever since 1959 when Hall had become the general secretary. Jack Childs had died in August 1980 at the age of seventy-three, but Hall had been in touch with his older brother only some months earlier. Ever since the late 1950s Morris Childs had been “the secretary of state” or “ambassador” of the CPUSA, taking care of party’s contacts to socialist countries and, most importantly, the Soviet financial subsidies to the American party. Between 1958 and 1980 the CPUSA had received more than \$28 million from the Soviet Union, all of which had gone through the hands of the Childs brothers.

Now a book had been published in the United States claiming that the Childs brothers had all this time been informers of the FBI. Historian David J. Garrow had come across such information as he had been researching for his book concerning FBI’s surveillance of Martin Luther King in the 1960s. The Bureau had watched King closely because he was suspected to have close contacts with the American communists. While there was some truth in these claims, King’s connections to the CPUSA were indeed flimsy.

The publication of Garrow’s *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.* – including, of course, his findings on the Childs brothers – made first-page news in *Washington Post* and was covered by many other newspapers as well. According to Sue Kling, Gus Hall was “very shocked” after reading the news. Jack Kling was “physically sick” after hearing such news about his close friend.<sup>2</sup> In New York the party headquarters prepared a press release in which Henry Winston, the chairman of the party, denounced the claims of Garrow’s book. According

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1 Sue Kling described the events in Moscow in an interview with David J. Garrow in January 1999. In addition to that, Jack Kling described the 1981 Moscow visit in his autobiography. See David J. Garrow’s unpublished manuscript, 85 and Kling 1985, 106.

2 David J. Garrow’s unpublished manuscript, 85.



to Winston, the American people were “being confronted with a new and monstrous hoax by the Reagan administration”. Winston continued:

What is being perpetrated is a sensational frame-up designed to smear an American working class party, an attempt through character assassination of the Childs brothers and even the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Gus Hall. It is designed to sow confusion and mistrust in the growing ranks of the people’s fight-back against Reagan’s assault upon their living standards, constitutional rights and longing for world peace.

The hoary myth about Soviet funding of progressive movements in the United States, the “Moscow gold” charge is a perennial, totally false lying invention.

This attempted frame-up signals a dangerous bid to revive the McCarthyite era of persecution in our country. It smacks of the fascist practices of the Hitler regime when the Reichstag Capital was burned by the Nazi accusers who attempted to frame up the heroic communist Georgi Dimitroff.<sup>3</sup>

However, Garrow’s book was not a “monstrous hoax by the Reagan administration”. The Childs brothers were not victims of character assassination, but they had for more than 20 years served as FBI’s informers, passing on all possible information to the Bureau’s agents in New York and Chicago. After Garrow’s book had been published, Morris Childs and his wife Eva were never again seen at any party functions. They had, in fact, already in August moved to a luxurious ocean-view apartment in Miami, Florida with guards patrolling in the lobby around the clock.<sup>4</sup> Thus ended a decades-long operation which has been claimed to be one of the greatest, if not the greatest, intelligence success of the FBI.

Garrow’s book had revealed only the basic features of the operation, but in 1995 John Barron provided a much more detailed picture in his *Operation Solo: The FBI’s Man in the Kremlin*. Barron’s book was based on interviews with Morris Childs and the FBI agents handling the operation. Barron, an experienced journalist, was not a professional historian, which could clearly be seen from his book. Intelligence experts and historians of American communism criticized Barron’s book severely and some of them expressed a wish that someday Operation Solo could be studied by a proper historian.

Since August 2011, the FBI has made research on Operation Solo possible by gradually publishing the original documents of Operation Solo on its website. In the fall of 2020, the FBI had published most documents related to the operation from February 1958 to August 1968, all together little more than 21 000 pages. These documents are central source material for this dissertation.

This study is not, however, a study primarily on Operation Solo. Instead, the main focus of this study is on Gus Hall. After Hall became CPUSA’s general secretary in December 1959, he co-operated closely with the Childs brothers, even to the extent that he can be called one of the main characters of the Operation Solo material. As a consequence, I will make use of Solo documents especially in the latter half of my study in which I will focus on Hall’s political line in the 1960s. Operation Solo documents are a highly suitable source for such an examination, as they contain large amounts of behind-the-scenes information

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3 CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 109, folder 1.

4 Barron 1995, 331.

especially concerning CPUSA's relations with the Communist Party of Soviet Union and other comrade parties. In addition to Hall's political line, I will also examine his party leadership and personality, which topics are also prominently featured in Operation Solo material.

Before delving into Operation Solo documents and Gus Hall's political line in the 1960s, I will, however, first take a thorough look on Hall's life before the 1960s. I will study Hall's family background, his youth in Minnesota and his first steps in the party organization, including his studies in the International Lenin School in Moscow. In addition to that, I will examine Hall's career as a labor organizer in the 1930s, his experiences during WWII, the first Smith Act trial in the late 1940s – in which Hall was one of the defendants – and his prison years in the 1950s. I believe that looking at Hall's background, his youth and his party career which culminated in 1959 when Hall became CPUSA's general secretary can considerably help explaining his political line and his party leadership in the 1960s.

As a researcher focusing on Gus Hall, I will be more or less stepping onto virgin soil. Hall has naturally played a smaller or bigger role in numerous CPUSA-related studies – most recently in Gary Murrell's biography of CPUSA intellectual Herbert Aptheker and in Daniel Rosenberg's article on CPUSA's split in 1991 – but no academic research has been conducted solely on Gus Hall. The biography of Gus Hall published in 1985 in the Soviet Union or the CPUSA's Hall-related publications do not fulfill the criteria of proper historical research. Many of Hall's life stages – such as his studies in Moscow's International Lenin School or his years as a labor organizer in the 1930s – have been shrouded in secrets or controversial, but my intention in the first half of the study is to illuminate them more effectively than any previous researcher has done so far.

Lack of proper research has not prevented historians from expressing sharp views concerning Hall's character and political orientation. Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes – top experts on CPUSA's history – called him “an unyielding Stalinist” whereas Peter Kivisto – specialist on Finnish American communism – claims that Hall parroted Soviet propaganda while “his political ideas appear to have been hermetically sealed in the ideological mausoleum erected by Stalin”.<sup>5</sup> Robert Service was not very much more discreet when he called Hall “a dullard devotee of the USSR” in his 2007 book *Comrades! – A History of World Communism*.<sup>6</sup> Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps share this view of Hall in their more recent study of American left. According to them, in 1991 “no one better personified this image of fossilized left than Gus Hall [...] who had supported Soviet bureaucratic hardliners opposed to glasnost and perestroika”.<sup>7</sup>

In the latter half of this study, my aim is to find out how correct this prevailing idea of Gus Hall is. To what extent was he a “devotee of the USSR”? What was his position towards alternative forms of communist thinking, especially towards the Chinese and Cubans in the 1960s? What was Gus Hall's relationship to communist parties in other capitalist countries and the first inklings of what was later called Eurocommunism? What was his stance on

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5 Kivisto 1984, 195 and Klehr & Haynes 1992, 176.

6 Service 2007, 127.

7 Brick & Phelps 2015, 268.

the occupation of Czechoslovakia and the emerging New Left of the 1960s? Can Gus Hall be legitimately called a Stalinist – as Klehr and Haynes and numerous other writers have done – and if not, what would be a better way of describing his policies?

In the final conclusions of the study I will bring together the findings of the two halves of the study and reflect on the question on to what extent Hall's political line in the 1960s can be explained by his life experiences before his general secretaryship.

As I study Hall's life and his political line until the late 1960s, I will do it – whenever possible – from an international or even from a transnational perspective. As international communism was a transnational phenomenon in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is appropriate to try to put Hall and the CPUSA in a proper international context.<sup>8</sup> This I will try to do especially when I examine Hall's studies in Moscow's International Lenin School and his political line in the 1960s. Such a perspective has not always been applied in American studies of CPUSA history which often look at the party from a pronouncedly American perspective.

## **1.2. Earlier research**

### **1.2.1. Research concerning Gus Hall and the CPUSA in the 1960s**

Although American Communist Party's (CPUSA) role in American politics has always remained limited, the party and its leaders have received a lot of attention among academic researchers ever since the 1950s. Considering that the party has never been able to have a representative in the U. S. Congress or any state legislature, the constant flow of research has indeed been extensive. The wealth of literature has encouraged some researchers even to say that “never have so many written so much about so few”.<sup>9</sup>

The CPUSA research has, however, to a striking extent concentrated on the decades before the 1960s. This is of course understandable considering the rapid decline of the CPUSA in the 1950s. In the 1960s the CPUSA was already a marginal group, a mere shadow of itself in the glorious days of the 1930s and 1940s. While the party had had around 60 000 to 80 000 members in the mid-1940s, 20 years later it had less than 4 000 members.<sup>10</sup> In his

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8 For a more detailed discussion of the concept of transnationality in the context of international communism, see, for example, Studer 2015, 5-6.

9 Klehr & Haynes 2003, 29.

10 There is no exact and fully trustworthy information available on CPUSA's membership figures and estimates of the figures vary widely. Estimating the correct membership figures is complicated by the fact that the CPUSA and the FBI – which was closely monitoring the party – both had a motivation to inflate the figures, the CPUSA for obtaining larger financial subsidies from Moscow and the FBI for obtaining larger appropriations from the U.S. congress. The CPUSA claimed it had 65 000 members in January 1945. James R. Barrett and James G. Ryan have suggested that the membership figure was even higher – around 80 000 – in the mid-1940s. According to the FBI statistics, the CPUSA had 75 388 members in the end of 1947 and 3 665 members in the summer of 1965. See Glazer 1961, 92; Ryan 1997, 234; Barrett 1999, 226 and Ernie Lazar's collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 1).

recent book Tom Pecinovsky pays attention to the lack of research concerning the post-1950s CPUSA when he writes that “comprehensive histories of party activity during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century written by more competent authors is desperately needed”.<sup>11</sup>

As the CPUSA’s history after the 1950s has not been studied properly, also the party’s post-1959 leader Gus Hall has been left out of historians’ scope. Especially in the 1990s there was a steady flow of biographies of U.S. communists, and some works have also been published during the last few years.<sup>12</sup> Some CPUSA leaders like William Z. Foster and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn have been topics of no less than two properly researched biographies respectively during the last few decades. However, no such work has been published on Gus Hall although he led the party for more than 40 years – longer than any other leader of the party.

The CPUSA naturally published many accounts of Gus Hall’s life story over the years. Produced for party purposes, these undocumented accounts of course do not fulfill the criteria of historical research. The most thorough of these accounts was the 63-page booklet *Gus Hall – The Man and the Message* which was published as a part of Hall’s 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in 1970.<sup>13</sup> Hall’s life story was studied also in, for example, *Gus Hall Bibliography* which was published by the CPUSA publishing house New Outlook Publishers in 1981. Most recently, in 2019, a lengthy article on Gus Hall was published in the book *Let Them Tremble* celebrating the centennial of the CPUSA.<sup>14</sup>

The Soviet Union honored Gus Hall by publishing his biography – written by Mark Lapitsky and Nikolai Mostovets<sup>15</sup> – in Russian in 1980. Soviet publishing house Progress

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11 Pecinovsky 2019, 19.

12 Since the early 1990s biographies have been published at least on Herbert Aptheker (Murrell 2015), Earl Browder (Ryan 1997), Ben Davis (Horne 1994), Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (Camp 1995 and Vapnek 2015), William Z. Foster (Johanningsmeier 1993 and Barrett 1999), James Jackson (Rzeszutek 2015), Al Lannon (Lannon 1999), William Patterson (Horne 2013) and J. Peters (Sakmyster 2011). At the same time, autobiographies were published by John J. Abt (Abt & Myerson 1993), Bettina Aptheker (Aptheker 2006), Howard Fast (Fast 1990), Dorothy Healey (Healey & Isserman 1993) and Junius Scales (Friedman 2009).

13 The booklet consists of three biographical essays written by high-ranking party members Joseph North, James Jackson and George Meyers. The booklet contains several factual mistakes and deficiencies which severely undermine its overall credibility. The writers, for example, do not mention with a single word the fact that Gus Hall studied at Moscow’s International Lenin School in the early 1930s. Instead, the book claims that Hall was leading a protest march of the unemployed in Minneapolis in 1932 and sentenced to prison for four months. In addition to that, the booklet claims that Gus Hall served in the U.S. Navy from 1942 to 1946. This, however, did not take place. In reality, Hall joined the U.S. Navy only in January 1945 and was honorably discharged in March 1946. Similar mistake takes place when Hall’s prison sentence in the 1950s is discussed. The booklet claims that Hall spent eight years in Leavenworth prison, but in reality Hall spent there less than six years because he was released on parole already in March 1957. See North 1970, 10, 18-19 & 25-27 and Jackson 1970, 48.

14 Instead of writing a thoroughgoing biographical article on Hall, Tony Pecinovsky concentrates mainly on Hall’s speeches to university students in the early 1960s. While doing so, Pecinovsky repeats the same mistakes concerning Hall’s whereabouts in the early 1930s and during WWII as other CPUSA writers do. See, for example, Pecinovsky 2019, 127 & 130.

15 Mostovets served for many years as the head of the North and South American section of the international department of the CCCPSU. Mostovets also wrote a biography of CPUSA’s national

Publishers published an English-language version of the biography in 1985. Just like the CPUSA's accounts of Gus Hall's life, the Soviet biography does not meet the requirements for historical research. Lapitsky's and Mostovets's documentation, for example, is almost non-existent.<sup>16</sup>

Gus Hall is naturally featured in several reference books like *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern* and *Encyclopedia of the American Left*. Somewhat surprisingly, these entries contain significant shortcomings and errors, especially concerning Hall's studies in the International Lenin School and his Navy service during WWII.<sup>17</sup> A longer and more thoroughly researched article on Hall can be found in *Leaders of the Communist World*.<sup>18</sup> After Hall's death, some newspapers like *The New York Times* published well-researched obituaries of Hall.<sup>19</sup> In Finnish language probably the best overview of Gus Hall is Auvo Kostianen's article in *Suomen Kansallisbiografia*.<sup>20</sup>

If Gus Hall has not been studied comprehensively, the same can be said about the CPUSA in the 1960s. The internal disputes in the party in the late 1950s have been well covered by researchers, but the years after 1959 have been left almost completely untouched by historians. Most writers discuss the CPUSA in the 1960s in one or two sentences, like Guenter Lewy does in his *The Cause That Failed: Communism in American Political Life*. Lewy writes in length, for example, about the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy and

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chairman Henry Winston. The book was published in English by Progress Publishers in 1983.

16 Lapitsky's and Mostovets's book contain similar shortcomings and mistakes as CPUSA's publications concerning Hall. For example, Lapitsky and Mostovets never mention Hall's studies in the International Lenin School. Similarly the book incorrectly claims that Gus Hall spent four years in the U.S. Navy, fighting the Japanese in the Pacific. The writers are also somewhat selective also when they are writing about CPUSA history in general. For example, when they are discussing the removal of Earl Browder from the party leadership in 1945, they never mention the so-called Duclos letter which according to most historians played a central role in the process. Most historians have considered the letter as Moscow's order to get rid of Browder. Another example of this selective approach to CPUSA's history can be seen when Lapitsky and Mostovets discuss the events of 1951. They never mention CPUSA's exceptional and controversial decision to send four of its top leaders – including Gus Hall – hiding underground because the party saw that the United States was about to become a fascist state. Such gross deficiencies severely undermine the credibility of the book. See Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 27-28, 47, 50-52 & 65-67.

17 The entries in *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left* and *Encyclopedia of the American Left* do not, for example, mention Gus Hall's studies in Moscow's International Lenin School. They also contain incorrect information concerning Hall's Navy service during WWII. The Gus Hall entry in *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern* does mention Hall's studies in Moscow's International Lenin School, but otherwise the entry contains several mistakes and inaccuracies. Gus Hall was not, for example, elected as a member of CPUSA's politburo in the 1930s. In addition to that, Hall did run for president also in 1972 and 1976, not only in 1980 and 1984. See *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 175-176; *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, 167 and *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 287-288.

18 See Swearingen 1971. Rodger Swearingen was among the first to point out that Hall had studied in Moscow's International Lenin School in the early 1930s.

19 *The New York Times*, October 17, 2000. *The New York Times* obituary was written by Sam Tanenhaus, who was well informed concerning American communism after he had written a 1997 biography of Whittaker Chambers, a CPUSA member and Soviet spy who later turned into an ardent anticommunist.

20 Kostianen 2004, 505-506. *Suomen Kansallisbiografia* is a biographical encyclopedia of notable Finns and people of Finnish origin.

Students for Democratic Society, but the CPUSA is mentioned – despite the subtitle of the book – only in passing. Other groups, like the Progressive Labor Party, a small Maoist breakaway from the CPUSA, are studied far more closely than the CPUSA.<sup>21</sup>

Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes study the CPUSA in the 1960s only a bit more closely in their *American Communist Movement – Storming the Heaven Itself*. Much like Guenter Lewy, Klehr and Haynes also focus strongly on the New Left when discussing the 1960s. The Old Left is discussed only shortly:

The Communist Party, rocked by Soviet de-Stalinization and torn apart by internal strife, was on the verge of disintegration. Its membership had all but vanished, disillusioned with communism, exhausted by more than a decade of governmental assault or convinced that American radicalism had no future. Some of its cadre remained loyal, but, like the surviving rank-and-file members, the Communist Party was old, tired and increasingly out of step with American life. Many party members were more concerned with keeping the organization alive as a comfortable old-age home than influencing American life; few had any hope of making an impact on American society.<sup>22</sup>

A more recent overall study on the American left, Howard Brick's and Christopher Phelps's *Radicals in America: The U.S. Left since the Second World War*, discusses the CPUSA in the 1960s even more briefly.<sup>23</sup> Daniel Rosenberg's exhaustive 2019 article *From Crisis to Split: The Communist Party USA, 1989-1991* also contains relatively little information on party history in the 1960s as it mainly focuses on the late 1980s and early 1990s.

### **1.2.2. Research concerning Operation Solo and other infiltration cases**

While this is first and foremost a study on Gus Hall, it is also an examination of Operation Solo as its documents are the main source of information in the latter half of the study. It may therefore be useful to have a look at earlier research on Operation Solo and other comparable intelligence operations.

Intelligence services are by nature secretive and keep silent about their operations. In this respect the FBI is not very different from the world's other intelligence services. Operation Solo has been, however, revealed to the general public exceptionally well. As mentioned earlier, the operation was first revealed already in 1981 by historian David J. Garrow who came across the operation as he was studying the FBI's relationship with Martin Luther King. Garrow's six-page Solo treatment disclosed the basic features of the operation but further details – including, for example, the total sum of Soviet financial assistance to the

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21 Lewy 1990, 224-276.

22 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 148. Harvey Klehr studies the CPUSA in the 1970s and 1980s in his 1988 book *Far Left of the Center: The American Radical Left Today*, but also in this book he writes very little about the party in the 1960s. See Klehr 1988, 3-53.

23 Brick & Phelps 2015, 150.

CPUSA – remained still in secrecy.<sup>24</sup> Garrow’s revelation made first-page news for example in *The Washington Post*.<sup>25</sup>

Further details of the operation were revealed in 1995 as the book *Operation Solo – The FBI’s Man in the Kremlin* was published. It was written by John Barron, a former senior editor at *Reader’s Digest*, who was specialized in intelligence issues and had written several intelligence-related books. Barron’s book on Operation Solo is written in a fluid, lively and enthusiastic manner – to the extent that a reader sometimes feels that he is reading a spy novel.<sup>26</sup>

Not surprisingly, Barron’s book raised a lively discussion among intelligence experts and historians. In general, the book’s reception was somewhat critical as historians complained, for example, about Barron’s non-existing documentation. According to historian Theodore Draper – who reviewed *Operation Solo* for *New York Review of Books* – the book was “seriously flawed”:

One does not know where almost anything in it came from. Much of the book is written in directly quoted dialogue form. Meetings of twenty or more years ago are reproduced word for word. The entire book is composed in a high pitched *Reader’s Digest* style, as befits a writer who was an editor there for twenty years. The popular style of the book may make it easier for some to read, but it works against trusting the book as history. With almost no indications must wonder again and again how Barron knows what he has put on the page.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to Barron’s “minimal documentation”, Draper also criticized him for some harsh mistakes. For example, the Childs brothers never received Presidential Medals of Freedom from President Reagan, but they were given National Security Medals. The mistake may seem minor, but the difference between these two medals is significant, as the Presidential Medal of Freedom is usually given only to outstanding national and international dignitaries.<sup>28</sup>

Draper also paid attention to Barron’s tendency of praising the operation highly. Barron quoted Henry Kissinger – who at the time served as President Nixon’s national security

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24 Garrow 1981, 34-40. According to Harvey Klehr, Garrow learned about Operation Solo from a retired FBI agent. At the time Klehr was assisting Garrow in his research. In Klehr’s opinion, the FBI revealed the operation purposefully. He writes: “Many agents wanted to end the operation, convinced that it had outlived its usefulness and that the public should know about this American hero. Although they would not tell Garrow the names of Solo, they dropped enough facts about the two that Garrow, with my help, was able to identify the two brothers.” See Klehr 1996, 72.

25 *The Washington Post*, September 17, 1981.

26 Finnish American double agent Kaarlo R. Tuomi knew Barron who wrote a story about him for *Reader’s Digest*. According to Tuomi, Barron had “his own encumbrances” just like *Reader’s Digest* had. In Tuomi’s opinion, “the writer had to support a certain set of values and to work for its propaganda”. From a Finnish point of view it is interesting that Barron was – according to Tuomi – certain that the long-time president of Finland Urho Kekkonen was a KGB agent. See Tuomi 2014, 145-146.

27 Draper 1996, 6.

28 Draper 1996, 6. *Operation Solo* book contains two photos of Morris Childs wearing the medal. Looking at the pictures, one can clearly see that the medal in question is a rounded National Security Medal, not a star-shaped Presidential Medal of Freedom. The eight-page photo supplement can be found between the pages 176 and 177.

advisor – calling Operation Solo “fabulous” and “unprecedented in modern history”. According to Kissinger, Operation Solo had “opened a window not only into the Kremlin but into the minds of the men in the Kremlin”.<sup>29</sup> Doubting the credibility of the quote, Draper had *New York Review of Books* staff contact Kissinger who could not remember ever having said such things. For Draper, this was yet another example of the untrustworthiness of Barron’s book. In his opinion, Operation Solo desperately needed a professional historian to bring out a more accurate picture of the operation.<sup>30</sup>

Draper’s critique was severe, but *Operation Solo* was even more harshly criticized by CIA historian Ben B. Fischer who considered it a “carelessly written, factually incorrect and undocumented book”.<sup>31</sup> Fischer pointed out numerous errors with names and dates claiming that there was “an utter disregard for facts throughout the book”.<sup>32</sup> Nor did Fischer hold the Childs brothers in high regard. According to him, Jack and Morris Childs were “a con man and a schmoozer” who hoodwinked the CPSU, the CPUSA, the FBI and the U.S. government and who earned princely sums by “trading in gossip and cocktail party chitchat”.<sup>33</sup>

Fischer’s severe criticism may have been at least partly inspired by the traditional confrontation between the CIA and the FBI. According to Fischer, Barron was “bashing Langley” in his book. As an example of this bashing Fischer mentions Barron’s claim that Jack Childs and the FBI were in 1956 the first in the United States to obtain a copy of Khrushchev’s secret speech.<sup>34</sup> Traditionally the CIA has been given the credit for first obtaining the speech in the United States.<sup>35</sup> According to Barron, Childs got the speech from the Canadian CP leader Tim Buck who in turn had received a copy from the Polish leader Wladyslaw Gomulka.<sup>36</sup>

Not all reviewers were as negative as Draper and Fischer. According to Harvey Klehr, Morris Childs was “the most successful American agent of the Cold War”. “The astonishing saga of Morris Childs is one of the great spy stories of this century and deserves to become

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29 Barron 1995, 172.

30 Draper 1996, 7. Draper also pointed out the curious fact that Barron never mentions David J. Garrow’s 1981 book which disclosed Operation Solo in the first place. Several other reviewers also paid attention to this detail. See Klehr 1996, 72; Powers 1996, 20 and Fischer 1997, 474.

31 Fischer 1997, 474.

32 Fischer 1997, 476. There are indeed several serious mistakes in *Operation Solo* which undermine the credibility of the book. Barron, for example, claims that Yuri Andropov’s successor as the Soviet leader was called Anatoly Chernayov, not Konstantin Chernenko. Among other things, Barron also makes mistakes with Alexei Kosygin’s first name and the timing of Nazi Germany’s invasion to the Soviet Union in 1941. See Barron 1995, 32, 121 & 319.

33 Fischer 1997, 477-478.

34 Fischer 1997, 477. The headquarters of the CIA is in Langley, Virginia.

35 In his 2007 history of the CIA, Tim Weiner tells us how the CIA was able to obtain Khrushchev’s speech from the Israelis in April 1956. In his 2012 history of the FBI, Weiner does not mention Barron’s claim according to which Jack Childs would have been the first to obtain the speech in the United States. See Weiner 2007, 123-125.

36 Barron 1995, 54. According to Barron, Buck had personally attended the CPSU’s 20<sup>th</sup> congress in Moscow, but he was not told about Khrushchev’s speech. When travelling back to Canada he stopped in Warsaw where he received a copy of the speech from his old friend Gomulka. As the Operation Solo documents released by the FBI cover only the years 1958-1968, they do not contain information concerning the spring of 1956 and Khrushchev’s secret speech.



a national legend”, Klehr wrote.<sup>37</sup> In addition to Klehr, also *Washington Times* reviewer Arnold Beichman – who was well known for his relentless anticommunism – saw the book in a positive light, stating that the story of the “great, if not the greatest American intelligence triumph” was “told superbly”.<sup>38</sup> *The Washington Post* reviewer Jeff Stein – a specialist on intelligence affairs – was much more critical, hoping that a proper historian someday finds out the true significance of Operation Solo.<sup>39</sup> In *Financial Times* British intelligence specialist Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones wrote that Barron is “at best guilty of myopic judgment”, but “at worst a propagandist”. According to him, Barron’s book was “a good story spoiled by overstatement”.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the wishes of Theodore Draper and Jeff Stein, Operation Solo has not been researched thoroughly after 1996. This is at least partly due to the fact that the Operation Solo documents were not easily available for researchers – in order to obtain the documents researchers would have to go through a lengthy Freedom of Information Act procedure.

FBI researchers Athan G. Theoharis, Tony G. Poveda, Susan Rosenfeld and Richard Gid Powers discussed Operation Solo briefly in their 1999 book *The FBI – A Comprehensive Reference Guide*. According to them, the operation was “probably one of the FBI’s most dramatic counterintelligence successes”. They pointed out, however, that “historians of the FBI still do not have a firm sense of what FBI officials learned and how this intelligence was used” as the operation was only known through interviews granted by former FBI agents and members of the Childs family.<sup>41</sup>

Richard C.S. Trahair was equally careful in his assessment of Operation Solo in his *Encyclopedia of Cold War Espionage, Spies and Secret Operations*. Trahair wrote in his Operation Solo entry that “the operation received high praise in 1996 [when Barron’s book was published], but the report of their [Childs brothers’] activities is not as accurate as historians would want”. “Claims were made that their secret work for America was brilliant, legendary and fundamental in preventing uncontrollable hostilities during the Cold War”, Trahair wrote, but such claims were not confirmable, because “evidence was based on the stories of FBI agents who handled Operation Solo, and there were no documents to support the recollections”. “The FBI archives will be a major source on this operation”, Trahair concluded.<sup>42</sup>

In order to make Operation Solo research easier, the FBI has since 2011 gradually released documents related to the operation on its website. The first portion of more than 3 000 pages was released in August 2011. The documents covered the first phases of the operation from 1958 to 1960. Some researchers like Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes and Ronald Radosh studied these first documents immediately after their release but in their magazine

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37 Klehr 1996, 70.

38 *Washington Times*, March 9, 1996.

39 *The Washington Post*, April 23, 1996.

40 *Financial Times*, March 15, 1997.

41 *The FBI – A Comprehensive Reference Guide*, 26. Operation Solo is discussed briefly also in Ronald Kessler’s 2002 book *The Bureau – The Secret History of the FBI*. The brevity of Kessler’s review gives an impression that he does not see Operation Solo as a major achievement in FBI’s history. See Kessler 2002, 138-139.

42 Trahair 2004, 244.

article they stated no “stunning revelations” were to be found. One of the most noteworthy bits of information in the first portion of Operation Solo documents concerned Coleman Young, the future mayor of Detroit. According to Klehr, Haynes and Radosh, Young was “a secret CPUSA member” in 1959.<sup>43</sup>

Also Tim Weiner studied the available Operation Solo documents for his 2012 history of the FBI. He does not, however, present any tangible research results but concentrates mainly on praising the potential of the material. In Weiner’s opinion, the Operation Solo documents open up vast opportunities for historians and can “help explain several mysteries of the Cold War”.<sup>44</sup> Aaron J. Leonard and Conor A. Gallagher come to similar conclusions in their 2018 book *A Threat of the First Magnitude* which focuses on the FBI’s counterintelligence and infiltration operations in the 1960s and 1970s. Their 15-page chapter on Operation Solo is mainly based on Barron’s book and Operation Solo documents. In Leonard’s and Gallagher’s opinion, Operation Solo is likely to be “the most successful operation the FBI conducted during the cold war”.<sup>45</sup>

While being an exceptionally successful and long-lasting operation, Solo is by no means a unique operation. The FBI had hundreds of informants in the CPUSA but most likely no one in such high positions as the Childs brothers. According to the FBI documents obtained by researcher Ernie Lazar, the FBI had 433 informants in the party in 1960 which meant that almost eight percent of the party membership (5 531 members) was supplying information to the FBI.<sup>46</sup>

Only a handful of FBI’s informers in the CPUSA have received as much publicity as the Childs brothers. In addition to Morris and Jack Childs, among the most well-known FBI informers in the CPUSA are Angela Calomiris, Matt Cvetic and Herbert Philbrick, whose experiences served as a basis for books, a radio series, a movie and a television series.<sup>47</sup> Each

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43 *The Weekly Standard*, September 5, 2011. Operation Solo documents do not actually state that Young was a party member but he seems to have been at least closely connected with the party. On a visit to Moscow in February 1959, James Jackson suggested that Young and three or four other African Americans would travel to the Soviet Union to study Marxism-Leninism. The Soviets, however, considered Young to be too old for that. Young was at the time 40 years old. He served as mayor of Detroit from 1974 to 1994. Young is mentioned in a report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on March 13, 1959; OSD, part 6, page 104.

44 Weiner writes: “Solo’s reporting gave [J. Edgar] Hoover an unquestioned authority in the White House. The United States had never had a spy inside the high councils of the Soviet Union or the People’s Republic of China. Morris Childs would penetrate them at the highest levels and provide the FBI with insights no president had ever possessed. [...] Solo’s reporting provided Ike with insights that no eavesdropping satellite or spy plane could ever deliver.” See Weiner 2012, 209.

45 Leonard & Gallagher 2017, 44.

46 See Ernie Lazar’s collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 1). According to Lazar’s documents the number of informers in the CPUSA decreased gradually during the 1960s and was 318 in 1968. At CPUSA’s national convention in June 1966 the FBI had 24 informants as delegates and 16 informants as observers. The convention was attended by 213 delegates and 422 observers. See *Yearbook of International Communist Affairs 1966*, 174.

47 Based on her experiences in the CPUSA, Calomiris wrote a book *Red Masquerade* which was published in 1950. Cvetic’s experiences served as a basis for a radio series and a 1951 film *I Was a Communist for the FBI*. Philbrick told his story in the book *I Led Three Lives: Citizen, “Communist” and Counterspy*. His story inspired a television series *I Led 3 Lives*.

one of these three informers have been studied by historians. Lisa E. Davis has written a book on Calomiris, Daniel J. Leab a book on Cvetic and Veronica A. Wilson has studied Philbrick in an article.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to these, Robert M. Lichtman and Ronald Cohen have written a book on Harvey Matusow, who briefly acted as an FBI informer while being involved in communist activities in 1950, but is mainly known because of his career as a fraudulent government witness.<sup>49</sup> As the Childs brothers were first and foremost FBI informers, I will here focus only on Calomiris, Cvetic and Philbrick.<sup>50</sup>

The stories of these three informers are somewhat different from the Childs brothers: They all served as informers in the 1940s, Calomiris in New York City, Cvetic in Pittsburgh and Philbrick in Massachusetts. Whereas Childs brothers served as informers for more than twenty years, Calomiris, Cvetic and Philbrick did so for much shorter periods. None of them rose to any higher positions in the CPUSA organization and could thus not deliver the FBI any truly high-level information. They all joined the CPUSA only after the FBI had asked them to do so and none of them had a decades-long party career behind them when they started informing the Bureau.

Considering all these differences, the cases of Calomiris, Cvetic and Philbrick are not really comparable to the Childs brothers. Informers delivering confidential information for several decades from the very top of a communist party are indeed a rare phenomenon. When one looks outside the United States, however, one can find some comparable cases. In Britain, for example, the domestic counterintelligence and security agency MI5 managed to infiltrate Julia Pirie to a central position in the Communist Party of Great Britain. Pirie worked for more than 20 years as a trusted personal assistant of CPGB's general secretary John Gollan. Before the MI5 in 1978 concluded that the CPGB no longer posed a threat, Pirie delivered the MI5 information from the heart of the party. Unlike the Childs brothers, however, she was not originally a communist but joined the party following MI5's suggestion.<sup>51</sup>

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48 Lisa E. Wilson studies Angela Calomiris in her 2017 book *Undercover Girl – The Lesbian Informant Who Helped the FBI Bring Down the Communist Party*. Daniel J. Leab tells Cvetic's story in his 2000 study *I Was a Communist for the FBI – The Unhappy Life and Times of Matt Cvetic*. Veronica A. Wilson's article *Anticommunism, Millenaralism and Challenges in Cold War Patriarchy: The Many Lives of FBI Informant Herbert Philbrick* was published in *American Communist History* in 2009.

49 Lichtman's and Cohen's *Deadly Farce: Harvey Matusow and the Informer System in the McCarthy Era* was published in 2004. In addition to FBI informers, historians have recently also studied communists who – while not having been FBI informers during their membership in the CPUSA – later turned into important government witnesses in communist trials. Sam Tanenhaus published Whittaker Chambers's biography in 1998 and Robert M. Lichtman an article on Louis Budenz in 2004. Elizabeth Bentley has been a subject of no less than two biographies. Kathryn S. Olmstead's version was published in 2002 and Lauren Kessler's version in 2003.

50 Also Calomiris, Cvetic and Philbrick served as government witnesses in communist trials and hearings. Calomiris and Philbrick ended their careers as clandestine informers in April 1949 when they testified in the Foley Square trial of the CPUSA leadership. Cvetic ended his double life as an informer in February 1950 when he testified before House Un-American Activities Committee HUAC.

51 West 2014, 439-440.

Another similar case can be found in Finland where the Finnish Intelligence and Security Service could from the mid-1950s onwards receive high-quality confidential information from the top of the Finnish Communist Party. Beginning June 1955, Veikko Hauhia, the informer, worked in the central committee of the Finnish communist party SKP. He was in many ways a similar character to Morris Childs. Both men were born during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and had joined the communist parties in their respective countries in the 1920s. Both men had had difficulties with their party careers, both had experienced financial difficulties – at least partly related to illnesses – and both had become disillusioned with communism. According to Kimmo Rentola, Hauhia was especially affected by the murders of Finnish communist leaders – many of whom he knew personally – in Stalin’s Soviet Union. The Finnish communists killed in the Soviet Union included also Hauhia’s older brother Kosti.<sup>52</sup>

### 1.2.3. Dispute on CPUSA historiography

Anyone writing about the CPUSA’s history cannot avoid coming across with the lengthy dispute that has taken place among the historians of American communism. Historians have been somewhat divided on the role Moscow and the Comintern should play in CPUSA historiography. The two sides in the dispute have been called traditionalists and revisionists.

The traditionalists – of whom the most well-known are Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes – follow the research tradition established by Theodore Draper, who saw Moscow and the Comintern largely determining CPUSA’s policies. The revisionists, however, call for a “grassroots approach” which – instead of looking at the Communist movement from above, from the perspective of Moscow and party leadership – studies activities and desires, the “lived life” of ordinary, local-level party members, thus grasping a better understanding of the true nature of the movement. The revisionists have emphasized the “homespun” nature of CPUSA policy decisions instead of domination by the Soviets, which the traditionalists have strongly criticized.<sup>53</sup>

The so-called revisionist point of view is well reflected in Vivian Gornick’s 1977 interview book *The Romance of American Communism* in which the writer criticizes the traditional way of writing CPUSA history:

Mainly, it is the experience of being a Communist that has been written of in monolithic terms, terms that level and homogenize. The image that is created by these terms is one of a group of men and women sitting in a smoke-filled room, drugged with Marxist-Leninist jargon, supported by Moscow gold, obeying Kremlin directives, densely making anti-American, pro-Soviet policy.

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52 Rentola 1997, 432-444 and Vesikansa 2004, 115 & 119-121. Just like Childs brothers and Julia Pirie, Veikko Hauhia continued his work as an informer until the late 1970s. He retired from the Communist Party in 1976 at the age of 68. According to Vesikansa, the quality of the reports deteriorated after Hauhia’s departure. See Rentola 1997, 501 and Vesikansa 2004, 291.

53 Ottanelli 1991, 213 and Haynes & Klehr 2003, 55.

For most Communists it was not even remotely that way, and for all Communists being a Communist was as varied an experience as the initial conversion to Communism had been.<sup>54</sup>

The revisionists – many of whose background is in the New Left movement of the 1960s – have studied, for example, the influence of the communist artists in cultural life. In these studies – their critics claim – the communists’ connection to the Soviet Union and to the international Communist movement has been dissolved almost completely, leading to – as Theodore Draper puts it – “genre of books about Communists-without-communism”.<sup>55</sup>

The traditionalists have also been called “orthodox” or “Draperite” historians. Some have also called them “conservatives”, “right-wingers” or “anti-Communists”. However, as Harvey Klehr points out, to call traditionalists “conservatives” or “right-wingers” is misleading, since for example Theodore Draper – who in his youth worked among others for the CPUSA newspaper *Daily Worker* – remained a leftist for the rest of his life.<sup>56</sup>

The parties of the dispute have clashed sometimes in a colorful way. Klehr’s *The Heyday of American Communism* (1984) caused a fierce debate in the mid-1980s, drawing irritated criticism from the revisionists. One of the most explicit – and extreme – manifestations of the revisionist thinking has been Michael E. Brown’s essay *The History of the History of U. S. Communism*. In his sprawling essay Brown dismissed the writings of traditionalists Draper, Starobin and Klehr as being not scholarly at all, but “outside of social science” and only “an extraordinary overtly tendentious type of satire”. He linked the reappearance of “orthodox” historical writings about communism in the 1980s to the “introduction of a durable fascist element at the center of the United States polity”, presumably referring to the presidency of Ronald Reagan.<sup>57</sup>

Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes have commented the dispute frequently in their writings. According to them, the revisionist historiography has concentrated on individual communists working in one area while the Communist Party has remained in the background, often presented only vaguely:

Revisionist literature offered a Communist movement where local autonomy spontaneity and initiative ruled and orders from the center where ignored. This literature often conveyed the impression that there were two Communist Parties. One consisted of the CPUSA headquarters in New York to which was attributed the regrettable past of Communist history: subordination to Moscow, support to Stalin’s purges, cheers for the Nazi-soviet Pact, contempt for political democracy and fervent belief in Marxism-Leninism. The other Communist Party consisted of idealistic rank-and-file Communists who rooted themselves in the wants and needs of workers, were inspired by the populist traditions of the American past and paid little attention to Earl Browder in New York and even less to Joseph Stalin in

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54 Gornick 1977, 107-108.

55 Haynes & Klehr 2003, 35. Haynes and Klehr see Michael Denning’s 1997 book *Cultural Front – The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* as “the apogee of this tendency”. According to Haynes and Klehr, “there isn’t much recognizable communism in the amiable Popular Frontism of The Cultural Front”. See Haynes & Klehr 2003, 34.

56 Haynes & Klehr 2003, 43.

57 Brown 1993, 21 & 28. Brown criticizes Draper’s and Klehr’s works also in his 2009 book *Historiography of Communism*. See, for example, Brown 2009, 84-98 & 92-93.

Moscow. In most revisionist accounts rank-and-file Communists were not Marxist-Leninists in any meaningful way. They were just passionate supporters of trade unions, principled opponents of racism and steadfast enemies of fascism.<sup>58</sup>

Klehr and Haynes remind that most revisionist studies deal with a limited geographic area, a short time span, a specific ethnic or racial group, a particular union or some other partial aspect of communist history. The analytic perspective of these studies is often disconnected from any broader attempt to interpret communist history. They agree with Maurice Isserman's view that "it would be a mistake to regard the Communist Party at any point of its history as if it had been simply a collection of autonomous, overlapping sub-groupings of Jews, Finns, blacks, women, longshoremen, East Bronx tenants and baseball fans, who were free to set their own political agenda without reference to Soviet priorities."<sup>59</sup> Klehr and Haynes point out that revisionist studies hardly ever deal with the CPUSA as whole or study it over a longer period:

There is no revisionist equivalent to the traditionalist, one-volume histories that cover the entire history of the party from origins to irrelevance and must, consequently, provide a comprehensive narrative and unified interpretive stance. And, decidedly, it is difficult to imagine a revisionist-style interpretation that could deal coherently with the party from origin to finish.<sup>60</sup>

What is my take on the dispute concerning CPUSA historiography? When it comes to the study of an individual communist leader, I think neither side in the dispute is completely correct. To a large extent, I subscribe to the analyses by Ellen Schrecker and James R. Barrett:

Was the party a progressive political reform movement or a revolutionary Soviet-led conspiracy? In fact, of course, it was both – and more. American Communism came in many flavors and changed significantly over time. On the one hand, the CP was a highly disciplined, undemocratic outfit that tried to apply Soviet prescriptions to American ills. On the other hand, it was also a genuinely forward-looking organization that stimulated many of the most dynamic political and social movements of the 1930s and 1940s. And it was often both at once.<sup>61</sup>

If the New Left historians have focused too much on the local, often neglecting the particular kind of political party within which the rank-and-file Communists operated, then the new anti-Communist historiography has focused almost entirely on 'orders from Moscow'. While the New Leftists chose themes – agitprop cultural work, union and strike organizing, unemployed organizing – that might provide a 'usable past' for current activists, the New Anti-Communists have chosen their themes – espionage, subversion in government agencies, internal purges – that best exemplify the control of American Communists by their Soviet masters. In the first approach, we often get so much detail and nuance, so much emphasis on agency, that the broader context of a highly-centralized party operating in a highly-centralized international movement is often lost – Geoff Eley's 'history of communism with the Communism left out'. In the second, we run the risk of equating the lives and activities of thousands of militants with national and international Communist bureaucracies, and missing entirely the experience of

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58 Klehr & Haynes 2010, 191. The article was originally published in *Labour History Review* in 2003.

59 Isserman 1985, 539-40.

60 Klehr & Haynes 2010, 193-194.

61 Schrecker 1998, 4-5.

Communist activism, the vital role of Communists in local labor and community movements, the meaning of Communism in the broader context of working-class everyday life.<sup>62</sup>

K. A. Cuordileone states in her more recent article on the espionage activities of American Communists – which has been the major topic of discussion within CPUSA historiography for the last twenty years – that the revisionists “tend to present new evidence with a prosecutorial diligence” and not discuss profoundly enough the aims and motives of the spies. According to Cuordileone, historians should “strive to understand the past, not simply pronounce guilt or innocence according to strict legal definitions of espionage”.<sup>63</sup> Gus Hall apparently was not involved in the communist espionage activities, but Cuordileone’s point is valid also when one studies communists in general.

When studying an individual communist leader, one has to consider his or her own reasons and motivations for becoming a communist. These reasons and motivations are to be found at the grassroots level, they were not fed from above. Gus Hall, for example, did not become a communist because Comintern told him to.

On the other hand, Gus Hall’s political thinking in his later years seems to have been strongly influenced by Moscow. A purely traditionalist or revisionist approach cannot provide us an adequate explanation for this transformation, and therefore we will have to examine the phenomenon from a new, biographical perspective:

A biographical approach makes it suitably difficult for us to see our subjects as political robots programmed to achieve particular ends, and encourages us to consider them rather as individuals, each with his or her own strengths and frailties. [...] There is a subjective history of Communism that could tell us a great deal about the costs and perhaps also the attractions of Stalinism, but a strictly political reading of the phenomenon will not grasp it.<sup>64</sup>

## **1.3. Source material**

### **1.3.1. Source material concerning Hall’s life before 1960**

The first main part of this dissertation – which charts Gus Hall’s life until December 1959 – is based on a wide variety of source material. Hall’s autobiographical writings are of course a central source in this respect, as well as the Hall-related biographical material produced by the CPUSA and the Soviets. Like all sources, these writings will be studied critically and possible errors will be corrected.

I will naturally also make use of a broad selection of earlier research concerning, for example, Finns in Minnesota, Finnish American communists in the 1920s, Moscow’s International Lenin School, the Little Steel Strike of 1937 and the first Smith Act trial of

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62 Barrett 2003, 178.

63 Cuordileone 2011, 634.

64 Barrett 2003, 180.

the late 1940s. Hall-related newspaper stories and memoirs and biographies of CPUSA members have of course also been important sources in the first main part of this study.

In addition to these published sources, I have also made use of several archives and internet databases in my study. As I was studying Hall's family background, the internet databases of Finnish Migration Institute, Ellis Island Records and Minnesota Historical Society helped me to figure out details concerning the travels of the Halberg family members and the birthdates of the Halberg children. The town records of Gus Hall's childhood hometown Cherry – which are available in Iron Range Research Center in Chisholm, Minnesota – contain interesting bits of information concerning Hall's father, Matt Halberg. In the collections of Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, Minnesota I was able to locate the oral history interview transcripts of Jacob Anderson, Carl Ross and Leo Turner, which contain valuable information on Gus Hall's youth in Minnesota.

Professor Harvey Klehr's documents in the archives of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia contain valuable information on the American students in Moscow's International Lenin School. Oral history interview transcripts of Harry Wines and John N. Grajciar, which I was able to obtain from Historical Collections and Labor Archives of Pennsylvania State University, contain interesting remarks related to Hall's activities in the Little Steel Strike of 1937 in Ohio.

As I was studying Gus Hall's WWII years, I closely examined the almost 400-page collection of Gus Hall's radio speeches from the 1940s. This collection is located in Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives of New York University in New York City. These speeches are especially interesting as Hall's writings were not yet frequently published in the CPUSA's newspapers and journals in the 1940s. In addition to these speeches, I will also refer to some other Hall-related findings I have made in the vast collections of CPUSA material located in Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

I have also made use of the minutes of the hearings of congressional committees, such as the Committee on Un-American Activities of the House of Representatives. These minutes have been printed and published by U.S. Government Printing Office. Especially interesting in this sense is the hearing of Gus Hall which took place in February 1960 before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws. Despite the fact that Gus Hall declined to answer most of the questions asked by the committee – as did most witnesses before such committees – the minutes contain lots of useful information for a Hall researcher.

### **1.3.2. Operation Solo documents and other 1960s source material**

The main source material for the second main part of this study is FBI's documents related to Operation Solo. By October 2020, the FBI has published on its website more than 21 000 pages of Operation Solo documents from years 1958-1968. Considering that the operation



continued until the early 1980s, the FBI has thus released approximately one half of the Operation Solo material.<sup>65</sup>

The documents have been published in 125 parts, each part consisting of on average 168 pages. Part 1 also contains some scattered documents from the years 1956 and 1957, but the systematic collection of Operation Solo documents begins in February 1958. The most recent document in part 125 is dated on August 20, 1968. During the night between August 20 and August 21, the Warsaw Pact troops occupied Czechoslovakia. The representative of the FBI's Records Management Division declined to answer my question on whether the occupation of Czechoslovakia has something to do with the fact that Operation Solo documents are only published until August 20, 1968.<sup>66</sup>

The Operation Solo documents consist mainly of reports from the FBI's Chicago and New York offices to the Bureau headquarters. The reports are addressed to the Director, referring to FBI's director J. Edgar Hoover. These reports – written by FBI agents handling Operation Solo – consist of information gathered by Morris and Jack Childs. The reports include, for example, thorough accounts of Childs brothers' trips to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries and their clandestine communications with the Soviets. Childs brothers' discussions with Gus Hall are also often described in detail. Several documents of the international communist movement – obtained by the Childs brothers – are also included in the Solo material. The documents include also monthly reports of financial transfers related to Operation Solo and numerous letters to Gus Hall, from, for example, *The Worker's* Havana correspondent Beatrice Johnson. In addition, the documents contain Solo-related FBI letters to the White House, the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, the CIA and other relevant authorities. The documents are only in a very rough chronological order which of course hampers the research work.

Unfortunately, there are significant gaps in the research material. The longest gap is between June 1962 and August 1963 which is particularly unfortunate as the Cuban missile crisis took place in the fall of 1962. There are gaps also between mid-July and late September 1966 and between late January and early March of 1967. I have requested explanations for these gaps, but the representative of the FBI's Records Management Division declined to answer these questions as the Freedom of Information Act does not require federal agencies to answer inquiries concerning the published documents.<sup>67</sup>

The FBI redacts the documents it releases following the regulations of the Freedom of Information Act. This has also been the case with Operation Solo documents. Some of the documents have been redacted but a clear majority of the material has been left untouched or has been redacted only very lightly. The Freedom of Information Act allows redactions,

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65 Operation Solo documents are of course only a minuscule share of all FBI documents related to the CPUSA. According to CPUSA lawyer John Abt, FBI's CPUSA files contained in the 1970s "an approximate 26.5 million pages of records at the J. Edgar Hoover Building in Washington, another 9.5 million pages at FBI headquarters in New York and untold millions more in FBI field offices around the country". See Abt & Myerson 1993, 282-283 & 287.

66 E-mail from government information specialist Holly Early to the author on November 22, 2016.

67 E-mail from government information specialist Holly Early to the author on November 22, 2016.

for example, when the information was to be “kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy” or when documents contain “trade secrets and commercial or financial information”. Redactions can also be made when dealing with “personnel and medical files and similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy”. In addition to that, redactions can be made, if the publication of a document “could reasonably be expected to disclose the identity of confidential source”; “would disclose techniques and procedures for law enforcement investigations or prosecutions” or “could reasonably be expected to endanger the life or physical safety of any individual”.<sup>68</sup>

Most of the redactions in the Operation Solo documents seem to be the names of individuals which most likely have been redacted in order to protect the privacy of these individuals. In some cases, names have clearly been redacted to conceal the identities of FBI informers.

How reliable were the Childs brothers as sources of information? Does their dislike of communism make them untrustworthy in the eyes of a historian? My answer is negative. While the Childs brothers could be called anticommunists, their anticommunism was very different from the anticommunism of Joseph McCarthy and his associates in the 1950s, for example. One could even say that because of their dislike of communism, the brothers wanted to provide the FBI as accurate information as possible. The general tone of their reporting is factual and calm, not passionately anticommunist like some writings of J. Edgar Hoover, for example. Especially Morris Childs’s knowledge of the Soviet Union and international communism was on a good level.<sup>69</sup> This can be seen, for example, in the 55-page memorandum Childs wrote for the FBI in April 1967 concerning U.S. foreign policy and the Soviet Union. In general, one seldom finds factual mistakes or discrepancies in their reporting. This was helped by the fact that special agent Carl Freyman – who handled the operation in Chicago – was well informed on communist ideology.<sup>70</sup>

If one looks at the traditional criteria for judging the reliability of historical documents, the Operation Solo material would seem reasonably reliable. W.H. McDowell, for example, writes in his guidebook *Historical Research* that “the value of any source may depend upon number of factors, such as the elapse of time between the event and its recollection, its purpose and intended audience, physical proximity to the events observed as well as the perspective and powers of observation of the observer”.<sup>71</sup> Later McDowell presents a more thorough list of factors that should be paid attention to when judging the reliability of a historical source.<sup>72</sup> In light of McDowell’s list, several factors would seem to increase the reliability of the Solo documents:

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68 See FBI’s website *Explanation of FOIA/PA Exemptions* (<https://vault.fbi.gov/explanation-of-exemptions>).

69 Leonard and Gallagher pay attention to this in their study of Operation Solo: “The FBI had in Morris Childs someone trained in Marxism-Leninism, and in that sense he was a highly effective counterintelligence instrument. Childs could parse out the dual levels that those who ascribed to the pro-Soviet communist philosophy operated under, the theoretical as well as practical.” See Leonard & Gallagher 2018, 44.

70 Leonard & Gallagher 2018, 40.

71 McDowell 2002, 109.

72 McDowell 2002, 113.

1. The Childs brothers were willing and able to provide accurate information to their FBI handlers.
2. Most of the documents were written soon, often only some hours or days after the events described had taken place.
3. The Childs brothers were usually present during the events they are describing – i.e. the documents consist largely of first-hand information.
4. The Operation Solo documents were intended to be confidential and not available to the public.
5. The Childs brothers and the FBI agents handling the operation were well informed on the Soviet Union and international communist movement – i.e. experts of the topics discussed in the documents.
6. There are few factual errors or discrepancies in the documents.

Some details in the Operation Solo documents raise, however, questions concerning their reliability. When one compares for example the picture that Childs brothers draw of the African American CPUSA leaders and the picture of the leaders with a Jewish background, one can easily say that African American leaders – especially James Jackson but also others – are shown in a much more negative light. Whether this is a consequence of possible racial prejudices of the Childs brothers is difficult to judge, but such a possibility should be kept in mind when reading the documents.

Also the picture given of Gus Hall in Operation Solo documents is somewhat negative. He is pictured as an overtly demanding and short-tempered party leader who closely took care that he and his family got a good share of the CPUSA money coming from Moscow. Morris Childs described Hall in a highly negative manner also in John Barron's book *Operation Solo*.<sup>73</sup> In Operation Solo documents Morris Childs describes Hall especially negatively in documents concerning their lengthy tricontinental trip in late summer and early fall of 1966. According to Childs, the trip was both physically and mentally exceedingly exhaustive. This exhaustion may have sharpened Childs's reporting concerning the journey. In general, it is difficult to say to what extent Childs's personal aversion to Hall distorted his reporting to the FBI, but this factor should also be kept in mind when studying the documents.

What can and what cannot be said based on Operation Solo material? As Gus Hall is so strongly featured in the Operation Solo documents, the Solo material is especially rewarding for a Hall researcher. And as the Solo material so strongly focuses on the CPUSA's international relations, it is indispensable for anyone studying Hall's or CPUSA's international orientation in the 1960s. At the same time, the Solo material contains relatively little information on, for example, Hall's views on trade unions, U.S. national economics or domestic politics. Similarly, the documents contain very little information on the everyday functioning of the CPUSA. The focus of the Solo material is on the very top leadership of the party and as a consequence, it is not the most appropriate source for anyone studying the CPUSA from a grass-roots perspective. And as the Operation Solo documents are largely focused on the international relations of the CPUSA, the documents are not an ideal source for a researcher interested in the internal affairs of the party. As the Solo documents look at the CPUSA and the international communist movement solely

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73 Barron 1995, 61-62.

from the viewpoints of Morris and Jack Childs, I have therefore tried – whenever possible – to broaden the perspective by incorporating other sources and perspectives such as Gus Hall’s writings, newspaper reports and memoirs of his party comrades.

In addition to Operation Solo documents, I have also made use of the large FBI document collections of researcher Ernie Lazar. Lazar’s documents – which he has obtained on the basis of the Freedom of Information Act – are available on his websites. Lazar’s documents contain information on, for example, the CPUSA’s membership figures in different U.S. states and amounts of FBI informers in ranks of the CPUSA. FBI’s 1963 document *Who’s Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.* – included in Lazar’s collections – is also useful for a researcher studying the CPUSA in the 1960s.

In addition to archival findings mentioned above, I also refer to three unpublished autobiographical manuscripts – written by Matthew Hallinan, Charlene Mitchell and George Wheeler – I have been able to obtain during my research process. These manuscripts were especially helpful as I studied the consequences of the 1968 occupation of Czechoslovakia within the CPUSA.

### **1.3.3. Interviews with former and current CPUSA members and Hall’s relatives**

During my travels in the United States, I have interviewed several former and current CPUSA members and Gus Hall’s relatives across the country. These interviews have not been a central source of information in this study, but I have used them as a complementary source.

The interviews with Hall’s relatives – Hall’s nephew Dennis Hallberg and his nieces Kristin Koskela and Marcy Steele – were particularly helpful in examining the living conditions of Hall’s childhood and youth. My correspondence with Armas Tamminen, Gus Hall’s childhood neighbor, was also rewarding in this regard. I also repeatedly tried to arrange interviews with Hall’s children Arvo Hall and Barbara Conway but for an unknown reason they were not willing talk to me.<sup>74</sup>

The interviews with the former and current CPUSA members offered me interesting details concerning the CPUSA in the 1960s. Most of my interviewees – like Bettina Aptheker, Matthew Hallinan, Jack Kurzweil, Michael Myerson, Danny Rubin, Jay Schaffner and Michael Zagarell – left the CPUSA right after the party split of 1991 or had done so earlier. In order to get a more balanced picture of Hall and the CPUSA I also interviewed some party members – like Betty Smith, Jarvis Tyner and Sam Webb – who remained in the CPUSA after the 1991 split. In addition to former and current party members, I also interviewed two persons who never were members of the party but who knew Hall personally. Minnesota labor historian

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<sup>74</sup> I contacted Arvo Hall and Barbara Conway several times through e-mail and ordinary mail. From Arvo Hall I received a curt negative reply – saying he did not want be interviewed – but from Barbara Conway I received no answer. Hall lives in Herndon, Virginia – very close to Washington D.C. – and Conway in New Haven, Connecticut. During my visit in Washington D.C. I also called Arvo Hall’s home telephone number which I found in a telephone directory, but I was again told that he was not willing to talk to me.

Hyman Berman – who was a professor of history at the University of Minnesota from 1970 to 2004 – knew personally both Gus Hall and Carl Ross, another notable Finnish American communist leader from Minnesota. Richard Healey is the son of Dorothy Healey, who was probably the most prominent critic of Gus Hall within the CPUSA in the 1960s. He learned to know Hall through his mother’s party activities.

All CPUSA interviewees held some kind of responsible or prominent positions in the party and were in close contact with Gus Hall at one time or another. The sample is by no means representative. For example, most of the CPUSA interviewees lived in New York or Northern California. New York and California were of course the two most important membership states for the CPUSA, but the party did have significant numbers of members also in many midwestern states which are not represented in my sample.

In addition to that, the vast majority of the CPUSA interviewees were born in the 1940s and joined the party in the 1960s. They can thus be seen as representatives of the so-called Sixties generation. As most interviewees left the party in 1991 or earlier, they tend to be somewhat critical towards Hall. I tried to arrange interviews also with many other former and current CPUSA members but was not successful. The fact that I lived in Europe during the research process and visited the United States only briefly naturally hampered arranging these interviews.

As the collection of interviews is not representative and the number of interviews is limited, their role in this study is, as mentioned earlier, only complementary. I refer to the interviewees’ comments in several parts of the study, however, and on three occasions – when discussing the significance of the Lenin School to Hall’s political career, Hall’s relationship with the New Left of the 1960s and Hall’s personality – I have written separate subchapters based on the comments of the interviewees.

## **1.4. Why Gus Hall?**

### **1.4.1. Filling a gap**

How did I ever come up with an idea of studying the life and times of Gus Hall? The roots of this study go way back to my childhood and teenage years. I grew up in Finland in the 1970s and 1980s, in a neutral and largely social democratic country which both economically and in terms of foreign policy represented a kind of a third way between western capitalism and eastern communism. Already as a small kid I was well aware of the cold war dichotomy prevailing in the world. Traveling both in Eastern Europe and in the United States strengthened my awareness. In this sense the long bus trip to Poland and Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1978 was significant, as was my very first visit to the United States in 1984 when I spent a month in Knoxville, Tennessee as a part of a youth exchange program. The bleakness of the socialist countries affected me strongly as an eight-year old, as did the affluence of the United States six years later. My first-hand knowledge of socialist bloc countries was deepened in 1986 when I visited the GDR, Czechoslovakia

and Hungary on a train trip around central Europe and in 1987 when I spent a month at a youth camp in Romania.

My experiences in Eastern European countries made me highly critical of socialist societies. At the same time I grew increasingly aware of the ills of American society, such as a relatively high poverty rate, a high murder rate and a high level of incarcerations. The absence of free universal health care and the high cost of acquiring a higher education in the United States also caught my attention as my home country differed strongly from the United States in these respects.

When comparing the political systems of Finland and United States I quite soon paid attention to the weakness of the left-wing political parties in the United States. The difference between the United States and Finland in this respect was significant as the left-wing parties – social democrats and communists – held at least two fifths of the seats in the Finnish parliament from WWII until the late 1980s.<sup>75</sup> As these parties had played central roles in most European countries, the question of the weakness of the political left in the United States soon began to interest me more profoundly. My interest in the American left only grew stronger when I learned that Finnish immigrants had been an active membership group in American socialist and communist parties – and that the leader of the American Communist Party was a son of Finnish immigrants, Gus Hall.

As an eager reader of historical studies and biographies, I at some time in 2002 or 2003 searched the Amazon web bookstore for Hall's biography. I was greatly surprised not to find such a book published. After all, Hall had led the U.S. Communist Party for more than 40 years – far longer than any other general secretary – and had ran for president four times.

My amazement only grew bigger as I read through various Hall-related material that was available on the internet. With all its twists and turns, Hall's life story was so intriguing that it was astonishing that it had not caught the attention of any biographer in the United States. As Hall was a son of Finnish immigrants and thus a relatively well-known character in Finland, I was surprised that no Finnish researcher had conducted more comprehensive research on him. Quite soon an ambitious idea came to my mind: Could I perhaps fill this gap in the research literature concerning the American left?

I wanted my research to fulfill scientific criteria and therefore I decided to study Hall in the form of an academic dissertation instead of producing a mere journalistic biography. At first, I aimed at writing a biographical dissertation which would have covered Hall's entire life. However, considering the length of Hall's life – 90 years – and the fact that he was an active CPUSA member for no less than 73 years, such an aim was indeed ambitious. After all, Hall led the party for more than 40 years and wrote extensively from the 1940s to the late 1990s. As a consequence, a biographical study of such a long, eventful and multifaceted life ran the risk of snowballing into a massive thousand-page tome.

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<sup>75</sup> After the parliamentary elections of 1958 and 1966 the left-wing parties in Finland actually had a majority in the parliament. In addition to social democrats and communists also the Social Democratic Union of Workers and Smallholders – a small and short-lived fraction which had split from the Social Democratic Party – was able to gain some seats in the parliament. The left-wing parties were not, however, a united bloc – rather vice versa, as many of the social democrats were strongly anticommunist and the social democrats were split in two parties.

While conducting research on Gus Hall's first years as CPUSA's general secretary, I started going through the Operation Solo material which the FBI had been releasing on its website since 2011. Originally I had not understood how closely Operation Solo was connected to Gus Hall, but after having gone through first files of the Solo material, I realized indeed how close that connection was. Following this realization, I decided to refocus my research, concentrate more strongly on the Solo material and Gus Hall's political orientation in the 1960s and leave out the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s from my study.

#### 1.4.2. "Why is there no socialism in the United States?"

Studying Gus Hall and the CPUSA in the 1960s offers a new perspective from which one can try to find explanations for left-wing parties' weakness in the United States.

The historians of American communism surprisingly seldom discuss explanations for the weak success of ideology they are studying. Guenter Lewy makes an exemption in his *The Cause That Failed – Communism in American Political Life*:

Unlike in Europe, the Party never achieved a mass base among the working class. It refused to understand that American capitalism is a dynamic social system with little class-consciousness, an open society which Marx himself had feared as a solvent of European-bred socialist beliefs. In the footnotes to *Capital*, the prophet of scientific socialism had expressed his amazement at the number of people in America who could move about freely and change their occupations "much as a man could change his shirt".<sup>76</sup>

Ellen Schrecker offers a wider set of explanatory factors in her *Many Are the Crimes – McCarthyism in America*:

Their [American communists'] appeals for class solidarity had little impact on an ethnically diverse, racially divided working class that bought into the American dream of upward mobility and individual success. The party's secular emphasis and disregard for traditional religion further distanced it from the workers it was trying to convert.<sup>77</sup>

Among the social scientists, the weakness of the left-wing parties in the United States has been a much-discussed topic ever since the days of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. One of the most notable works in this field is Werner Sombart's study *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* which was published more than one hundred years ago. The book's title is indeed an intriguing question, because – as Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks point out – parties calling themselves socialist, social democratic, labor or communist have been major forces in every democratic country in the world with the exception of the

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76 Lewy 1990, 294.

77 Schrecker 1998, 7. Peter Kivisto offers a list of seven explanatory factors for the weakness of left-wing ideas in the United States in his *Immigrant Socialists in the United States*: racial and ethnic diversity of American work force, availability of free land and lack of impediments to geographic mobility, fluid class structure, unpolitical nature of the working class, governmental and nongovernmental repression and propaganda against communists and other leftists, relative prosperity of the United States and the ideology of Americanism. See Kivisto 1984, 215-216.

United States.<sup>78</sup> This difference has been seen as a central sign of American exceptionalism in comparison with other western democracies.

Many answers to Sombart's question have been given over the years – according to Lipset and Marks, “explanations of socialism's weakness in America are as numerous as socialists were few”.<sup>79</sup> Friedrich Engels explained the weakness of American socialist movement by referring to the absence of a feudal past which made the United States “purely bourgeois” – to the extent that “bourgeois prejudices” were strongly rooted also in the working class. Also Max Weber and Antonio Gramsci came to similar kind of conclusions in their analysis of the American socialism.<sup>80</sup> Gramsci referred to the ideology of Americanism as an explanation for the weakness of socialism in the United States. In Gramsci's opinion the essence of Americanism was rationalism uninhibited by the existence of social classes and values derived from a feudal past. Unlike other nations, America was characterized by complete ideological “hegemony” of bourgeois values, unaffected by feudalism.<sup>81</sup>

Karl Marx paid attention to the higher wages of American workers in comparison with their European colleagues in his *Capital*.<sup>82</sup> Later Friedrich Engels pointed out that the prosperity of the United States could cause great difficulties for the development of the American workers' party.<sup>83</sup> In addition to that, Engels paid attention to the social mobility of the United States where “everyone could become if not a capitalist, at all events an independent man, producing or trading, with his own means, for his own account”.<sup>84</sup> Werner Sombart also saw social mobility as one answer to his question concerning the non-existence of socialism in the United States:

America is a freer and more egalitarian society than Europe. [...] For him [an American] “Liberty” and “Equality” [...] are not empty ideas and vague dreams, as they are for the European working class.<sup>85</sup>

Marx also saw large-scale immigration as an explanation for the weakness of socialism in the United States. According to him, in the United States the working class was “split

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78 Lipset & Marks 2000, 9. Harvey Klehr compares the CPUSA with British and Canadian CPs and points out that unlike its English-language comrade parties the CPUSA “was never able to elect a member of the lower house of the national legislature”. British CP had single MPs in 1923-23, 1924-29 and 1935-45 and two MPs in 1945-50. Canadian CP – which operated under the name Labour Progressive Party – had one MP in 1943-47. Canadian communist MP Fred Rose was expelled from the parliament because of his involvement in the Gouzenko espionage affair. See Klehr 1978, 83; Knight 2005, 157 & 182-183 and *British Electoral Facts 1885-1975*, 88.

79 Lipset & Marks 2000, 11.

80 Lipset & Marks 2000, 21-23.

81 Lipset & Marks 2000, 30-31. According to Seymour Martin Lipset, Americanism could be described through five properties: antistatism, laissez-faire liberalism, individualism, populism and egalitarianism.

82 Marx 1958, 777. See also Lipset & Marks 2000, 24.

83 Lipset & Marks 2000, 25. Also such writers as H.G. Wells and Leon Trotsky paid attention to the relatively high standard of living of the American working class when they wrote about their travels in the United States. See Lipset & Marks 2000, 27.

84 Marx & Engels 1942, 449. Quoted in Lipset & Marks 2000, 25.

85 Sombart 1976, 97. Quoted in Lipset & Marks 2000, 26.



into two hostile camps”, native and foreign-born. In Marx’s opinion, American socialists should aim for “coalition among workers of different ethnic backgrounds”.<sup>86</sup>

V.I. Lenin paid attention in 1907 to the fact that the United States was a “model bourgeois society” with “most firmly established democratic systems”. This paradoxically undermined the power of American socialists in comparison with the German Social Democrats who worked in “a country where bourgeois-democratic revolution was still incomplete”.<sup>87</sup>

More recent explanations for the weakness of socialism in the United States have paid attention, for example, to the American party system which makes it highly difficult to create a successful third party to compete with the Democrats and the Republicans. The so-called first-past-the-post principle – in which parties do not receive any representation unless they gain more votes than any other party within a constituency – dissuade voters from voting small or new parties because they do not want to see their votes being wasted. As a consequence, the nominees of the Democratic and Republican parties received almost 95 percent of the votes in the presidential elections during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Lipset and Marks, the two-party oligopoly of the United States is “more complete and durable than in any other modern democracy”.<sup>88</sup>

Lipset and Marks also point out that American major parties are highly flexible when it comes to their political platforms and are thus capable of “stealing the thunder” of the new parties by adopting parts of their platforms into their own.<sup>89</sup>

Lipset and Marks agree with Karl Marx who saw immigration as an explanation for the weakness of socialism in the United States. According to them, the United States is an immigrant society with an extraordinarily high degree of ethnic, religious and racial diversity and thus “class consciousness in the workplace was secondary to ethnicity as a basis for organization and political activity”.<sup>90</sup> As a consequence, the American Socialist Party was an amalgam of native and immigrant groups but never a class-based party. “American workers were riven by ethnic particularisms that made it difficult if not impossible to unite them behind the notion of a working-class party”, Lipset and Marks write.<sup>91</sup>

The weakness of socialism in the United States has been also explained by political repression during and following WWI and in the early 1950s when Senator Joseph McCarthy dominated the headlines, but Lipset and Marks do not see it as sufficient explanation for

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86 *The Karl Marx Library*, vol. 3, 499-500. Quoted in Lipset & Marks 2000, 29.

87 Lipset & Marks 2000, 35. American labor historians John R. Commons and Selig Perlman argue also that the “universal manhood suffrage” which American workers secured at least two or three generations before labor in other countries was a major cause of the lack of class consciousness among American workers. According to Perlman, also the ethnical, linguistical, religious and cultural heterogeneity of the American working class inhibited the development of a class consciousness. See Lipset & Marks 2000, 38-39.

88 Lipset & Marks 2000, 43. Already Friedrich Engels paid attention to the political system of the United States as an explanation for the weakness of socialism in the country. According to him, the political system made it difficult to create a successful third party to compete with the Democrats and the Republicans. See Lipset & Marks 2000, 37.

89 Lipset & Marks 2000, 65.

90 Lipset & Marks 2000, 131.

91 Lipset & Marks 2000, 137.

the phenomenon.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, they do not consider the socialists' own strategic choices to be an adequate explanation. According to some researchers, the American Socialist Party was overly concerned with ideology, inflexible and unable to make compromises necessary to build a viable electoral base.<sup>93</sup> The party's opposition to the American entry to WWI, for example, proved to be a major stumbling block for it.<sup>94</sup>

According to Lipset and Marks, one central explanation for socialism's weakness in the United States is the split between American labor unions and the Socialist Party. They point out that "the separation of political from economic organization distinguishes the left in the United States from that in every other industrialized democracy".<sup>95</sup> In their opinion, this split is a consequence of some fundamental features of American culture:

The unwillingness of the leadership of mainstream American unions to support an independent labor party in collaboration with Socialists reflects cultural dispositions grounded in American history. American culture was forged in an egalitarian, antistatist, individualistic revolution. The dominant strain in American culture contrasts sharply with more ascriptive, communitarian and paternalistic of European societies.<sup>96</sup>

Although the weakness of the American left-wing parties is not the main topic in my study, one cannot avoid pondering whether Gus Hall was the best person to lift the CPUSA from its nadir after the 1950s. Looking at the results he was not. The CPUSA was small when Gus Hall became the general secretary in 1959 but it was even smaller in the end of his reign in 2000. The conditions for creating a mass left-wing party were of course not very favorable in the United States during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but still one has to ask whether Gus Hall is – at least partially – to blame for his party's dismal destiny. To what extent the CPUSA's meager success was caused by surrounding circumstances and to what extent by the unwise policies of its leadership? This is one of the questions that will be discussed in the final conclusions of this study.

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92 Lipset & Marks 2000, 260.

93 According to historian Mark Lause, for example, American socialists had a "predisposition to ideological dogmatism". According to Daniel Bell, American Socialist Party was a "heavily doctrinaire party, more so than most of its European counterparts because of its lack of commitments to the labor movement". Also Karl Marx's grandson Jean Longuet pointed out in 1906 that American socialists were more orthodox than any other movement outside of Russia. See Lipset & Marks 2000, 168, 185 & 196.

94 According to Milton Cantor, "had American Socialists imitated their overseas brothers [and not opposed American entry to WWI], their party might well have adjusted to wartime exigencies, retained its reform constituency and survived". See Lipset and Marks 2000, 186.

95 Lipset & Marks 2000, 85.

96 Lipset & Marks 2000, 97. The concepts of individualism and antistatistism as fundamental elements of American culture and political thinking – and as explanations for socialism's weakness in the United States – are a repeating feature in Lipset's and Marks's book. According to them, the socialist project was always "an uphill battle in a culture characterized by individualism and antistatistism". American workers were "not able to build class consciousness into American culture as a counterweight to individualism and antistatistism". In their opinion, "distinctive elements of American culture – antistatistism and individualism – negated the appeal of socialism for the mass of American workers for much of the twentieth century". See Lipset & Marks 2000, 124, 235 & 266.

## 1.5. The structure of the study

As the dissertation studies Hall's life only until the late 1960s, it is not a comprehensive biographical study of Hall. As mentioned earlier, including all of Hall's four decades as the CPUSA's top leader in the study – including his four presidential campaigns between 1972 and 1984, his troubled relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev's reform policies and the dramatic split of the CPUSA in 1991 – would have made the study inappropriately large. Although most of Hall's lengthy leadership term is left out of this study, I think it still offers a good overview of Hall's political line as the CPUSA's leader – thanks to the unique nature of the Operation Solo material.

The study has two main parts which are both roughly 200 pages long. The first main part *Making of an American communist leader* (chapter 2) studies Gus Hall's life until December 1959 when he became the general secretary of the CPUSA. The second main part *An American communist leader in the 1960s* (chapters 3-5) begins by taking a look at Operation Solo and Soviet Union's financial support to the CPUSA of which the Operation Solo documents contain detailed information. After this background chapter the study focuses on Hall's relationships with different strands of international communism including Soviet, Chinese, Cuban, Italian and Romanian interpretations of the ideology. Following this review, I will study Gus Hall's relationship with the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and with the American New Left in the 1960s.

The second main part of the study concludes with an examination of Gus Hall as a party leader. In this chapter I will look at Hall's relationship with different membership groups within the CPUSA – the African American and Jewish members, the women, the intellectuals, the Midwestern and the Finnish American party members. In addition to this, I will examine Hall's personality, study him from a generational perspective and elaborate his instrumentalist view of history.

The explanation for such a structure is simple: Gus Hall's political line in the 1960s – which is studied in chapter 4 – can be, to a large extent, explained by his life story preceding his general secretaryship, which is studied in chapter 2. Many features of Hall's party leadership – which is studied in chapter 5 – can also be explained by his personal history.

In Appendix 1, I put together the Operation Solo documents' figures related to the Soviet Union's financial assistance to the CPUSA between 1960 and 1968 and compare these figures with the figures presented in John Barron's book *Operation Solo – The FBI's Man in the Kremlin*. In Appendix 2, I study more closely the FBI's COINTELPRO operation which led to the expulsion of long-time CPUSA member William Albertson. As the so-called Albertson case was an open wound in the party for decades and Operation Solo documents contain a wealth of new information concerning the case, writing such an appendix was justified.

In Appendix 3 I study Gus Hall's horse dealings with the Eastern European countries. Although these dealings are only a minor detail in the overall picture of Gus Hall, they are worth studying in a separate appendix as they deepen our understanding of Hall's personality and his family connections. In addition to the horse dealings, I will have a look

at the FBI's planned COINTELPRO operation which was targeted against the imported horses.

A note on Gus Hall's name: As Hall's original name was Arvo Kustaa Halberg, I will use that name in the study until the mid-1930s when he anglicized – and abbreviated – his name to Gus Hall. The name change will be discussed more closely in the chapter dealing with the mid-1930s.

Another technical note: For the sake of brevity, Operation Solo documents will be referred to with the abbreviation "OSD" in the footnotes.

# **I Making of an American communist leader**

## **2. From Minnesota to Manhattan**

### **2.1. Between Minnesota rock and a hard place**

#### **2.1.1. An immigrant family from Lapua, Finland**

One of the most striking features of Finnish immigration to the United States is the geographical concentration of the emigrants. Out of 303 000 emigrants who left Finland between 1870 and 1914 more than half – 158 000, to be more exact – came from the Vaasa province in Western Finland.<sup>97</sup>

Also on the new continent the immigrants concentrated on certain areas. Michigan and Minnesota were by far the two most popular destinations for Finnish immigrants. Of the 320 000 people of Finnish origin living in the U.S. in 1930, 42 percent lived in these two states. New York and Massachusetts, the two most popular destinations after the two Upper Midwest states, had far fewer inhabitants with Finnish background.<sup>98</sup>

The Halperi family from Lapua was in many ways a stereotypical Finnish immigrant family in the United States. They came from the province of Vaasa and when they got to the United States, they headed to the Western Great Lakes region. Also socially they were typical Finnish emigrants as they were so-called cottagers living on a small farm on rented land. This social group produced more emigrants than any other group.<sup>99</sup>

Like so many immigrant families, the Halperi family moved to the United States almost entirely but not at the same time. According to family history account, the first one to leave was father Kustaa who is supposed to have left for the United States in 1892.<sup>100</sup> He was by then already almost 50 years old so he was clearly older than the average immigrant. The next one to leave was Kustaa's oldest son Matti who followed his father's footsteps in 1896.<sup>101</sup>

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97 Kero 1996, 58.

98 Kero 1996, 131.

99 Toivonen 1963, 42.

100 There is no sign of Kustaa Halperi's arrival to the New World in the Ellis Island Records which are available on the internet. These records however start only in 1892 so he may have arrived before the commencement of the records.

101 According to Halperi's family history account Matti left already in 1895 but Ellis Island

Looking at the life of the Halperi family in Finland it is easy to understand their eagerness to emigrate. Kustaa's wife Susanna Vappu Matintytär had given birth to ten children between 1867 and 1885. The living conditions in the small hut of the Halperi family were far from ideal, demonstrated by the fact that four of the ten children died before their second birthday.<sup>102</sup>

The difficult living conditions of the Halperi family can at least partly be explained by the economic difficulties of the Vaasa province in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tar production had been a major source of income – often even the main source – for more than two centuries for the people in the province, but in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century ships were increasingly built of metal which stalled the demand for tar. According to Anna-Leena Toivonen, the decline of tar burning started in the 1860s and by 1910 the once flourishing industry had almost completely withered away.<sup>103</sup>

The end of tar economy hurt especially landless cottagers like Kustaa Halperi. Tar burning had required great amount of work power but now this source of income dried up. The situation was not helped by the fact that many other once profitable industries such as shipbuilding also faded away in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>104</sup>

Considering all this, the Vaasa province was indeed experiencing a major structural change. What made the situation worse was the fact that – partly because of favorable conditions created by tar burning and shipbuilding – the population of the Vaasa province had grown massively during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During years 1805-80 the population of the Vaasa province almost tripled from 74 000 to 200 000.<sup>105</sup> At the same time, the amount of agricultural land only doubled so the area started having difficulties in feeding its population.<sup>106</sup> The Vaasa province clearly had a massive surplus population, which partly explains why its inhabitants emigrated so eagerly.

### **2.1.2. Tough life in a mining town**

Before his migration in 1896, Kustaa's son Matti Mikko Kustaanpoika Halperi (b. 1873) had worked as a farm-hand on several farms in the Lapua parish since he was 17. In 1892 he worked at J. A. Lundqvist's farm called Härsilä where a maid called Sanna Kaisa Juhontytär Hautakangas (b. 1876) was also employed. It is unclear how their relationship developed but in August 1895 the young couple was married. Three months later their first son Juho Kustaa was born.<sup>107</sup>

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Records and Finnish passport records tell us that he emigrated only in June 1896.

102 The details of Halperi family history were gathered from an account to the author in October 2008 by Lapua-based genealogist Pauliina Talvitie and Leskelä-Lescelius-Lescell-Lesell family history.

103 Toivonen 1963, 93-95.

104 Toivonen 1950, 256 and Toivonen 1963, 95-100.

105 Toivonen 1963, 76.

106 Toivonen 1963, 80.

107 When the couple got married Matti was working for Hantula farm and Sanna for Alasaari farm. These farms were – just like J. A. Lundqvist's Härsilä farm – in the village of Lapua.

It may well be that the birth of the son and the need to find better surroundings for the newcomer were the final incentives that spurred Matti Halperi to emigrate. According to the passport database of Finnish Migration Institute, he received his passport on June 4, 1896.<sup>108</sup> Ellis Islands records tell us that he arrived to New York from Southampton with the steam ship *Saint Louis* on June 20. By the time Matti Halperi arrived to Ellis Island his family name had already found a more Anglo-Saxon form, for the ship register page states his name Matte Hallberg. The page with Matti's information on it is unfortunately torn but it seems that he was on his way to Eveleth, Minnesota – perhaps to meet his father.<sup>109</sup>

There is very little information available about Matt Halberg's whereabouts after his arrival to the United States.<sup>110</sup> In the fall of 1897 he is likely to have heard sad news from Finland as his son Juho Kustaa had died because of a throat disease. Juho Kustaa died in September, two months before his second birthday. Matt Halberg seems to have travelled back to Finland at some point. This was not unusual as many immigrants travelled back and forth when looking for sufficient livelihood and satisfactory living conditions. Ellis Islands Records tell us that a Minnesota resident called Matt Halberg arrived again to New York in late November 1903.<sup>111</sup>

This time his wife followed him about a year later. Sanna Halberg arrived to Ellis Island on early January 1905 on steam ship *Lucania* from Liverpool and continued her way to

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Interestingly, in the same village there was also the farm of Vihtori Kosola (b. 1884) who in the early 1930s became the leader of the so called Lapua Movement, a far-right alignment which in many ways was close to Italian fascism. See Suomen maatilat V, 721-726.

108 The passport holder's name is Matts Michael Hallberg, but being born in Lapua in 1873 he is undoubtedly Gus Hall's father. See [www.migrationinstitute.fi](http://www.migrationinstitute.fi)

109 See [www.ellisland.org](http://www.ellisland.org). After arriving to Minnesota, Matti seems to have used Halberg as his family name. Such a form is not very usual in Finland or in Sweden where the form "Hallberg" is much more usual. Halberg seems to be more usual name in Norway and Germany.

110 Matt Halberg's name comes up in one surprising connection, however. Interestingly, Hans R. Wasastjerna's *Minnesotan suomalaisten historia* tells us that among several others a Finnish American man called Matt Halberg from Virginia, Minnesota took part in the Spanish-American War in 1898-99. Wasastjerna's source for this information is *Siirtokansan Kalenteri* ("Immigrant's Calendar") of 1945 which indeed lists 24 Finnish American men from Ely, Eveleth and Virginia who took part in the war. This information is confirmed by Franklin F. Holbrook's book *Minnesota in the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection*. In his thorough examination Holbrook studies carefully all units where Minnesotans served during the war. In the Forty-Fifth Volunteer Infantry Regiment we can find a Virginia resident Mathew Halberg who enlisted in September 1899 in his home town and was mustered out in June 1901 in San Francisco. The regiment served in the Philippines where they fought the local rebels which opposed the American rule of the country. Was Matt Halberg of the Forty-Fifth Volunteer Infantry Regiment the husband of Sanna Kaisa Juhontytär Hautakangas and the future father of a future Communist leader? Gus Hall never mentions this kind of detail when he writes about his father. In addition to that, Hall's nieces and his nephew who were interviewed for this study had never heard that their grandfather had taken part in such an adventure. It is of course possible that another Finnish American young man named Matt Halberg lived in Virginia in 1899 but the likelihood is small as Virginia had less than six thousand inhabitants of whom only around one fifth were Finns. After becoming a Communist, Matt Halberg may well have been ashamed of his youthful error and have kept silent about it – after all, none other than Lenin himself considered Spanish-American War as a typical example of imperialist war. See Holbrook 1923, 105-107 & 465; *Siirtokansan Kalenteri* 1945, 181 and Wasastjerna 1957, 508.

111 See [www.ellisland.org](http://www.ellisland.org).

Minnesota.<sup>112</sup> Once back together again, the couple did not waste time before having children. Their second child – son Onni (the name could be translated in English as “Happiness”) – was born in late October in Virginia, Minnesota almost exactly nine months after Sanna’s arrival to Mesabi Range. Matt and Sanna – or Susanna, as she was now called in the New World – were indeed somewhat productive when it comes to having children. Although Susanna was already 29 years old when Onni was born, she and Matt would have eight more children over the following 15 years.<sup>113</sup>

After Sanna Halberg’s arrival to the United States the family lived in Virginia, Minnesota, where Matt Halberg worked as a miner.<sup>114</sup> Virginia had been founded only a little more than ten years earlier in 1892 when a promising vein of iron ore was found in the area. Its beginnings were difficult, however, since fires destroyed the town in 1893 and in 1900. The town was rapidly rebuilt and in 1905 Virginia already had 6 000 inhabitants. It was the second biggest town in Mesabi Range after Hibbing. Finns were the biggest nationality in Virginia where almost every fifth inhabitant had been born in Finland.<sup>115</sup>

Life in newly-born mining towns was rough. In the winter lightly-built houses offered only meager protection against the freezing Minnesota weather. During the spring and fall months the streets turned into mud and in the summer ferrous red dust was everywhere.<sup>116</sup> The primitive sanitary conditions caused diphtheria, diarrhea and dysentery epidemics and contributed to high rates of infant mortality.<sup>117</sup>

Many immigrants escaped the tough conditions to the comforting world of bars and saloons. According to Wasastjerna, there were more than fifty saloons in Virginia. In addition to them, there was also a number of gambling halls and brothels. In order to fight the evils of alcohol and moral decay, Virginia’s Finns founded a temperance society Valon Tuote (“Product of Light”) which at its best was able to attract almost 400 members.<sup>118</sup>

Virginia’s Finnish workers’ association was founded in 1904, and in 1905 it joined the American Socialist Party. The association had several meeting halls during its first years but before its tenth anniversary the workers built themselves a building which was one of

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112 See [www.ellisland.org](http://www.ellisland.org). According to Finnish Migration Institute’s passport database, Sanna Kaisa Halperi from Lapua received her passport on December 16, 1904. See [www.migrationinstitute.fi](http://www.migrationinstitute.fi)

113 In his autobiographical writings Gus Hall often mentions that he comes from a ten-child family. This information is correct if Juho – who died in Finland in 1897 – is included in the figure. Of the nine children born in the United States, seven were sons (Onni, Urho, Arvo, Toivo, Veikko, Oiva and Taisto). The daughters were called Sivia and Hilia. Their birth certificates can be found in Minnesota Historical Society’s data base in [www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org)

114 Gus Hall’s autobiographical writings do not mention exactly where his parents lived in Mesabi Range, but Sanna Halberg’s Ellis Island ship register page tells us that she was on her way to Virginia, Minnesota. Gus Hall’s niece Kristin Koskela confirmed that they lived in Virginia in an interview with the author in July 2008.

115 Kaups 1975, 75-77. After the Finns the biggest immigrant groups were Croats, Serbs, Slovenians and Swedes.

116 Alanen 1981, 39-43.

117 Alanen 1989, 163-164.

118 Wasastjerna 1957, 471-476. According to Ross, Minnesota’s Finns established twenty temperance societies between 1885 and 1902. See Ross 1977, 110.



the finest Finnish workers' halls in the United States. Virginia's Socialist Opera – a three-story stone building with elegantly decorated festival hall – was completed in 1913.<sup>119</sup>

### 2.1.3. The miners' strike of 1907

The workers of Virginia were not only interested in choirs, bands and theatre groups operating at the local Finn hall, but they also wanted to improve their own plight. There was much to improve. Besides being exhausting and poorly paid, work in Mesabi mines was highly dangerous. During 1905-06 the death rate on the Mesabi was about 7.5 workers per thousand employed. Between 1905 and 1910, a total of 386 mining fatalities were recorded on the Iron Range – about five per thousand workers.<sup>120</sup> According to Arnold Alanen, 77 Finns died in mining accidents between mid-1905 and mid-1907. The amount of people who were injured in everyday mining accidents was surely even higher. Mine safety was not improved by the fact that mining companies had a policy of deliberately intermixing employees from different nationalities – most of whom spoke only very little English – in order to prevent formation of strong and well-organized labor unions.<sup>121</sup>

Because the work of a basic open pit miner did not require profound education and workforce was amply available, the wages of immigrant miners were meager. The wages of American-born workers were usually much better since they often worked as steam shovel operators, supervisors and railway workers. The cost of explosives, fuses and caps were deducted from a miner's pay and – in addition to that – the worker had to pay bribes to his bosses in order to get better assignments.<sup>122</sup>

According to one source, the miners grew more and more discontented as the wages deteriorated after the steam shovels became more common in the Mesabi Range. Before the breakthrough of steam shovels in 1901 a worker earned \$2.25-\$3.00 a day but in 1906 the wage was only around \$1.25 a day.<sup>123</sup>

Considering all this, it was not surprising that the Western Federation of Miners – which originally had been formed in 1893 after a violent strike in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho – could gain ground among Mesabi's immigrant workers. As Neil Betten writes, the syndicalist WFM was far from the conciliatory world of the American Federation of Labor and its leader Samuel Gompers. Swearing in the name of class struggle, it wanted to seize the industries into the hands of the workers. In order to achieve this end, the best strategy

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119 Wasastjerna 1957, 484-490; Kivisto 1984, 122 and Roe 1992, 37-43. Virginia's socialist opera house served as strike headquarters in the 1916 mining strike. The house was utilized among others by the IWW strike orator Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who admired the fine workers' halls built by the Mesabi Range Finns. See Flynn 1973, 202 & 213-214.

120 Karni 1977, 74 and Ross 1977, 109-110.

121 Alanen 1989, 174-175. According to Alanen, more than 300 Finns perished in Minnesota's mines between 1884 and 1930. In addition to these, untold numbers died of mine-related illnesses. Alanen 2012, 35.

122 Ross 1977, 108-109.

123 Syrjälä 1926, 70.

was to form “one big union” which in this case was called the Industrial Workers of the World. WFM was one of the organizations that founded IWW in 1905.<sup>124</sup>

WFM started really gaining ground in Mesabi Range in 1906 when the union sent an Italian-born organizer Teofilo Petriella to the area. He divided each local into three sections – Italian, Slavic and Finnish – and placed a man of corresponding nationality in charge of each group.<sup>125</sup> Many Mesabi Finns were already familiar with the idea of class struggle since the Finnish Socialist Federation had been founded in Hibbing, Minnesota in August 1906.<sup>126</sup> As WFM’s organization rapidly grew in the area, the main ore producer on the Mesabi Range, the Oliver Iron Mining Company – a wholly-owned subsidiary of the massive U.S. Steel Corporation – now had a weighty adversary and it was only a matter of time before a conflict would break out.<sup>127</sup>

WFM had planned to organize at least fifty percent of the workers on the Range before presenting demands to the companies. This could not be done before the strikes began, however. In July 1907, a wave of strikes hit northeastern Minnesota. The railway workers and dock workers in Duluth and Two Harbors were striking and agitation for action was spreading on the Range. WFM had no choice but to join the strike wave before wildcat strikes would start taking place. On July 19, Teofilo Petriella presented Oliver Company a list of demands which included wage increases and an eight-hour working day. In addition to these, the union wanted to end the system of bribes paid to the bosses.<sup>128</sup>

Oliver was not willing to negotiate with the union. The company made its viewpoint clear by firing three hundred active union members. WFM had no choice but to proclaim a strike on the Mesabi Range on July 20. For the first time, the whole Mesabi Range was closed down by a worker walkout.<sup>129</sup>

According to Betten, the strikers numbered somewhere between ten and sixteen thousand. The exact figure is hard to estimate because at same time many miners were being laid off. Finns were the biggest group among the strikers, the rest being mainly Slavs and Italians. Since the Slavs often had no workers’ halls of their own, they assembled at Finnish halls.<sup>130</sup> Among the Finnish strikers was also Matt Halberg.<sup>131</sup>

The situation started turning bad for the strikers in early August when the Duluth port strike was defeated and ore shipping was restored to normal. In order to produce the ore, the

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124 Betten 1967, 341.

125 Sofchalk 1971, 220. Finnish leaders of the strike were John Välimäki and John Kolu. Just like Matt Halberg, Välimäki was born in Lapua but eleven years later in 1884. He originally worked as a miner in Hibbing. From union activities Välimäki moved onto journalism, ending up as the chief editor of the Finnish American socialist newspaper *Työmies*. See Sulkanen 1951, 502-503.

126 The Federation grew rapidly. At the time of its founding, it had approximately 2 600 members but six years later the figure was already almost 13 700. See Karni 1977, 70-71.

127 Betten 1967, 341 and Ross 1977, 112.

128 Betten 1967, 342 and Ross 1977, 112. WFM demanded a \$2.50 daily minimum wage for open pit workers and \$3.00 minimum for underground workers.

129 Ross 1977, 112; Sofchalk 1971, 221.

130 Betten 1967, 343. According to Kostianen, the 1907 strike was called the “Finn strike” as Finnish American miners played such a crucial role in the strike. Also Sofchalk sees the 1907 strike as “a largely a Finnish undertaking”. See Sofchalk 1971, 223 & Kostianen 1978, 37.

131 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 12.

Oliver Company started recruiting strikebreakers. Hundreds of so-called special deputies were brought in to protect the strikebreakers. The situation got tense and some violent clashes occurred. Although there were several minor violent scuffles, Betten estimates that the Mesabi strike remained relatively peaceful compared to other mining strikes.<sup>132</sup>

The peacefulness can be partly explained by the tactics advocated by Petriella. He demanded that the strikers follow the law and “behave with respect to all men”. Petriella believed that the strikers can win their struggle without impeding the strikebreakers entering the mines. This, of course, calmed down the situation remarkably. Because of the relative calmness, no state troops were ever sent to the strike sites – unlike in so many other mining strikes.<sup>133</sup>

Petriella’s peaceful tactics did not bring victory to the strikers, however. The Oliver Company brought in trainloads of strikebreakers, with whom the mines could resume to business. The strikers tried, of course, to persuade the strikebreakers to join their ranks. In most cases the strikebreakers were fresh immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe recruited in New York and other big cities in the East. They often had no idea that they were going to be used as strikebreakers. According to Betten, sometimes WFM succeeded in turning the heads of the newcomers.<sup>134</sup>

Such occurrences were exceptional, however. With hundreds of strikebreakers flowing to Mesabi Range every week, the strikers could not keep up their fight infinitely. Hiring the strikebreakers and deputies cost Oliver more than 250 000 dollars, but for a subsidiary John Pierpont Morgan’s U. S. Steel this was not an impossible investment.<sup>135</sup> In late August, the strikers began returning gradually to work. Their decisions may have been spurred by the fact that some Range businessmen decided to deny the strikers the credit necessary to wait out the companies.<sup>136</sup>

According to Betten, the socialist Finns held out the longest with the strike. Actually, many of them never returned to the Mesabi mines because of the employers’ blacklisting system. Not surprisingly, the mining companies no longer wanted to hire Finnish hot-heads and troublemakers who had joined the strike. From now on, employers favored Southern Europeans when hiring new miners, which changed also the nationality complexion of the Iron Range towns. Before the strike about 18 percent of Oliver’s work force was Finns but after the strike the figure was only eight percent. This meant that more than 1 200 Finns were now cut off from the major source of employment in northern Minnesota.<sup>137</sup>

According to Sofchalk, the strike “actually played in the hands of the companies, giving them an opportunity to disrupt the union by blacklisting many of the radical Finnish miners, who had comprised the leading element among the strikers”.<sup>138</sup> The blacklists were not only circulated in Minnesota but across the country from Pennsylvania and West

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132 Betten 1967, 344-345.

133 Betten 1967, 346.

134 Betten 1967, 347.

135 Karni 1977, 75.

136 Betten 1967, 347 and Karni 1977, 76.

137 Karni 1977, 78.

138 Sofchalk 1971, 221.

Virginia in the east to Montana in the west.<sup>139</sup> According to Lapitsky and Mostovets, Matt Halberg was among the blacklisted workers.<sup>140</sup>

#### 2.1.4. A miner becomes a farmer

For the miners who were blacklisted during the 1907 strike in Mesabi Range – like Matt Halberg – there were not many alternatives to make a living. For many the only choice was to move away from the mining towns and start their own farms. Because of this, a number of small townships populated by Finns was born in the countryside near the Mesabi Range towns after the strike of 1907.<sup>141</sup> One example of such townships is Cherry which lies about ten miles southwest of Virginia. Cherry was originally called Alavus since many of the first settlers came from Alavus in Western Finland. The Finnish-language name, however, never received recognition outside the Finnish American population so the name remained what Matti Kaups calls an “in-group place name”.<sup>142</sup> According to some, the official name Cherry has its origin in the wild cherry trees growing in the area.<sup>143</sup>

The first Finns came to Cherry already in the early 1890s but most of them moved in during the next decade, mostly coming from nearby towns Virginia and Eveleth. In addition to people originating from Alavus, many of Cherry’s inhabitants came originally from Lapua and Kuortane in the Vaasa Province in Western Finland.<sup>144</sup> According to *Siirtokansan Kalenteri 1958* and *Minnesotan Suomalaisten Historia*, Matt Halberg moved to Cherry sometime after 1906.<sup>145</sup>

Cherry – like most areas in northeastern Minnesota – was far from being ideal farmland. Unlike the fertile prairies of southern and western Minnesota, northeastern part of the state is covered mainly with marshy soil and coniferous forests. Clearing cutover land was an onerous, time-consuming task as the farmer had to remove massive amounts of rocks, stumps and remaining trees. The farms remained small, in some places averaging only 20 acres of cleared land. The thin, boggy and acidic soil was poor for farming and the growing season was short, but still many Finns favored farming to mining.<sup>146</sup> The tenacity of Finnish farmers impressed Minnesota writer Glanville Smith who wrote – after spending a winter in Northern Minnesota – that only Finns could “convert muskeg to milk” in such a “cold, rocky, lonesome country”.<sup>147</sup> The small dairy farms available could not offer a very

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139 Ross 1977, 113-114.

140 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 12.

141 According to Høglund, the development of Iron Range’s hinterland was largely a consequence of the 1907 strike. Alanen points out that in St. Louis County the number of rural Finns increased from 1 300 to more than 3 500 between 1905 and 1910. See Høglund 1994, 54 & Alanen 2012, 54.

142 Kaups 1966, 392-393.

143 *Mesabi Daily News*, February 21, 2003.

144 Ilmonen 1926, 177.

145 Wasastjerna 1957, 670 and *Siirtokansan Kalenteri 1958*, 42.

146 Høglund 1994, 55-56; Alanen 1989, 181.

147 Smith quoted in Alanen 2012, 38.

good living so farmers often had to earn their livelihoods also as lumberjacks, trappers, carpenters, road builders and – those who were not blacklisted – as miners.<sup>148</sup>

In addition to small-scale farming, Matt Halberg made his living as a carpenter. According to Gus Hall, carpentry was not a flourishing business in rural Minnesota in the 1910s and 1920s, so Halberg family lived in “semi-starvation”. Matt Halberg seems to have been a crafty woodworker, however. According to his son, he could build everything, including the family house and the sauna building in which Arvo – the fifth child of the family – was born on October 8, 1910. Matt Halberg specialized in building staircases – according to Gus Hall, people in Cherry still pointed to the staircases built by his father as he visited the area decades later.<sup>149</sup>

Not all Cherry residents were blacklisted former miners and socialists. The Lutheran congregation, founded in 1906, seems to have been the biggest social organization in the township, but the workers’ association – founded in 1912 – also gathered a good crowd. In 1913 the association built itself a hall where numerous activities – a library, a gymnastics club, a brass band<sup>150</sup>, a theater club, a singing society and clubs for farmers, youth and women – took place.<sup>151</sup>

According to Gus Hall, his father was a central character in building the hall. He writes:

Father was an activist all his life. In the early years he got a committee together that built a Communist Hall on the piece of land he owned. It was a political, social and sport center. The group around this center produced revolutionary plays, year in and year out. There were lectures, mainly by followers of Marx, Engels and Lenin. But there were also speeches and lectures by IWWs, syndicalists and others. I sat through some of the longest lectures of my life in that hall, on hard wooden benches.<sup>152</sup>

According to Wasastjerna and *Siirtokansan kalenteri*, Matt Halberg was one of the founders of Cherry co-op store in 1919.<sup>153</sup> According to Jacob Anderson, in the late 1920s Halberg served as the chairman of the board of the co-op store.<sup>154</sup> He was also involved in the community administration. According to Cherry Town Records, Matt Halberg served as town board supervisor in 1925-27. There are no signs of Matt Halberg’s revolutionary political views in the Cherry Town Records – unless erecting billboards for posting notices is considered revolutionary. Matt Halberg was made responsible for this task in April 1925 and in August he was paid \$12 for his services.<sup>155</sup>

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148 Hoglund 1994, 57-58.

149 Bonosky 1987, 8.

150 Most of the Halberg boys played in the brass band Kaiku (meaning ”Echo”). Onni played the tuba, Urho the trumpet, Veikko the baritone and Oiva played the snare drum. Interview with Kristin Koskela in Virginia, Minnesota, May 2010.

151 Mattson 1946, 145-146.

152 Gus Hall’s autobiographical manuscript, 17.

153 Wasastjerna 1957, 672 and *Siirtokansan Kalenteri* 1958, 43. Hall claims his father was the leader in setting up the co-op store but Wasastjerna and *Siirtokansan Kalenteri* only list him as one of the founders. See Gus Hall’s autobiographical manuscript, 18.

154 Jacob Anderson’s oral history interview transcript, 11.

155 Cherry Town Records 1925-27. During these years the main topic of discussion in the town board was the contamination of the river that runs through Cherry. This caused diseases to the

In addition to founding a workers' association and a co-op store, Matt Halberg was also active in building a working-class recreation site Mesaba Park near Cherry. According to Gus Hall, his father was part of the group that bought North Star Lake and its surroundings in 1928 and 1929 in order to create a co-op park for Finnish American workers. Matt Halberg convinced the sellers that the land was a mere swamp, so the workers could buy it with a lower price. Hall writes that he and his father were also actively involved in building the large dance pavilion which was finished in June 1930. The park became a highly popular gathering place for the left-wing Finns in Northern Minnesota, and especially its *Juhannusjuhlat* – the midsummer parties in late June – drew hundreds of participants who socialized, danced and listened to political speeches.<sup>156</sup>

Despite their ideological differences, Cherry inhabitants seem to have got along relatively well. According to Hall, religious and non-religious families were able to be on friendly terms.<sup>157</sup> Many religious families took part in founding the co-operative store and the gymnastics club Reipas – in which the Halberg boys were active – attracted young men from all kinds of families. Mesaba Park, however, was not visited by the so-called church Finns – some even called it “the valley of sin”.<sup>158</sup>

The older generation spoke Finnish together, and while children spoke English among themselves they communicated in Finnish with their parents. The Halberg children learned Finnish also through reading their father's subscription of radical weekly newspaper *Työmies* and leftist humor magazine *Lapatossu*. Living mainly in Finnish-speaking surroundings for most of his life, Matt Halberg never learned English well and thus he had no common language with his grandchildren who no longer spoke Finnish.<sup>159</sup>

The Cherry children went to School #96 which was located about a mile away from the Halberg farm. The one-room schoolhouse with a porch and small bell-tower was built around 1912. The school system aimed at Americanizing the youth, which largely explains why the children spoke English among themselves:

Wearing hand-me-down, surge dresses, knickers, baggy pants and suspenders, the majority of the two or three dozen pupils in grades one through eight were of Finnish extraction, many not knowing how to speak a word of English when they first arrived. The motto on the blackboard read “Speak English”, and the teachers would become furious at the recess time when the foreign tongue, which they could not understand, was all that was heard.<sup>160</sup>

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cattle that was drinking from the river. Cherry's town board decided to send representatives to neighboring towns to protest against the polluting of the river.

156 Gus Hall's autobiographical manuscript, 21; *The Community Dispatch*, July 1999; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, July 10, 1988. In his article about Mesaba Park's history, Arnold R. Alanen mentions that Matt and Arvo Halberg took part in the building work, but he does not say anything about Matt Halberg's leading position in the project. See Alanen 2004, 70-71.

157 *The Community Dispatch*, July 1999. Gus Hall's childhood neighbor Armas Tamminen confirms this. According to him, his mother and Susan Halberg were good friends although the Tamminen family was actively involved in the church activities. See Armas Tamminen's letter to author, August 31, 2008.

158 Armas Tamminen's e-mail message to author, September 27, 2008.

159 Armas Tamminen's e-mail message to author, September 27, 2008; *Duluth News-Tribune*, November 2, 1980; Interview with Kristin Koskela in Cherry, Minnesota, August 2008.

160 *Cherry High School All Class Reunion*, 11.

### 2.1.5. “Rebel spirit in the blood”

In his autobiographical writings, Gus Hall always proudly states that his parents were charter members of American Communist Party. The claim is difficult to verify since CPUSA does not have a set list of its charter members. Whatever the case, Hall’s parents do not seem to have been in any kind of leadership position in the Finnish American workers’ movement. They did not, for example, take part in the founding of the Finnish Socialist Federation in Hibbing, Minnesota – not far from Virginia, Minnesota – in August 1906.<sup>161</sup> Nor do their names show up in the minutes of the meetings Finnish Socialist Federation between 1909 and 1919.<sup>162</sup> Also if one looks at literature concerning Finnish American workers’ movement, Hall’s parents’ names are nowhere to be found.<sup>163</sup> However, according to the biographical material produced by CPUSA, Matt Halberg also served as a chairman of the Communist Party branch in Iron, Minnesota which also included the township of Cherry.<sup>164</sup>

Not only were Hall’s parents revolutionaries but his father “came from a long line of rebels and radicals”. Gus Hall writes:

My parents and family were co-workers in the class struggle. They inspired me. They set an example. They were the critics. It was easy for me to become a revolutionary. In becoming a radical and a rebel I simply followed a family custom of some generations. Even going to prison for political reasons was following a family tradition of long standing. I am the proud recipient of the only material family heirloom. It is a wooden sugar bowl carved in prison by a great-great-grandfather. He was the one who wasn’t hung...<sup>165</sup>

According to the Gus Hall biography published in Moscow in 1985, Gus Hall’s “great-grandfather was active in the liberation movement in Finland and was sentenced to life imprisonment”.<sup>166</sup> In a 1990 interview Hall claims that he is a third generation rebel as his “father, grandfather and uncles took part in the Finnish fight against Russian and Swedish aggression”.<sup>167</sup> Unfortunately the biography or Gus Hall himself do not give us more detailed information on these political imprisonments or liberation movements. These narratives raise questions, as there were no political liberation movements in Finland in

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161 See *Pöytäkirja Amerikan Suomalaisen Sosialistiosastojen Edustajakokouksesta Hibbingissä, Minn., Elokuun 1-7 päivinä 1906*.

162 See *Kolmannen Amerikan Suomalaisen Sosialistijärjestön Edustajakokouksen Pöytäkirja (1909), Pöytäkirja Keskipiirin Edustajakokouksesta (1910), Suomalaisen sosialistiosastojen ja työväenyhdistysten viidennen eli suomalaisen sosialistijärjestön kolmannen edustajakokouksen pöytäkirja (1912), Pöytäkirja suomalaisen sosialisti-järjestön keskipiirin 3:sta edustajakokouksesta (1914), Yhdysvaltain Suomalaisen Sosialistijärjestön Neljännen Edustajakokouksen Pöytäkirja (1914) and Yhdysvaltain suomalaisen sosialistijärjestön viidennen edustajakokouksen pöytäkirja (1919)*.

163 For example, Elis Sulkanen lists hundreds of Finnish American communists and socialists in his *Amerikan suomalaisen työväenliikkeen historia* (“The History of Finnish Workers’ Movement in America”), but Hall’s parents are not among these. See Sulkanen 1951.

164 Jackson 1970, 42.

165 Bonosky 1987, 10.

166 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 10.

167 *Range View*, Fall 1990.

the 19<sup>th</sup> century and certainly no fight against Swedish aggression.<sup>168</sup> Also the use of death sentences – to which Hall refers to – were somewhat unusual in Finland in 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>169</sup>

The Soviet biography of Gus Hall also states that while still in Finland, “Gus’s father and mother worked energetically in the socialist and working-class movement”.<sup>170</sup> This is an interesting claim since it would seem to contradict the studies about the emergence and growth of socialism in Finland.

There has been diverging views among the researchers about when socialism spread to Finland. Peter Kivisto writes in his article *Pre-Migration Factors Contributing to the Development of Finnish-American Socialism* that “while the earliest immigrants exhibited some kind of non-ideological discontent, those who arrived from 1890 onwards, no matter where their point of origin in Finland, had been exposed in varying degrees to socialism; socialist ideas, quite simply, were in the air”.<sup>171</sup>

However, when one looks more closely at the research done on the spreading of socialism in Finland, one can quickly come to the conclusion that Kivisto’s timing is not correct. For example, in his classic study *Sosialismin tulo Suomeen* (“The Arrival of Socialism to Finland”), Hannu Soikkanen states that in the 1890s socialism was still only a phenomenon of the few large industrial centers of Finland and it spread to the countryside only during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – especially after the general strike of 1905.<sup>172</sup>

In this light, Hyman Berman’s understanding of the roots of the Finnish American radicalism would seem to be more correct than Kivisto’s. According to Berman, most Minnesota Finns did not bring Socialism with them from the Old Continent:

Finnish Social Democracy did not really firm up until 1899 and its strong center was in industrial Southern Finland, whereas most of Mesabi Finns came from the rural provinces of Oulu and Vaasa. Many of the Finnish socialist clubs on the Range were organized before there was an effective network of socialist clubs in Finland.<sup>173</sup>

Lapua was not an exception in this sense. Its workers’ association was founded only in January 1903.<sup>174</sup> In the very beginning socialism did not seem have a large supporter base in Lapua – for example the *Työmies* newspaper had only one subscriber in the parish in 1903<sup>175</sup> – but the association grew rapidly. In the end of 1905, it was already the tenth biggest in rural Finland with its 200 members.<sup>176</sup>

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168 There was, of course, a strong national awakening in Finland in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but that was not an actual political liberation movement but rather a cultural and academic phenomenon which took place mainly among the national elite. As no one was sentenced to life imprisonment because of his or her participation in the national awakening, this is surely not the liberation movement Gus Hall is referring to.

169 The last peace-time execution in Finland took place in 1825. See, for example, Moilanen 2019, 200.

170 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 10.

171 Kivisto 1983, 27. See also Kivisto 1984, 70.

172 Soikkanen 1961, 391-393.

173 Quoted in Riippa 1981, 308.

174 Vattula 1976, 62 and Lehtinen 1984, 553.

175 Vattula 1976, 60.

176 Soikkanen 1961, 207.



With all this taken into consideration, it would have been surprising if Matti Halperi would have been a socialist before his emigration in 1896. He could, of course, have been a self-educated socialist since he surely was able to read – that was, after all, a prerequisite for getting married. That, however, was not very likely since a farm-hand usually did not have too much time for extensive reading or extra money for buying literature. Also, socialist literature was not widely available in the 1890s Lapua.

### 2.1.6. Favorable environment for a future communist leader?

When Gus Hall describes his family and his childhood in Cherry, he emphasizes the poverty in which he grew up. In addition to that he also stresses the socialist thinking of his parents. The tone of Hall's comments is idealizing and romanticizing – sometimes even to the point that the reader starts questioning the credibility of Hall's descriptions:

Recalling his home, Hall speaks of what was especially typical of it: "It was the most radical in the area; it was the poorest and it was the house with the biggest library."<sup>177</sup>

"My very first childhood memories are political... I was a very much involved 8-10-year-old in the political storm and hysteria that followed the first socialist revolution."<sup>178</sup>

Nevertheless, Hall's childhood was by no means a gloomy one. Deprived though the children of the Halberg family were of what's called "creature comforts", and as often as they had to stint on this and that, there was always plenty of food for the mind. The Halberg household was a kind of way-station for working-class militants passing through who stopped over for a meal and a place to spend the night – but who brought with them the latest news hot from the class struggle fronts. Ideas flourished, arguments back and forth rocked the calm of the neighborhood.<sup>179</sup>

And as Gus was educated not only by books but by practice, he learned from the talk around the dinner table, from his parents' comments on the political scene, and there was always a book by Marx or Engels or Lenin, by Eugene Debs, or any of the other radical writers of the day, within easy reach.<sup>180</sup>

Looking at Hall's reminiscences, the Halberg household was indeed a favourable environment for a future communist leader. In addition to Marx, Engels, Lenin and Debs, Hall read eagerly IWW leader William Haywood's writings and other IWW publications. He was especially well informed on the Russian revolution as John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*, Louise Bryant's *Six Red Months in Russia* and Albert Rhys Williams's *Through the Russian Revolution* were also among his favorite books. Hall's top favorite book in his youth was, however, Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* which helped him "to understand the inner workings of the U.S.A."<sup>181</sup>

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177 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 10.

178 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 15.

179 Bonosky 1987, 8.

180 Bonosky 1987, 10.

181 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 17 and North 1970, 8.

Hall's father was a major role model for him as the following autobiographical portrayal of a May day in Halberg family exemplifies:

Matt, the iron miner and a lumberjack, never worked on May Day. He lost jobs because of this. But for Matt it was a matter of working-class principle.

Instead of going to work, Matt would get a clean shave and put on his one good shirt without any fuss or planning because in a sense May Day was a special family day. Susan, his wife, who was fully conscious of the political meaning of the day, would add an extra egg for breakfast and a few extra pieces of meat to the stew for dinner. But more than anything else, it was a day when the family conversation invariably drifted to political matters. It was a day when, more than at other times, Matt would talk about his experiences in strikes and other mass actions of the workers.

As he related his experiences it seemed that the workers had lost most of the struggles. But Matt never referred to them as defeats. He would mention with obvious pride how he had been arrested for his strike activities and with a mixture of anger and sorrow he told of the time when the National Guard broke into the home of strikers and bayoneted them to death in their beds. They had been friends of Matt's. After 25 years he still refused to have anything to do with those who had scabbed during that strike.

May Day was a day when socialism and the first working-class state, the Soviet Union, were the centrepiece of family conversation. Racism was also a subject that was discussed on this day more than others – racism and its effects on the nearby Indian Reservation.<sup>182</sup>

Matt Halberg seems to have originally supported IWW-style syndicalism. Gus Hall tells us that his father was a friend of IWW leader Big Bill Haywood and that he acted as a security guard for young IWW orator Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who later was one of the top American communist leaders together with Gus Hall.<sup>183</sup> There is, however, ambiguity concerning the timing of Matt Halberg's IWW activities. According to Gus Hall, in 1916, when another IWW-led mining strike took place in Mesabi Range, Matt Halberg was already in disagreement with the Wobblies, as the IWW organizers were called.<sup>184</sup> This claim contradicts comments by Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who in a 1951 newspaper story tells us how she became acquainted with Gus Hall's parents during the strike of 1916.<sup>185</sup> Later in her memoirs, Flynn again writes that Hall's father was among the strikers during the 1916 strike. According to Flynn, the quiet and reserved Mesabi Range Finns were "wonderful people":

I loved the people on the Range and did not mind staying on, as we did for several months. But it made me very lonely for my little son to see the blond children of the Finnish workers, with their rosy cheeks, playing around the hall during our

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182 Hall 1987, 369-370.

183 Bonosky 1987, 8 and Gus Hall's autobiographical manuscript, 19. Hall's claim about his father having been a friend of Big Bill Haywood is questionable in the light of the comments of Gus Hall's niece Kristin Koskela. According to her, Matt Halberg's English skills were very poor as was the case with many first-generation Finnish American immigrants who lived in mainly Finnish-speaking communities. See interview with Kristin Koskela in Cherry, Minnesota, August 2008.

184 *Duluth News-Tribune*, November 2, 1980.

185 *Daily Worker*, October 19, 1951.

meetings. Maybe one of them was Gus Hall, whose father was one of the strikers then.<sup>186</sup>

If Matt Halberg would have abandoned IWW syndicalism already before the 1916 strike – as his son claims – he would have belonged to a minority among his compatriots. Most Finnish American socialists in Minnesota supported IWW when the Finnish Socialist Federation split into two parts in 1914 over the issue of industrial unionism.<sup>187</sup> Most Finnish Wobblies turned to communism only after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917, just like Big Bill Haywood did.<sup>188</sup>

Be that as it may, in the late 1920s Matt Halberg apparently was an active CP member. According to Jacob Anderson, Matt Halberg used his position as a local co-op store boss to recruit IWW members into the party:

Gus Hall's father recruited me in the Party in 1928 when I went to work to manage the [Cherry] co-op store. He was the chairman of the board of directors and that's when I joined the Party. [...] I belonged to the IWW before that.<sup>189</sup>

Although Matt Halberg had allegedly been a friend of IWW leader Big Bill Haywood and a security guard of IWW orator Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, to Gus Hall his parents were first and foremost orthodox Marxist-Leninists, which is clearly reflected in a depiction of his childhood home:

This was a place where workers and farmers who were members of the IWW and syndicalists would come to discuss and debate questions with father and mother, who always defended the positions of Marx and later of Lenin. At times the discussions became rather loud and heated.<sup>190</sup>

### 2.1.7. A red lumberjack in the woods of Minnesota

Young Arvo Halberg<sup>191</sup> quit school at the age of 15 and went to work in a lumber camp in Northern Minnesota to help feed the family of nine children. According to Hall, although

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186 Flynn 1973, 213. Flynn's memoirs of her two first decades as an activist were originally published in 1955. Flynn writes about the Mesabi Range Finns with exceptional warmth. She praised the Finnish workers' halls which served as strike headquarters. She also lauded the gender equality among the Finns as they were "one people among whom the women are truly equal, participating in plays, meetings and all affairs, side by side with their menfolk, an example for all others". See Flynn 1973, 202, 213-214 & 228.

187 Ollila 1975, 157-159. The more moderate socialists called IWW supporters "impossibilists" because of their radical policies, which emphasized direct economic action and a general strike as the only effective way to deal with the capitalist repression.

188 Klehr and Haynes 1992, 19. Also according to George Meyers the Halbergs moved from the syndicalism of the IWW into "a more advanced position of Left Socialism", but unfortunately he does not mention the timing of this move. See Meyers 1970, 55.

189 Jacob Anderson's oral history interview transcript, 11.

190 Gus Hall's autobiographical manuscript, 18.

191 In this study I will use Gus Hall's original name Arvo Halberg until the mid-1930s when he changed his name. The exact time of the name change is not known, but it took place some time between summer of 1935 and summer of 1937. In June 1935 Ohio newspapers still referred to him as Arvo Halberg, but during the Little Steel Strike of 1937 he was already known as Gus Hall. The

his formal schooling ended, his real education of capitalist economy – “the college of hard knocks” – began only then. Robust Halberg – six feet tall and weighing nearly 200 pounds – was well-suited for lumber work so he decided to follow the footsteps of the famous North American folklore lumberjack Paul Bunyan. Arvo Halberg’s first job at a lumber camp was “swamping”, clearing the roads in the woods in order to move the logs. Later he got a better-paid job as a “four-horse skinner” and as a “river rat” floating the logs down the river to the sawmill spending “many lonely weeks deep in the woods with no other company but squirrels and chipmunks and other lumberjacks”. According to Hall, he spent three winters in the woods near Rainy Lake and Lake Vermilion and around Cotton.<sup>192</sup>

Lumber camps of Northern Minnesota employed numerous Finnish Americans, many of whom had gathered experience in forest work already in their original homeland. The biggest timber company in Northern Minnesota, Virginia and Rainy Lake Company, employed up to 2 800 men annually in its almost 150 lumber camps. Finns and Swedes were the biggest nationalities among the lumberjacks. Their season stretched from September into May, most work occurring during the winter months. In the spring the logs were floated down the stream to Virginia and Rainy Lake Company’s sawmills in International Falls and Virginia, which was in the 1910s and 1920s the world’s largest white pine sawmill. In the summer many lumberjacks worked in mines or farming. Modern capitalism had extended its reach even to the farthest woods of Minnesota, as most of the forests were owned by the powerful Weyerhaeuser Company.<sup>193</sup>

When Arvo Halberg joined the Minnesota lumberjacks in the mid-1920s, he was among the last to enter the logging industry in the North Star State. Logging and sawmills were gradually dying out in Minnesota as the forest reserves in the state were running out. As there were no more forests to cut down, the focus of the industry was moving to the Pacific Northwest. The decline had started already in the very beginning of the century.<sup>194</sup> The last mill of the once flourishing Minneapolis sawmill industry had already ceased its operations in 1919 as there was no longer raw material available within reasonable distance. Virginia and Rainy Lake Company’s massive sawmill in Virginia ceased its operations in 1929 for the same reasons. In 1928 Minnesota, once one of the United States’ most important forest industry centers, produced only around one percent of whole country’s board production.<sup>195</sup>

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name change will be discussed more closely later in the chapter examining Hall’s years as a labor organizer.

192 Meyers 1970, 56-57; North 1970, 5; *Duluth News-Tribune* Nov 2, 1980; Brandt 1981, 1; Bonosky 1987, 8-9 and *The Community Dispatch*, July 1999. According to Hall’s nephew Dennis Hallberg, young Arvo Halberg worked in a big logging camp in Cusson, Minnesota where also many other Finnish Americans worked. See interview with Dennis Hallberg in Superior, Wisconsin, August 2008.

193 Salmi 1971, 11-44 and Alanen 2012, 28-31.

194 Jensen 1945, 45. The decline of lumbering in Great Lakes states was indeed dramatic as in 1933 the industry employed only 12 000 people whereas it had employed 112 000 people in 1889. See Jensen 1945, 10 & 64.

195 Orcutt 1925, 15; Todes 1931, 17-18, 26-27 & 202-203 and Hidy, Hill & Nevins 1963, 186-187. According to Hidy, Hill & Nevins, Virginia and Rainy Lake Company – one third of which was owned by the Weyerhaeuser – was “an unwieldy but impressive monster”. Because of lack of usable waterways in Northern Minnesota, large part of the logs had to be transferred by logging railroads

Arvo Halberg was deeply impressed by his colleagues in the lumber camps. According to him, these deep-wood workers were lonely, quiet and considerate men. Hall was surprised because of lumberjack's great interest in culture – to him it seemed that “the great majority of world's poets and songwriters were in these lumber camps”. Once again Hall's description is so idealized and even romanticized that a reader may have difficulties believing its accuracy:

Lumberjacks have a deep love of the nature, for the woods. They worked all week in the woods. But come Sunday, after dinner they would take long walks in the deep woods. Most of the lumberjacks had wild animal pets – chipmunks, a bird called the lumberjack (which hung around lumber camps), a bear or a deer they helped to find food in the snow and cold. Looking back, it's interesting that while there was so much wildlife I don't recall ever seeing a deer or even a rabbit killed by a lumberjack. [...]

Now these old type lumber camps of the deep woods are gone, pushed out of existence by new technology. I sometimes wonder where the beautiful, lonely thoughtful poets who used to inhabit these camps go today.<sup>196</sup>

Life in the lumber camps was not easy since – as Arnold R. Alanen writes – “the hazardous nature of the lumberjacks' work was exacerbated by isolation, lack of medical services and deplorable living conditions”.<sup>197</sup> Gus Hall's memories of his first job were somewhat similar to Alanen's description. Hall reminisced his lumberjack days in CPUSA's *Daily World* newspaper in 1977. According to Hall, the lumberjack's worked for \$1.00 per day with “no set hours of work, from dark-before-dawn to evening darkness, often in weather 40-50 degrees below zero”. Food in the lumber camps was appalling as maggots could be found in beef stew.<sup>198</sup> The smell in the bunkhouse was horrible when 60 lumberjacks – who had not had a bath for several months – dried their clothes in a house with no ventilation of any kind. In the spring as the lumberjacks went back to cities they had to shave off all their hair and fumigate their clothes “to get rid of six-month crop of human lice, crabs and dirt”.<sup>199</sup>

Some of Hall's stories about the miseries of lumberjack life are close to being unbelievable. In a *Newsweek* interview published in 1984 Hall claims that he slept in a same bunk with a dead man:

The camps are tarpaper shacks, and you sleep two to a bunk, and the fella I slept with in the bunk died. He was out driving horses and he came in and he was dead, and they didn't know what to do with him because there's no way to get out of the

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which was costly and inefficient. See Hidy, Hill & Nevins 1963, 195-196.

196 Hall 1987, 361.

197 Alanen 2012, 29.

198 When remembering his lumberjack days, Hall often repeated the claim concerning maggots in the lumber camp beef. While the claim may of course be correct, it also strongly brings to mind the memorable – and pivotal – scene in a major Soviet film classic, Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, in which the sailors complain about the worms in the beef to the ship's doctor who angers the sailors by declaring the meat edible. See *Daily World*, December 31, 1977; *Duluth News-Tribune* Nov 2, 1980 and *The Park Hill Reporter*, August 1994.

199 *Daily World*, December 31, 1977.

camp – you know, you’re *there*. So they put him in his bunk and I slept with him for I don’t know how many days.<sup>200</sup>

In addition to above-mentioned grievances, Hall could not accept “the irresponsible destruction of the most beautiful virgin forests by the land by profit-hungry corporations” and the racism against even more poorly-paid Indian Americans. The young radical decided to act and tried to organize a union among the lumberjacks. This, however, was not well looked upon and Hall was fired for “disturbing the peace” in the woods. According to Hall, he left the lumber camp “determined to dedicate my adult life in the struggle to change the conditions of work and life”.<sup>201</sup>

Descriptions of working conditions in Mid-Western lumber camps during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century vary widely. Hall’s description is definitely among the most negative. His recollections are somewhat similar to the reports of the inspectors of Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries who studied the lumberjacks’ living conditions in the 1910s. According to the inspectors, virtually all beds, blankets and men were infested with lice and toilet facilities were extremely primitive. Medical aid in the lumber camps was non-existent despite the high accident rate.<sup>202</sup> Deplorable conditions, meager wages and long working hours caused the lumberjacks to join in a short-lived IWW-led strike in Northern Minnesota in January 1917. This was by no means the only lumberjack strike of its time, as the loggers in the upper Great Lakes states also went on strike in 1919 and 1920.<sup>203</sup>

Hall’s reminiscences may seem exaggerated if one compares them with more moderate memoirs of Finnish American lumberjacks like for example John Salmi’s book *Minnesota Lumberjack*. Salmi – who like Hall worked in the woods in the 1920s – paints a far more positive picture of timber workers’ working conditions. Although lumberjacks’ working hours were long and their living quarters were smelly and crammed, Salmi had no real complaints. Food service was ample and varied and vermin were not at all such a problem as Gus Hall claimed them to be. Lumberjacks enjoyed the peaceful woods and the company of rabbit, squirrels, chickadees and woodpeckers. Sundays were idyllic days of rest with lumberjacks playing cards, making music, patching clothes and having haircuts. Historian Wright T. Orcutt gives a somewhat similar picture of lumberjacks’ living and working conditions in his *Minnesota History* article.<sup>204</sup> According to Vernon H. Jensen, vermin and

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200 *Newsweek*, February 20, 1984. Interestingly, Hall does not mention sleeping in the same bunk with a dead body in his *Daily World* memoir of his lumberjack days. He does, however, tell us about a teenage lumberjack who drowned as he was trying to cross thin ice because of homesickness. According to Hall, the frozen corpse was kept in the lumber camp for the winter “waiting for a spring burial”. See *Daily World*, December 31, 1977.

201 *Daily World*, December 31, 1977.

202 Haynes 1971, 167-169. A very similar description of the workers’ living conditions can be found in Rowan 1920, 9-10.

203 Engberg 1950, 209. According to George Rahkonen, Finnish American leader in Michigan’s Timberworkers’ Union, the lumberjacks’ living and working conditions were still deplorable in the 1930s in Michigan which led to a lumberjack strike in 1937. For Rahkonen’s account of the living conditions and the strike, see Kaunonen 2009, 35-37.

204 Orcutt 1925 and Salmi 1971, 11-44.

poor ventilation were indeed problems at the lumber camps, but the food service was generous and the lumberjacks remained in good health.<sup>205</sup>

Which one of these descriptions of lumberjacks' living and working conditions is the most accurate? The question is hard to answer as there surely were significant differences between lumber camps. Historians of the mighty Weyerhaeuser Company admit that there certainly was room for improvement in the living and working conditions in the 1910s but they also claim that conditions were improved significantly after the strikes in 1917. According to them, the spread of logging railroads and proper motor trucks made it easier to bring better building materials, electric lights and modern toilets and washrooms to remote logging camps.<sup>206</sup> Charlotte Todes – writing in a book published by the communists in 1931 – admits that there was some improvement in the conditions after the strikes between 1917 and 1923 as the “most flagrant evils” were eliminated, but “poor food, crowded bunkhouses, double tier bunks, unsanitary conditions, lack of drying rooms and the absence of showers” were still found in many camps.<sup>207</sup>

### 2.1.8. Conclusions

When one looks at Gus Hall's autobiographical writings and the biographical material the CPUSA and the Soviets published concerning him, Hall indeed appears as a true proletarian. The Halberg family was the poorest in the area and lived in “semi-starvation”, but at the same time they had the biggest library, filled with works by Marx, Engels and Lenin and American socialists like Eugene Debs and William “Big Bill” Haywood. According to Hall, his father came from “a long line of rebels and radicals” as his ancestors had been political dissidents already in Finland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hall's parents were – according to him – charter members of the American communist party and staunch supporters of the October revolution and Soviet Union. Hall himself had to quit school at the age of 15 in order to help to feed the family. He worked in the lumber camps of northern Minnesota in which the living and working conditions were appalling – so appalling that he decided to dedicate his life to the proletarian struggle.

While Hall describes his family background, childhood and youth in a consistent manner, the narrative he builds does not appear to be wholly reliable. Especially Hall's claims concerning his great-grandfather – who according to Hall was imprisoned for life for participating in a liberation movement in Finland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – raise questions due to the paucity of liberation movements in Finland during that time. In addition to that, Hall's portrayals of his childhood family and especially his father do not appear fully credible as he describes them in such highly idealized and even in a romanticized way – Hall's father appears more as a heroic worker character from a socialist realist painting or

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205 Jensen 1945, 51-55. Jensen emphasizes that it is difficult to give an overview of lumberjacks' working conditions as there were significant differences between lumber camps and as improvements took place over time.

206 Hidy, Hill & Nevins 1963, 336-342.

207 Todes 1931, 71-72.

a novel than as a truly living person. At the same time, Hall's depictions of lumber camp work in the 1920s appear at least partially questionable as he draws such an excessively negative picture of the living and working conditions in the lumber camps.

As a truly proletarian background was a central asset in the international communist movement<sup>208</sup>, a question comes to mind: To what extent did Hall exaggerate the proletarian features of his family, childhood and youth in order to create a picture of himself as a true proletarian – and thus to strengthen his position as communist leader? Here we have to remember that one's autobiography was central document for a member of the communist party. As Igal Halfin puts it, “communist autobiographies were one of the main standards by which entrance into the brotherhood of the elect was determined”. According to Halfin, the autobiographies were not always wholly truthful as “details could be pruned, embellished or ignored” and as “autobiographies allowed applicants to rewrite their selves, communist style”. Hall's autobiographical writings seem to have followed a typical pattern, because – as Halfin points out – “rather than telling a detailed individual chronicle, the Bolshevik autobiographer carefully selected and ordered a set of events from his or her life, typically presenting a complex narrative with spiritual development as its crux”.<sup>209</sup> A critical reader cannot avoid the impression that Hall's narration of his childhood and youth may be – at least partially – fallacious and unreliable as it was not primarily meant to be a truthful account of the topic but rather an instrument in Hall's advancement in the party machinery.

## **2.2. Lumberjack becomes a party organizer**

### **2.2.1. “Vigorous propagandist, an outstanding comrade”**

There is very little detailed information available on Hall's whereabouts in the late 1920s. In addition to working at lumber camps, Hall reminisces laboring as a railroad construction worker and steelworker, but he gives us no details.<sup>210</sup> He recalls joining the Young Workers' League – the forerunner of Young Communist League – in 1926 and joining the timber workers' union during the same year. At 17, Hall's Soviet biography tells us, “for the very first time in his life, he led a successful strike of railroad construction workers: the company was forced to recognize the union”.<sup>211</sup>

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208 According to Hungarian-born author Arthur Koestler – who was a member of the German communist party in the 1930s but later became a prominent critic of communism – a “cult of proletarian” prevailed in the party. In his opinion, the internal logic such a cult was not so very different from Nazism: “The ‘Aryans’ in the Party were the Proletarians, and the social origin of parents and grandparents was as weighty a factor both when applying for membership and during the biannual routine purges as Aryan descent was with the Nazis.” See *The God That Failed*, 49.

209 *A Dictionary of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Communism*, 142.

210 Hall indeed seems to have worked on many types of jobs in his youth, for George Meyers's biographical text on Hall claims that he also worked as a miner in Mesabi Range's mines, in the grain fields of Dakota and as a truck driver. See Meyers 1970, 56-57.

211 Meyers 1970, 57 and Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 21. As these texts do not give us any details



At 17 Gus Hall also followed his parents' footsteps by joining the American Communist Party in Iron, Minnesota, where his father acted as a local party chairman.<sup>212</sup> The basic ideas of Marxism-Leninism and Russian revolution were already familiar to the avid reader of Marx, Engels and Lenin, but he continued his studies in Young Communist League school in Wisconsin.<sup>213</sup> The school was sponsored by Finnish Workers' Federation. One of his teachers in the school was John Williamson, the Scottish-born communist, who 20 years later was together with Hall one of the 11 sentenced CPUSA leaders in the first Smith Act trial.<sup>214</sup> Already before his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday Hall got his first assignment as an YCL organizer in Northern Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan, aiming to "bring up young workers in the spirit of class struggle on Marxist-Leninist principles".<sup>215</sup>

Due to his assignment, Hall toured the towns and cities of the Midwest, learning to speak before large audiences. In the Upper Midwest, his audiences consisted largely of miners:

He was to speak to the men who had been in the deep of the earth with a pick and a shovel all day, and now after a quick washup and a gulped dinner, they hastened to the bare hall that constituted the classroom. Weariness was in their footsteps as he heard them come up the stairway. It was in their eyes, the gauntness of their cheek. Young Gus thrilled as he saw their faces light up when he told them truths of Marxism, of Leninism. "That flare of light strengthened me in my understanding," he says.<sup>216</sup>

Usually there was no money for bus or train tickets, so Hall had to resort to hitch-hiking. An alternative for hitch-hiking would have been hopping on and off freight trains or riding on a roof of Greyhound bus, as Carl Ross, another young Finnish American YCL organizer, used to do. The travelling "professional revolutionaries" were usually offered a place to eat and sleep by their comrades, but sometimes they had to sleep on the benches and tables of Finnish halls.<sup>217</sup> Hall's speaking tours were not unsuccessful, for in 1931 the YCL's District Nine – consisting of Northern Minnesota, Northern Wisconsin and Northern Michigan – was the second largest in the organization with its about 1 100 mainly Finnish members. Only the New York district with around 6 000 members was larger.<sup>218</sup> Finns were in the turn of the decade the second largest ethnic group in YCL after the Jews.<sup>219</sup> Halberg's skills were not left unnoticed:

Gus Hall liked to be in direct contact with different people, willing to debate all sorts of issues with worthy opponents and ever ready to parry a sudden attack. He was master of repartee. Contact with the masses was his element.

The Young Workers League – Hall was among the most vigorous of its propagandists – made great efforts to organize workers into trade unions. Gus, with his enthusiasm and knowledge, stood out among his comrades. Despite his youth, he displayed excellent skills as an organizer. He knew how to lead people, he

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concerning this strike, it is not possible to verify the accuracy of these claims.

212 Meyers 1970, 57.

213 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 21.

214 Williamson 1969, 62.

215 North 1970, 8; Brandt 1981, 2 and Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 21.

216 North 1970, 8.

217 Carl Ross's oral history interview transcript, 54-61.

218 Carl Ross's oral history interview transcript, 60.

219 Kostianen 1983, 266-267.

explained the purposes of the League and persuaded workers to join unions. It was already clear that the energetic young man will become a workers' leader.<sup>220</sup>

One of the biggest events that Arvo Halberg was involved in in 1929 was the farmers' hunger march from Mesabi Iron Range to Duluth. The farmers were protesting against their poor economic situation and the mortgage foreclosures of their farms. Halberg was organizing the march together with numerous other young Finnish American communists like Martin Mackie, Reino Tanttila and Jacob Anderson. According to Anderson, the demonstration attracted a massive crowd of Iron Range farmers:

We were riding on a top of the creamery truck, Gus Hall and Tantilla and I and Martin Mackie, leading this big farmers' hunger march and there were these cops. They had big shiny tear gas guns. We stopped to argue there and we finally got a permission that we could march on First Street. See, they were going to make us go on Second, but we did go on First Street and held our meeting out at the courthouse square.<sup>221</sup>

According to one CPUSA writer, Hall's speaking occasions sometimes led him to conflicts with authorities:

There was, for example, the International Youth Day Rally in Ely, Minnesota, in 1929, organized in support of peace, against the menace of fascism and in defense of the first socialist country – Soviet Russia. No sooner was the word “peace” out of his mouth, than the police burst in and a peaceful rally became a media-headlined riot. Young Halberg and a dozen others were soon behind bars.<sup>222</sup>

The Ely incident was Gus Hall's first police arrest. Vic Hiltunen, who like Hall took part in the youth movement and who later worked for the left-wing Finnish American newspaper *Työmies-Eteenpäin*, also recalls the arrest in Ely. According to him, Hall was “a husky, strapping youngster – never afraid of anything or anybody”:

He barely had time to finish his first sentence when the police seized him and threw him in jail together with several other activists. The following morning the jailer loudly asked them what they wanted for breakfast. “Bacon and eggs and the Communist Manifesto,” Gus called out from behind the bars.

“I don't remember if he got his Manifesto but bacon and eggs they did get,” Hiltunen concludes, noting that already then Gus Hall was hungry for a communist science.<sup>223</sup>

Enthusiastic Arvo Halberg seems to have proceeded well with his party career already before his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. In the spring of 1929, he served as a delegate in the Young Communist League's national convention in New York, thus making most likely his first trip to his

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220 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 21.

221 Jacob Anderson's oral history interview transcript, 7-8. Martin Mackie's widow Toinie Mackie – who like Arvo Halberg was born on the Mesabi Iron Range in 1910 – remembers the 1929 demonstration in her 1999 magazine interview: “Mackie attended her first big political rally in 1929. It was a ‘hunger march’ that took her, in the back of someone's truck, all the way to the courthouse square in Duluth. ‘We demonstrated for farm relief, jobs, things like that. And in the square there were cops waiting for us, and firemen with hoses, lined up to show that these dangerous protesters were coming into town.’” See *City Pages*, Oct 6, 1999.

222 Brandt 1981, 2.

223 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 25.

future home city. In August 1929, Arvo Halberg served as a delegate in the Trade Union Educational League's convention in Cleveland, Ohio.<sup>224</sup>

The TUEL had been established by William Z. Foster in 1920 in order to unite radicals in various trade unions for a common plan of action. The organization was subsidized by Comintern and the CPUSA. At first the organization applied so-called boring-from-within strategy, according to which the radicals should try to affect the policies of existing trade unions from within. The Comintern, however, decided to change the strategy in 1928. Instead of boring from within, the communists should establish their own unions in order to compete with the moderate ones. The new strategy of dual unionism was a central part of the Comintern's Third Period policy line which was marked by strong hostility toward socialists and their political reformism. The Comintern believed that capitalism's collapse was imminent and therefore the communist parties should be ready to take their place as the vanguard parties of the working class. As a consequence of the Comintern's strategy change, the American TUEL was transformed into Trade Union Unity League in its Cleveland convention in 1929. The re-named organization sought to establish radical dual unions in competition with the existing labor organizations. William Z. Foster, who had opposed dual unionism through the 1920s, accepted the change only grudgingly.<sup>225</sup>

After the TUEL national convention Arvo Halberg stayed in Cleveland in order to attend the YCL training school. The Cleveland school was one of many arranged across the country by the party after the Comintern had in 1925 ordered the party to establish a national schooling system.<sup>226</sup> Jack Kling, who later served as CPUSA's Illinois district organizer for a number of years, very likely attended the YCL school along with Arvo Halberg although Kling does not mention Hall's name in his memoirs. The class consisted of 28 students from all over the country. According to Kling, the students were considered to possess promising leadership qualities. The main subject in the six-week training was political economy – “theories behind wages, surplus value and profit” – but the students studied also Communist Manifesto, the problems of the labor movement, the Black liberation movement and the Soviet Union.<sup>227</sup>

The school, located in district party headquarters in downtown Cleveland, was run by Israel Amter, Betty Gannett and Sam Don.<sup>228</sup> The teachers had a strong experience in international communism, since Israel Amter had served as the American representative

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224 These details were disclosed by former CPUSA member Leonard Patterson in his testimony before a congressional internal security subcommittee in February 1960. See *Communist Leadership*, 37.

225 Barrett 1999, 158-161.

226 Ahola 1981, 99-101.

227 Kling 1985, 11.

228 Ahola 1981, 101 & Kling 1985, 11. Sam Don did not have as lengthy CPUSA career as Amter and Gannett. He worked for the *Daily Worker* for a number of years and held also the position of CPUSA's national educational director. In addition to these, he was a member of party's national committee. In 1945 however, he was removed from the party leadership because of alleged “factionalist activities”. In 1951 he was expelled from the party. See *Purge Victims of the Communist Party, USA*, 19-20. *Purge Victims of the Communist Party, USA* can be found in Ernie Lazar's collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 2).

in the Comintern from 1923 to 1925<sup>229</sup> and Betty Gannett had studied in Moscow's International Lenin School in the late 1920s. Later in his life Arvo Halberg co-operated closely with Betty Gannett, who became a central figure in the party in the 1950s and who edited *Political Affairs*, the theoretical journal of the CPUSA, from 1963 to 1970.<sup>230</sup>

### 2.2.2. Party in Bolshevik turmoil

What kind of party young Arvo Halberg joined when he in 1927 became a member of the Workers' Party of America, which two years later became the Communist Party of the United States of America? He joined the grouping at a very sensitive time, as the party was going through inner factional battles and a thorough Bolshevization process which affected strongly also the Finnish-speaking communists.

The history of the CPUSA goes back to 1919, when two competing parties, Communist Labor Party and Communist Party of America were founded. After complex factional struggles and strict orders received from Comintern's head office in Moscow the two parties merged during years 1920-21. The new aboveground organization was called the Workers' Party of America.<sup>231</sup>

The Comintern controlled the American party closely through the whole 1920s. Not only did the Comintern urge the American communists to unite their ranks into one single party, but starting 1924 it demanded that all communist parties outside the Soviet Union should follow the structure of the Soviet CP. The Comintern wanted to make the parties more disciplined, centralized and unified organizations which could carry out orders more efficiently. The last remnants of socialist and social democratic thought were to be wiped out of world's communist ranks.

This meant among other things reorganizing the party on the basis of factory and residential cells instead of language federations. The language federations would no longer act as intermediaries between members and the party. With such a change the Comintern also wanted to speed up the Americanization of the American party. Workplace and street cells would require members to co-operate with other nationalities and communicate in English instead of their own native language. This in turn would help to the party to get

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229 Israel Amter (1881-1954) was a central figure in the CPUSA during its first three decades, serving for example as the chairman of the New York State Communist Party. He was also a member of CPUSA's central committee for many years. Amter was a frequent – and often popular – candidate of the Communist Party for various political offices, receiving more than 100 000 votes when he ran for congress in 1938, for example. See Flynn 1955, 31 and *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 6-7.

230 *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 149-150. In the early 1950s Betty Gannett, CPUSA's then educational director, was known as a strict watchdog of party's internal anti-racist campaign against "white chauvinism". Her stern line angered many within the party. See Fast 1957, 178; Fast 1990, 299-300 and Healey & Isserman 1990, 125-128.

231 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 20-39.

rid of its image as a grouping of Eastern and Southern European immigrants and make it more accessible to mainstream American-born workers.<sup>232</sup>

Not surprisingly such plans were met with severe opposition in the Finnish language federation. Most Finnish communists were far more attracted to the ethnic fraternal life of the “Finn halls” than to a Communist Party with no ethnic enclaves. Their party activities centered almost completely around their own language federation. Finnish workers’ halls were indeed busy centers of diverse social and cultural activities ranging from theater groups, bands and choirs to sports clubs, women’s clubs and sewing circles. Dances, outings and educational classes to adults and children were arranged, marriages were celebrated and politics were discussed. Hall libraries and reading rooms were an important source of information to workers who – like young Arvo Halberg – wanted to learn more about the surrounding capitalist society. As all this took place in Finnish language, it is easy to understand that Finns were not very eager to dissolve language federations.<sup>233</sup>

The Finnish American version of socialism was mockingly called “hall socialism” as it laid – according to its critics – bigger emphasis on trivial social activities than on socialist revolution. Such views were probably not wholly incorrect. Finnish American communist leader John Wiita – who was also known as Henry Puro – calculated that only some 20 percent of branch membership was involved in socialist activity for political and ideological reasons; the other 80 percent were motivated by cultural interests and other leisure activities.<sup>234</sup> Considering all this, it is understandable that the Comintern wanted Finns to give up “nationally concentrated activities”, as hall socialism was ethnocentric and thus worked against Americanization, assimilation and international workers’ movement.<sup>235</sup>

The unwillingness of the Finns to mix with other nationalities may also be explained by their limited English skills. According to one estimation, only about one fifth of the Finnish American immigrants could effectively speak English in the 1920s.<sup>236</sup> Many Finnish communists lived in geographically isolated locations in Upper Michigan and Northeastern Minnesota where they could – like Arvo Halberg’s father – live their whole lives in almost completely Finnish-speaking environment. Also, as Finnish is not an Indo-European language, learning English was more difficult to Finns than to, for example, Swedes or Norwegians.<sup>237</sup> Because of the language difficulties, Finns were prone to “clannishness and

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232 Kostinen 1975, 172; Ahola 1981, 27 and Klehr & Haynes 1992, 54.

233 For more on Finn halls, see, for example, Kostinen 1978, 172 and Alanen 2012, 53.

234 Virtanen 2014, 183. According to Kostinen, “many Finns were brought into touch with socialism simply by ‘hall socialism’ which meant the social activities taking place in the ‘Finn halls’”. “The activities centered around the workers’ hall were plentiful and everybody found things to do”, he writes. See Kostinen 1978, 35.

235 Kostinen 1983, 262-263.

236 Ahola 1981, 45. According to Ahola, “the language problem was a difficult one for first-generation Finnish Americans” who almost exclusively read only Finnish American newspapers *Eteenpäin*, *Työmies* and *Toveri*. “Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the social, educational and cultural activities of the Finnish American communists centered almost exclusively around the Finnish halls, which were owned and operated by the Finnish language clubs. Further, these class-conscious Finns, whenever possible, purchased their foodstuffs and daily necessities from Finnish-run cooperatives. As a result, Finnish Americans had little opportunity or need to become proficient in the English language.” See Ahola 1981, 44.

237 Kivisto 1984, 179; Kaunonen 2009, 13; Alanen 2012, 11 & 78 and Kostinen 2014b, 149.

inward-oriented activities”.<sup>238</sup> The introvert mentality of the Finns is also reflected in the party leadership in the 1920s. Although the Finns were by far the biggest ethnic group in the party in the early 1920s – in 1922 almost one half of the party’s membership was Finnish-speaking<sup>239</sup> – only four Finns served in the party’s central committees during the decade. At the same time, 24 Russian-born communists sat in central committees.<sup>240</sup>

Finns were of course not the only ones resisting the reorganization. In addition to English-speaking federation, there were 18 language federations in the Workers’ Party in 1925. After the Finns and the English-speakers, the biggest were the Jewish, South Slavic, Russian and Lithuanian federations.<sup>241</sup> Not surprisingly, William Z. Foster had to report in the Comintern meeting in Moscow in the spring of 1925 that there was strong opposition against the reorganization within the Workers’ Party.<sup>242</sup>

The Finns resisted the change by stating that the Comintern did not understand the exceptional conditions in which the American party was operating. The language federations were indispensable in such a multicultural organization where vast majority of the membership belonged to some non-English speaking federation. The functioning of the party would suffer severely as the workers would no longer understand each other. The Comintern’s line was considered so hazardous, that the Massachusetts-based Finnish American communist newspaper *Eteenpäin* bravely urged the Comintern to reconsider the matter and to give a new decision.<sup>243</sup> The bone of contention was, of course, not only the language or social mores. Finns worried that because of reorganization, they would lose control of their property, their workers’ halls, newspapers, printing machines, bookstores and libraries.<sup>244</sup>

In order to speed up the Bolshevization of the American party, in the fall of 1925 the Comintern sent Yrjö Sirola to supervise the reorganization. Sirola was a well-known Finnish Communist leader, who had served as the foreign minister in the short-lived People’s Republic of Finland in 1918. After the lost civil war, Sirola along with many other communist leaders escaped to Soviet Russia. Sirola, who was familiar with American society

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Not surprisingly, over three fourths of first-generation party members interviewed by David John Ahola saw language difficulties as a major reason for the opposition against the party reorganization. See Ahola 1981, 43.

238 Kostinen 1989, 32.

239 Glazer 1961, 42 and Kostinen 1978, 138.

240 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 50-51. As Klehr points out in one of his earlier studies, Finnish American communists were strikingly weakly represented in the party leadership. According to Klehr, only seven of CPUSA’s 212 central committee members between 1921 and 1961 were Finnish American. Klehr writes:” The Finns, for all their numbers and wealthy cooperative institutions, were never very influential within the party hierarchy. Concentrated largely in the upper Midwest, they sought to maintain their own institutions and property and were scorned by many other communists as petty-bourgeois farmers.” Also Theodore Draper paid attention to the passivity of the Finns when it came to party leadership. According to him, Finnish Americans were interested in little more than their cooperatives. See Draper 1960, 88, 101 & 190-191; Klehr 1978, 29 & 105; Kostinen 1978, 169 and Kivisto 1984, 17.

241 Ahola 1981, 31-32.

242 Kostinen 1975, 173.

243 Kostinen 1975, 174.

244 Kostinen 1975, 183.

and Finnish American radicalism after having been a teacher at Duluth's Work People's College from 1910 to 1914, stayed in the U.S. until the beginning of 1927 under the code name Frank Miller. Because of his lengthy experience, Sirola had a great authority among the Finnish American communists.<sup>245</sup>

Not even Sirola's presence, however, convinced all Finns of the necessity of the reorganization. The convention of the Finnish federation approved the reorganization unanimously in December 1925, but the members voted with their feet. Only around every fifth or every fourth of the Finnish American members joined the reorganized party. Before the reorganization the party had around 6 000 Finnish members, but now the figure dropped to around 1 200-1 500.<sup>246</sup> Finnish Americans were, of course, not the only ones leaving the party. According to Klehr and Haynes, the party lost more than a half of its 16 000 members following the reorganization.<sup>247</sup>

After the party leaders realized the damage that the reorganization had caused among Finnish American membership, a new organization, Finnish Workers' Federation, was founded in 1927.<sup>248</sup> Basically the founding of the new organization restored the Finnish American machinery largely to the condition before the Bolshevization.<sup>249</sup> Not all former members, however, joined the new organization as the overall party membership remained below 10 000 during the last years of the 1920s.<sup>250</sup> It indeed seems that Auvo Kostiainen is right when he argues that the Comintern failed because it underestimated the role of ethnic features and activities when it tried to reorganize the Finnish American communists.<sup>251</sup>

Bolshevization was not, however, the ending point of the turbulence within the party. In 1927 – the year when young Arvo Halberg joined the Workers' Party of America – its leader Charles Ruthenberg died which reignited factional warfare within the party. The main competitors for the leadership post were famous labor and strike leader William Z. Foster and young ally of Ruthenberg, Jay Lovestone. Being a frequent visitor to Moscow, Lovestone had close contacts with Nikolai Bukharin, the Comintern's chairman. Not surprisingly, the Comintern supported Lovestone in the leadership race. According to the Comintern, Foster should concentrate on the party's labor issues. Lovestone became the national secretary of the party.<sup>252</sup>

Bukharin's star, however, was fading. In 1927, after having destroyed the leftist opposition of Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev with the aid of Bukharin, Stalin turned on his ally. Stalin and Bukharin disagreed especially on industrialization and agricultural policies. Stalin called for very rapid industrialization – with an emphasis on heavy industries – and

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245 Kostiainen 1975, 184 and Kostiainen 1989, 32.

246 The estimates of the membership loss among the Finnish Americans vary. According to Klehr and Haynes, the Finnish organization lost around 75 percent of its membership, but according to Ahola the figure is around 80 percent. See Klehr & Haynes 1992, 54 and Ahola 1981, 41.

247 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 54. According to Ahola, the loss of membership was less than one half, possibly "upwards of one-third". See Ahola 1981, 34.

248 Ahola 1981, 90-92.

249 Kostiainen 1989, 33.

250 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 54.

251 Kostiainen 1989, 36-37.

252 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 44-45 and Johanningsmeier 1994, 235-236.

complete collectivization of agriculture. Bukharin stood for more moderate and balanced policies, defending peasants, private farming and production of consumer goods. He warned of the dangers of over-centralization and rampant bureaucratization. According to Bukharin, Stalin's policies were turning party bureaucrats into abusive, privileged elite comparable to czar's officials. He criticized Stalin's economic policies as adventurous and unscientific. Bukharin also supported the so-called New Economic Policy – which tolerated private enterprise to moderate extent – which according to Stalin was another sign of Bukharin's "right opportunism".<sup>253</sup>

By 1929 Bukharin's – and Lovestone's – position had already dramatically weakened. With the appointment powers of the general secretary of Communist Party, Stalin had since 1922 promoted numerous loyal supporters to important positions in the party. With their help, Stalin could gradually brush aside Bukharin and his allies.<sup>254</sup> At first, Lovestone's position seemed to be strong, as he and his supporters overwhelmingly dominated the March 1929 party convention. The Comintern, however, was not satisfied with the situation. Its representatives in the New York convention declared that Lovestone's leadership was unacceptable. Lovestone managed to keep his position, and after the convention travelled to Moscow to defend himself. Foster followed him close behind.<sup>255</sup>

In Moscow, Stalin – unusual for him – attended the meetings of the Comintern's American commission. He accused the American party of shaping its strategy in response to particular American events. This was a right-wing ideological error because communists should act everywhere in a uniform way in accordance with the underlying nature of capitalism. There was no need for an exceptional strategy in America.<sup>256</sup> The factions of Foster and Lovestone fought bitterly for days in the American commission, each trying to disgrace the other in the eyes of Soviets. Finally, the Comintern ended up calling for reorganizing the American party leadership, as had taken place already in numerous countries including, for example, Germany.<sup>257</sup> The American party did not drag its feet but expelled Lovestone and his closest allies as "right opportunists" in June. The Lovestoneites were replaced by a leadership quartet which included also William Z. Foster. Lovestone did not give up communism, but started his own communist party, which, however, remained very small and disbanded in 1941.<sup>258</sup>

Just like Lovestone, also Bukharin was kicked out of his high positions during 1929. In April Bukharin was expelled from the Comintern's chairmanship and in November he was kicked out of CPSU's Politburo. In August, *Pravda* and other newspapers started an unprecedented defamation campaign against Bukharin, branding him as anti-Leninist, anti-Bolshevik,

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253 Cohen 1980, 270-322.

254 Cohen 1980, 325-326.

255 Barrett 1999, 156-157; Johanningsmeier 1994, 246 and Klehr & Haynes 1992, 47-48.

256 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 48.

257 In Germany two prominent Bukharin-sympathizers Heinrich Brandler and August Thalheimer were expelled from KPD in December 1928. During 1929 hundreds of their followers were also expelled. Brandler and Thalheimer founded a new opposition-minded communist party KPO which later co-operated with Jay Lovestone's new communist party.

258 After 1941 Lovestone became a staunchly anticommunist operative in American Federation of Labor, financing anticommunist activities especially in Latin America in close co-operation with CIA. See Barrett 1999, 158.



anti-party, petty bourgeois liberal and pro-kulak. Such a campaign greatly helped Stalin in instilling the correct political approaches. According to Bukharin biographer Stephen Cohen, Bukharin's defeat had momentous social consequences as it was a political prelude to Stalin's "revolution from above" and to the advent of what became known as Stalinism. Bukharin's capitulation completed Stalin's rise to unrivaled leadership. Stalin had once again removed an influential adversary and could in December celebrate his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday – in the midst of a growing personality cult – as once again stronger ruler of The Soviet Union.<sup>259</sup>

### **2.2.3. The struggle for the co-operative movement**

In addition to the crisis caused by the Bolshevization of the Workers' Party in the mid-1920s, another major Comintern-ignited dispute took place among Finnish Americans at the turn of the decade. Unlike many other Finnish Americans, young Arvo Halberg seems to have accepted the policies of the Comintern as he remained a party member through the scuffle.

This time the dispute was about the control of the Finnish American cooperative movement in the Upper Midwest. During the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Finnish immigrants had established cooperatives all across the United States, but the Finnish-background cooperative movement flourished especially in the Upper Midwest.<sup>260</sup>

Following the Comintern's orders from Moscow the American communists wanted to make this thriving movement an auxiliary of the communist party. The Finnish American consumers' co-operative movement had in the mid-1920s nearly 20 000 members in about sixty store societies around the Upper Midwest. Although the Cooperative Central Exchange marketed its products under communist-style Red Star label, the communists did not control the movement. Communists were influential at the top of the movement, but the clear majority of the movement's 20 000 rank-and-file members opposed communists. They did not see the co-operative movement as a part of a revolutionary political party but rather as a purely economic and social movement.<sup>261</sup>

The conflict between these two viewpoints culminated in the annual meeting of the CCE in Superior, Wisconsin in April 1930. In the decisive vote the communists were soundly defeated. As a consequence, sixteen store societies and about 2 000 members left the CCE. These leftists established their own politically orientated co-operative organization

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259 Cohen 1980, 312-313 & 332-336. After 1929, Bukharin never again played a central role in Soviet politics and was executed as a part of Stalin's great purges in 1938.

260 According to Hannu Heinilä, the cooperative movement was one of the most visible forms of cooperation among the Finnish immigrants in the United States. The Finns' enthusiasm for cooperative activities was so great that it can be said that "no other group of immigrants had more influence on the development of the American cooperatives than Finns", as Heinilä puts it. See Heinilä 2014, 157.

261 Karni 1975, 186-196.

which – among other things – supported the Republican side in the Spanish civil war and promoted re-emigration of American Finns to Soviet Karelia.<sup>262</sup>

According to Michael Karni, the struggle for the co-operative movement “signaled the beginning of the end of Finnish-American radicalism as an ethnic movement”. As the Finnish American co-operative movement became politically less militant and it opened its doors non-Finns, it no longer carried the legacy of radical Finnish Americans.<sup>263</sup> At the same time, many of the remaining Finnish American radicals left behind the Finnish American radicalism and moved into the orbit of international communism and the left wing of American labor movement where some of them played prominent roles. According to Karni, Arvo Halberg was most notable of these radicals.<sup>264</sup>

#### 2.2.4. Conclusions

As mentioned earlier, Hall does not give us very detailed information of his whereabouts in the late 1920s in his autobiographical writings. Looking at other sources, however, it would seem that the phase in Hall’s life during which he mainly was a manual laborer, was short-lived, lasting only for about three years. According one party publication, young Arvo Halberg got his first assignment as a Young Communist League organizer already before his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. After that he seems to have spent most of his time in different kinds of party or labor union functions in the Midwest or in Moscow.

What can we gather from the information that we have? First, from the fact that young Arvo joined the party in 1927, we can come to the conclusion that the Comintern’s aim of Bolshevizing the U.S. Workers’ Party in the mid-1920s – due to which thousands of Finnish Americans left the party – did not bother him to such an extent that it would have stopped him from joining the party. It may well be that young Arvo, who had gone to strictly English-speaking school for eight years in Cherry and who with his childhood friends spoke English, no longer was interested in the Finnish-language activities offered by Finnish workers’ clubs.<sup>265</sup> It may well be that he no longer first and foremost considered himself as a Finn but rather as an American or, as a devout communist, an internationalist. He may even have considered the tightly-knit Finnish American community in the Iron Range as

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262 Karni 1975, 196-200.

263 The Finnish American cooperative movement in the Upper Midwest continued growing after the internal crisis. In the late 1930s the Central Cooperative Wholesale – as it was called after 1931 – had nearly 120 local member stores, approximately 40 000 members and annual revenues of nearly \$4 million. In the early 1960s the CCW had approximately 240 local member co-ops and its annual revenues reached \$20 million. In the longer term, however, co-operative activity was not able to meet the challenges posed by the transformation of American retail. See Heinilä 2014, 167-168.

264 Karni 1975, 187 & 200.

265 This hypothesis is supported by David John Ahola, who in his study on Finnish American communists points out that Gus Hall was never an active member of Finnish Workers’ Federation (Suomalainen Työväenjärjestö). The organization was founded by the communists in 1927 in order to gather Finnish Americans – many of whom had left the Workers’ Party after the Comintern-led Bolshevization of the party – again to support communist policies. See Ahola 1981, 234.

constricted and agonizing, and may have wanted to see the world outside of Northeastern Minnesota. It indeed seems that Arvo Halberg was a typical second-generation Finnish American, who according to Keijo Virtanen “did not share the same interest in Finnish language cultural activities [as their parents] but rapidly became Americanized”.<sup>266</sup>

Young Arvo’s Americanized and internationalized identity is also reflected by the absence of references to Finnish American radicalism in Gus Hall’s autobiographical writings. He does write about his father Matt and his actions in Cherry, Minnesota but other than that Hall does not pay attention to Finnish American radicalism in his writings. Finnish American communist leaders of the 1910s and 1920s like George Halonen, Martin Hendrickson, Leo Laukki, Santeri Nuorteva or Henry Puro never show up in Hall’s writings. Instead, he frequently refers to Big Bill Haywood, Eugene Debs, John Reed and other great heroes of American radicalism. Nor does he comment on the Bolshevization dispute or the dispute concerning the Finnish American co-operative movement. The only Finnish American radical who – in addition to Matt Halberg – comes up in his writings is Reino Tanttilla, a Finnish American volunteer from Minnesota who died in the Spanish civil war in 1938. Reflecting his internationalist mindset, Hall does not even mention Tanttilla’s Finnish background but presents him as a determined revolutionary committed to the struggle against capitalism and fascism.<sup>267</sup>

The fact that young Arvo stayed in the party after the expulsion of Jay Lovestone and his allies, shows that he was not one of Lovestoneites but rather a supporter of the victorious Foster faction. This is not surprising, as Foster – who had spent large part of his life organizing the workers in the Midwest and who, unlike college-educated Lovestone, had a truly proletarian background – was a popular figure among the Finnish communists in the Upper Midwest.<sup>268</sup> According to Barrett, the membership of American party dropped in the late 1920s to mere 7 000 as hundreds of members left the party after being disgusted by the continuous factional battles and reorganizations.<sup>269</sup> Arvo Halberg did not leave the party although he most likely knew well what was taking place in the leadership. Finnish American radical press followed keenly the quarrels in the party leadership and surely these topics were also discussed in YCL and TUEL conventions and Cleveland YCL school

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266 Virtanen 2014, 184.

267 Hall 1987, 350-352. Hall misspells Tanttilla’s family name Tantella. Michael Karni mentions Tanttilla – together with Gus Hall – as an example of a Finnish American radical who in the 1930s moved into the orbit of international communism from the traditional ethnic Finnish American radicalism. Tanttilla is featured also in Jyrki Juusela’s study on Finns in Spanish civil war and in Arnold Alanen’s study on Minnesota Finns. See Karni 1975, 200; Juusela 2003, 164 & 445 and Alanen 2012, 60.

268 Barrett 1999, 111. Foster’s popularity among the Finnish Americans may explain why Minnesota was one of the most Foster-voting states in the 1928 presidential elections. Foster received almost 5 000 votes in Minnesota which was ten percent of his total votes and 0.5 percent of all votes in Minnesota. Only New Yorkers voted Foster more actively. In Michigan Foster received almost 3 000 votes which was six percent of his total votes. In the 1932 elections Foster again received a large number of votes – relatively speaking – from these two “Finn states”. Almost 15 percent of Foster’s votes came from Michigan and Minnesota. See *Congressional Quarterly’s Guide to U.S. Elections*, 670-671.

269 Barrett 1999, 162.

in which Arvo Halberg attended in 1929.<sup>270</sup> And as Carl Ross tells us, the changes in the Comintern leadership were felt quickly also on the shores of Lake Superior: the YCL textbook, Bukharin's *ABC of Communism* was quickly removed from the curriculum in the end of 1920s as Bukharin lost his position in the Comintern leadership.<sup>271</sup>

By the time the 1920s ended with a massive Wall Street stock market crash and the beginning of the Great Depression, Arvo Halberg was already an experienced communist organizer. He had learned to respect and admire the Soviet Union already at his childhood home, but the 1920s taught him to honor the world's first workers' state even more deeply. By looking from a close distance at the Bolshevization of the Finnish language federation and little later the destiny of Jay Lovestone and his allies, he could now internalize the fact that Soviet Union – with its iron-fisted leader Joseph Stalin – was indeed the unquestionable ruler of the international communist movement.

German sociologist Karl Mannheim argued in his classic essay *The Problem of Generations* that the time around the 17<sup>th</sup> life-year of a human being is a very sensitive time of formation of one's worldview.<sup>272</sup> If one looks at Gus Hall's life that would indeed seem to hold truth. Young Arvo Halberg took his first steps in the communist movement just when the Soviet Union was tightening its grip on the movement and just when Joseph Stalin finalized his position as the glorified leader of the Soviet Union. These experiences were formative in Arvo Halberg's development, affecting his whole life, as he never seriously questioned the leading position of Soviet Union in the communist movement. His attitude towards Stalin was more complicated, but he never joined the loud and explicit critics of the Soviet leader, but rather defended his accomplishments as the modernizer of the Soviet society and economy.

## **2.3. Minnesota Red in Moscow's International Lenin School**

### **2.3.1. Great Depression hits Minnesota hard**

The Great Depression hit Minnesota and especially its Iron Range hard. Ore production, which averaged about 33 million tons annually in the 1920s, plunged to a record-low 2.2 million tons in 1932. The situation was not helped by the gradual shutdown of Minnesota's once flourishing lumber industry. The massive sawmill of Virginia Rainy Lake Company in Virginia had closed its operations in 1929 and only five years later logging ended in Rainy Lake area. Minnesota had run out of woods so the entrepreneurs turned their attention to the forests of the Pacific Northwest. As a result of all this, the unemployment rate in Iron Range rose above 70 percent.<sup>273</sup>

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270 Kostinen 1989, 34.

271 Carl Ross oral history interview transcript, 39.

272 Mannheim 1952, 300.

273 Lass 1998, 180 & 256.

The 1920s is often described in popular history books and films as a happy and care-free decade between the WWI and the Great Depression. That was, however, not the case with many Finnish Americans trying to eke out a living in American mines, lumber camps and on their small farms. For many Finnish Americans, life in new homeland had turned out to be a massive disappointment, and they were susceptible to other, radical alternatives. One such alternative was the Soviet Union, to which some Finnish Americans had moved already during the 1920s. When the Great Depression hit the U.S. at the turn of the decade, the susceptibility of the American Finns to look for other alternatives grew significantly. Thousands of Finns in both the United States and Canada reacted positively to Soviet-sponsored recruitment advertisements and speaking tours by leading Finnish American communists Matti Tenhunen and Martin Hendrickson. After experiencing the harsh reality of North American capitalism, Finns were more than willing to move to Karelian woods in order to build a workers' dream society.<sup>274</sup>

Exact estimates of the number of American and Canadian Finns who were infected by the so-called Karelian Fever vary between 5 000 and 10 000.<sup>275</sup> Most of them – around 4 000 – left North America during 1931 and 1932. The phenomenon seems to have ended after 1934. Most of the Finns returning to the Old Continent ended up living in Karelia which borders Finland.<sup>276</sup>

Very often immigrants are in their 20s or younger, but many of the Finns re-emigrating to the Soviet Union were already middle-aged people who had been born in Finland. Many of them moved together with their families. However, among the emigrants there were also young singles who had been born in the United States. One of those was Arvo Halberg's older brother Urho.<sup>277</sup> He was born in Cherry, Minnesota in April 1907 as the second U.S.-born child of the Halberg family.<sup>278</sup> He seems to have left for the Soviet Union before the fall of 1931.<sup>279</sup> There is no certainty of his destiny, but he seems to have survived Stalin's purges in 1937-38, in which hundreds if not thousands of American Finns were killed.<sup>280</sup> According to a newspaper story on the Halberg family, Urho, after emigrating to

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274 Kero 1996, 274-275.

275 A recent book on Finnish American immigration to Karelia states that approximately 6 000-6 500 American Finns moved to Karelia between 1931 and 1935. See Kamppinen 2019, 28.

276 Kero 1996, 271-272.

277 Urho Halberg is among the thousands of emigrants who headed to Soviet Union listed in the internet database [missinginkarelia.ca](http://missinginkarelia.ca). Gus Hall also mentions him in a 1980 newspaper interview. See *Duluth News-Tribune*, Nov 2, 1980.

278 Urho Halberg's birth certificate is available in the birth certificate database of Minnesota Historical Society in [www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org).

279 Gus Hall said in a 1980 newspaper interview that he travelled to the Soviet Union in the fall of 1931 following his older brother. Urho Halberg may have traveled to the Soviet Union together with working class writer Mikael Rutanen who according to Gus Hall was a family friend of the Halbergs. Rutanen published his writings in Finland, the United States and the Soviet Union. He published at least one novel and two collections of poems. In addition to those, he wrote theater plays. Born in Finland in 1883, Rutanen moved to the United States in 1908. He died in the Soviet Union in 1932 in an accident as he was working as a lumberjack in Karelia. He has been considered as one of the most significant Finnish American working-class writers. See Palmgren 1966, 327-330; *Duluth News-Tribune*, Nov 2, 1980; Hall 1987, 361; *Suomen kirjailijat 1809-1917*, 652-653 and Kamppinen 2019, 77.

280 According to Kamppinen, more than 3 000 Finns were killed in Karelia during Stalin's great

the Karelian Socialist Republic near Finland, joined the Red Army during World War II and died when German airplanes bombed a troop train near Leningrad.<sup>281</sup>

### 2.3.2. Comintern's school for young proletarians

Urho Halberg was not the only son of the Halberg family to travel to Soviet Union. Arvo Halberg, who for some years already had worked as Upper Midwest district organizer for the Young Communist League, was chosen to deepen his knowledge of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow's International Lenin School.<sup>282</sup>

The Comintern had established the International Lenin School in 1924 in order to produce a new phalanx of young and disciplined party cadres with proletarian background, free of reformist ideas. The school was the top of the Moscow-based three-step educational system of international communism. The lower steps were national central party schools for mid-level leaders and regional party courses for rank-and-file members.<sup>283</sup> For the Comintern, the school was a tool for the Bolshevization of the international communist movement. Its leaders wanted to generate a new revolutionary elite, committed to a Bolshevik interpretation of Marxism. According to British Lenin School researchers, "the education of their cadres in the new 'Leninism' was intended to create uniformity, commitment and efficiency, replicate the increasing conformity of the Russian party, filter deviancy and secure national allegiance to the politics of the Russian-dominated Comintern". This could be not done in the home countries of the students, but a school had to be located in Moscow, in the very heart of international communism.<sup>284</sup>

The International Lenin School opened its doors in 1926 and operated for 12 years. A recent estimate suggests that some 3 500 students from 59 countries passed through the school between May 1926 and mid-1938, when the school closed.<sup>285</sup> The biggest source for the Lenin School students was Germany, from where 370 students travelled to Moscow. Czechoslovakia was the second biggest source with its 320 students. Communist parties

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purges in 1937-38. Altogether more than 8 000 people were killed in Karelia during the great purges. See Kampinen 2019, 300.

281 *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, July 10, 1988. According to Gus Hall's relatives, Hall tried to find out about his brother's fate during his travels in the Soviet Union. Whether the above-mentioned information was acquired by Hall is not certain.

282 *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, 167.

283 Krekola 2006, 90.

284 Cohen & Morgan 2002, 327-328 and McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 99-100. There has been no thorough study done on the American students of the Lenin School. Therefore I will rely here largely on studies concerning the British students of the school. This is justified especially since the Americans and the British studied for many years together in the English-language sector of the school. In addition to British studies, I will refer to Joni Krekola's exhaustive study on Finnish Lenin School students, which is one of the most comprehensive studies conducted on the Lenin School. Krekola's study is in Finnish, but he has also published in 2005 an article in English titled *The Finnish Sector at the International Lenin School*.

285 Köstenberger 2007, 287. Cohen and Morgan estimated in 2002 that the school trained perhaps around 3 000 young communists from all around the world. See Cohen & Morgan 2002, 328.

of France, Poland, Italy, the United States and China each sent 200-225 students.<sup>286</sup> The Austrian party sent 180 students, the British party 150 students and the Spanish and the Finnish parties sent 135 students each.<sup>287</sup> The parties of the Soviet Union, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Canada each sent 60-75 students.<sup>288</sup>

Lenin School's intensive residential courses lasted from six months to three years. An ideal student for the Lenin School was a young person under 35 years of age, unmarried, of working-class or peasant origin and in perfect health. The student should have been a member of the party or Young Communist League for at least a year and he or she should have some kind of experience of class struggle in practice.<sup>289</sup> Arvo Halberg filled these requirements easily, being more or less a perfect participant for Comintern schooling.

According to Brigitte Studer, Lenin School students were "handpicked" which meant that also their political conduct – their loyalty to the party and its line – was under close scrutiny. The students' family and occupational backgrounds were investigated also to make sure that the students had no connections with members of the police or the intelligence services. The first selection was made in the student's home country by his or her own party, but the examinations continued in Moscow. Such examinations were needed, because the "communist parties were not always scrupulous in their application of the selection criteria, sometimes being only too happy to get rid of awkward customers among their militants".<sup>290</sup>

The recruitment for the Lenin School was organized through national party schools. Arvo Halberg may have been considered a suitable participant for the Moscow schooling since he had attended a national party school in Cleveland in the fall of 1929. According to David John Ahola, the Comintern's representative in the United States was involved in the selection of the students.<sup>291</sup> If this is the case, Arvo Halberg could have been selected to study in the Lenin School by Aino Kuusinen, the wife of the famous Finnish-born Communist Otto Wille Kuusinen. Aino Kuusinen served as the Comintern's representative in the United States from 1930 to 1933 under the alias "A. Morton". The main reason for Kuusinen's visit seems to have been reconciliation between the CPUSA and the Finnish Workers' Federation which had serious disagreements especially concerning the Finnish American co-operative

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286 Köstenberger 2007, 287. Klehr, Haynes and Firsov had earlier estimated that "hundreds" of American communists passed through the school during its operation. See Klehr, Haynes & Firsov 1995, 202.

287 Köstenberger 2007, 287. In comparison with other Nordic countries, Finland was by far the biggest source of Lenin School students. Swedish and Norwegian parties sent about 40-50 students to Moscow each and the Danish party sent 20-30 students to the school. The Icelandic party sent 10-15 students to the school.

288 Köstenberger 2007, 287. The CPs in such faraway countries like Argentina, Australia, Brazil and Cuba sent 10-15 students each to the Lenin School. The parties in large countries such as India, Japan and South Africa each sent less than ten students each to the school.

289 Cohen & Morgan 2002, 336. After Stalin's industrialization policy got under way in 1930, the student selection started preferring students with a background in heavy industry. For intellectuals, admission in to the school became even more difficult. According to Köstenberger, the proportion of "non-workers" (i.e. intellectuals, farmers and white-collar workers) was limited to 15 percent in 1932. See Krekola 2006, 123 and Köstenberger 2007, 295-296.

290 Studer 2015, 91.

291 Ahola 1981, 93 & 170. Unfortunately, Ahola does not produce any evidence to support his claim concerning Aino Kuusinen's role in the student selection.

business. In addition to that she among other things took actively part in reorganizing the Finnish American communist newspapers. In her memoirs Kuusinen does not mention taking part in the Lenin School student selection.<sup>292</sup>

Arvo Halberg was of course not the only Finnish American communist who deepened his or her understanding of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow's Lenin School. According to FBI's Lenin School FOIA Files, also Knut E. Heikkinen and Carl Paivio seem to have studied in Moscow. Paivio was a radical journalist who in 1919 was briefly imprisoned in New York for a violently revolutionary editorial he wrote for the Finnish American newspaper *Luokkataistelu* (Class Struggle).<sup>293</sup> FBI documents claim that Heikkinen studied at the Lenin School at the same time as Arvo Halberg in 1931-32 and after that worked for the Russian secret police the OGPU – the predecessor of the NKVD and the KGB – which took care of the purges among both Finns and American Finns who had moved to Soviet Union.<sup>294</sup> Jyrki Juusela names a fourth Finnish American Lenin School student in his study concerning Finns in the Spanish civil war. According to Juusela, Niilo Kruth from New York studied in Moscow some time before he joined the Republican troops in Spain. He was wounded in battle of Brunete in July 1937, and after returning to the United States he worked as an organizer for the Finnish Workers' Federation.<sup>295</sup>

According to David John Ahola – who for his study on Finnish American communism interviewed numerous veteran communists – “fewer than six” Finnish Americans studied in the Lenin School. Due to the confidentiality of his interviews, Ahola does not name these Finnish American students.<sup>296</sup> Such a number – maybe only about two percent of all American Lenin School students – is very low when compared to Finnish participation in the American communist party in the 1920s. The low figure can be, however, explained by the Karelian Fever. As thousands of Finnish American communists had already travelled

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292 See Kuusinen 1972, 104-139. Neither does Auvo Kostiainen mention Lenin School student selection in his study concerning Kuusinen's visit to the United States. According to Kostiainen, it is questionable whether Kuusinen indeed was the Comintern's actual representative in the United States. According to *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, Kuusinen traveled to the United States as an emissary of the Comintern. See Kostiainen 1975 and *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, 243.

293 Klehr, Haynes & Firsov 1995, 5-6. Paivio later became a prominent leftist political organizer and lecturer and the national secretary of the Finnish American Mutual Aid Society, the Finnish affiliate of the International Workers Order. Just like Knut E. Heikkinen, Paivio was arrested in New York in November 1949 by the officers of Immigration and Naturalization Service. The two men were charged with illegal entry. Paivio died in New York in 1952 at the age of 58 while deportation proceedings were pending against him. See *The New York Times*, November 22, 1949 and April 18, 1952.

294 Harvey Klehr Papers, Federal Bureau of Investigation FOIA Files, box 47, folder 4. Heikkinen later returned to the United States but was deported to Canada in the 1950s after a lengthy deportation process. Heikkinen, who was born in Finland in 1890, had immigrated to Canada in 1910 and had taken Canadian citizenship. In 1916 he moved to the United States where he, among other things, served as the editor-in-chief of *Työmies-Eteenpäin*, the Finnish American communist newspaper published in Superior, Wisconsin. For more on Heikkinen and his deportation, see Kostiainen 2014a, 279-280.

295 Juusela 2003, 271 & 433. Kruth was also known with first names Niels and Neils.

296 Ahola 1981, 93 & 130.



to the Soviet Union in order to build their dream society, the potential recruiting pool for Lenin School had diminished radically.

### 2.3.3. Revolutionaries in the Tower of Babel

Arvo Halberg traveled to the Soviet Union in the fall of 1931. He had obtained a U.S. passport under his own name in mid-August. He had applied for a passport a week earlier in order to “visit friends and relatives in England, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway”. Hall was a part of a group of 26 or 27 American Lenin School students who started their studies that fall. The group also included Leonard Patterson, a Young Communist League organizer from Philadelphia and William Odell Nowell, an African American CPUSA member from Detroit. Both of them later lost their belief in the communist cause and became witnesses for congressional committees investigating communist activities in the United States.<sup>297</sup> Both of them also named Gus Hall – then still Arvo Halberg – as their fellow student in the Lenin School.<sup>298</sup> Patterson even claims to have shared a room with Halberg in the Lenin School dormitory.<sup>299</sup> Also Steve Nelson, who later fought in the Spanish civil war and afterwards rose to leading positions in the CPUSA, started his studies in Lenin School in the fall of 1931. He, however, does not mention Gus Hall’s Lenin School studies in his memoirs.<sup>300</sup> The reason for such silence may be in the “code of silence” which was expected of all communists who had engaged in “special work”.<sup>301</sup>

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297 It is possible that Patterson and Nowell were FBI’s informants already when they were in Moscow. According to Harvey Klehr’s FOIA files, there were two FBI informants among the students who started in Lenin School in the fall of 1931. According to Thomas Sakmyster, there were also two other African American future government witnesses among the students who started their Lenin School studies in 1931: George Hewitt and Charles H. White. Hewitt, Nowell and White all served as witnesses in the deportation trial of J. Peters in 1948. Peters had been the CPUSA’s representative in the Comintern in the beginning of the 1930s. See Harvey Klehr Papers, Federal Bureau of Investigation FOIA Files, box 47, folder 4 and Sakmyster 2011, 153.

298 Nowell did not mention Hall in his testimony which he gave before a congressional committee on un-American activities in 1939, but named Hall as a Lenin School student when testifying in the first Smith Act trial on April 13, 1949. See Harvey Klehr Papers, Federal Bureau of Investigation FOIA Files, box 47, folder 4.

299 *Communist Leadership*, 39.

300 See Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 125-152. Nelson identifies only two of his course mates, Alabama sharecropper Mack Coad and Bill Lawrence from Philadelphia. Just like Nelson, both of them later fought in the Spanish civil war. Afterwards Coad became an organizer among the Southern sharecroppers. Gus Hall is conspicuously absent – mentioned only once – in Nelson’s autobiography, considering the fact that he was one of the leading figures in the CPUSA after WWII.

301 Sakmyster 2011, xvii & 178. Sakmyster also calls this code of silence “the discipline of the apparatus”, according to which “communists who had engaged in or had knowledge of the Party’s secret or underground activity were required to observe a code of silence and denial”. This may be one of the reasons why Nelson does not discuss his own espionage-related activities in his autobiography. For more on these activities see, for example, Haynes & Klehr 1999, 229-233 & 325-328; Sibley 2004, 136-149 & 211-215 and Haynes, Klehr & Vassiliev 2009, 40, 84-85, 121-122 & 537-538.

According to Steve Nelson, the class on 1931 consisted of workers and union activists: for example, a steelworker from Youngstown, a shipyard worker from Baltimore and several women from textile factories in Cleveland and New York. Almost half of the students were African Americans as the CPUSA was especially concerned with advancing African Americans to party leadership. As the African Americans were still a new group within the party, some of the Lenin School students were rather inexperienced.<sup>302</sup>

Because of the high confidentiality of the school's operation, the students had to go through certain safety measures when traveling to Moscow. They could reveal the true nature of their trip only to their closest family members, while to others explain their travel with a cover story. According to Leonard Patterson and Morris Childs, the students also had a serial number and their name typed on a little piece of cloth and sewed in the collars of their overcoats.<sup>303</sup> With such a measure the Comintern apparently could make sure that all students coming to Moscow were indeed the genuine ones.

In order to conceal the existence of the student group, the students were not allowed to be in touch with each other during the two-week journey to Moscow. According to Steve Nelson, this was not easy. As he and his fellow students were crossing the Atlantic, one evening an African American male student wanted to dance with a white female student. The male student was criticized for breaking the secrecy rules. This incident raised a quarrel within the group as the African American members of the group accused others of "white chauvinism". The controversy continued in Moscow, where the Comintern had to step in and settle the matter.<sup>304</sup> The class of 1931 indeed seems to have been a troubled bunch, because according to FBI's files four students had to be sent home before ending the course.<sup>305</sup>

There is no information on Arvo Halberg's exact itinerary to Moscow, but a group including William Odell Nowell left New York in late August and sailed to Leningrad via London. The group including Steve Nelson stopped also in Hamburg, where they could observe the atmosphere in Germany shortly before Hitler's rise to power. According to Nelson, the city felt like a madhouse with squads of Nazis roaming around in paramilitary dress and

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302 Nelson, Barrett & Ruck, 125-126.

303 Harvey Klehr Papers, Federal Bureau of Investigation FOIA Files, box 47, folder 4; *Communist Leadership*, 38 and Barron 1995, 21. Also the British Lenin School students had to undergo this kind of security precaution. See McLroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 107.

304 Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 126-127. The person responsible for settling the matter was Hungarian American communist Joe Peter who in the spring of 1932 served as the CPUSA's representative in the Comintern. Better known as J. Peters, he later had a central role in CPUSA's underground organization. In the spring of 1932 Peter organized a series of meetings for all American students of the Lenin School and "leading comrades of the Comintern" to discuss the matter. As a result, the Anglo-American secretariat of the Comintern presented a resolution that demanded the "liquidation of all divergencies" among the students. When some of the black students remained recalcitrant, the Comintern officials criticized them for being "insufficiently armed against the influence of Negro bourgeois nationalism". See Sakmyster 2011, 34.

305 Harvey Klehr Papers, Federal Bureau of Investigation FOIA Files, box 47, folder 4. The racial relations seem to have been a recurring problem among the American students in the early 1930s. The "negro question" in the American group was also discussed among the Finnish students of the Lenin School. See Krekola 2006, 146-147.

shouting openly racist taunts to Nelson's African American course mate Mack Coad.<sup>306</sup> Arvo Halberg may well have been part of this group, as he later remembered having very similar experiences of Germany in 1931. When he visited German Democratic Republic 35 years later, he told that in 1931 he spent two days in jail after making a public speech against the rising threat of fascism and Hitler.<sup>307</sup>

In Leningrad, the group had time for a hurried excursion through the city, which made Steve Nelson feel like "walking through the pages of John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*". From Leningrad the group, which was led by future Smith Act defendant Irving Potash<sup>308</sup>, took the train to Moscow. During their first day in Moscow the students enrolled in the Lenin School and visited the Comintern headquarters where they met Clarence Hathaway, the CPUSA's representative in the Comintern and Otto Wille Kuusinen, the secretary of the Comintern's executive committee. Soon after their arrival, the group embarked on a one-month tour of the Soviet Union, studying the country's industry, agriculture and political system.<sup>309</sup>

The American group was just a small part of a larger whole at the Lenin School. According to Julia Köstenberger, the school had 633 students in February 1932.<sup>310</sup> The number of students had grown rapidly, because in its very beginning in 1926 the school had only 70 students.<sup>311</sup> The students were divided into language sections. According to Steve Nelson, the school had German, English, French, Italian, Spanish and Russian language sections during his studies.<sup>312</sup> Over the years the number of language sections grew, because in 1936 the Lenin School hosted 20 language sections.<sup>313</sup>

The students of the English section came from all over the world, so "American seamen rubbed elbows with Irish revolutionaries, British ex-army men and South African Zulus",

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306 Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 127.

307 *Daily Worker*, Sept 20, 1966. Hall mentioned his 1931 visit to Germany as he spoke to 2 500 steelworkers in the steel industry town Eisenhüttenstadt: "My last visit to Germany was in 1931 and the picture of your country is in sharp contrast to the Germany of that time,' he told the factory workers. 'At that time I spent two days in jail because I made a speech against the rising threat of fascism and Hitler. Then Germany was on the road to war and disaster. Today, you are building a new city and a socialist country in the new epoch, for the advancement of all mankind and a bright future.'" In another newspaper story Hall mentioned that he had problems with the law enforcement in Hamburg in 1932. According to Hall, "in 1932 the Hitler-minded public prosecutor of Hamburg, Germany had me arrested and hauled me into court because of my modest activity in the attempt to stem the march of fascism in Germany". It is uncertain whether these are two separate incidents or whether Hall confused the years 1931 and 1932. Unfortunately, Hall gives us no further information on these interesting incidents. See *People's World*, Nov 26, 1951.

308 According the FBI's files, Potash had studied in the Lenin School in 1930-31. He later was Gus Hall's co-defendant in the Smith Act trial of 1948-49. See Harvey Klehr Papers, Federal Bureau of Investigation FOIA Files, box 47, folder 4.

309 This information is included in William Odell Nowell's testimony in the first Smith Act trial on April 13, 1949. See Harvey Klehr Papers, Federal Bureau of Investigation FOIA Files, box 47, folder 4.

310 According to Brigitte Studer, the Lenin School had 660 students during the study year 1931-32. See Studer 2015, 91.

311 Köstenberger 2007, 290. In 1928 the school had had about 200 students.

312 Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 127.

313 Studer 2015, 92.

as Al Lannon's – who studied in the school in the mid-1930s – biographer puts it.<sup>314</sup> Students who could not manage in any of the above-mentioned languages studied in the Russian section. The lectures were interpreted simultaneously in different languages, but the interpreters were not always of top quality. The Lenin School staff was very proud of its six-language simultaneous interpreting system, claiming that only the League of Nations had something similar.<sup>315</sup> Also the meetings of different nationality groups were interpreted, but were still difficult to follow. According to Steve Nelson, “with all the different languages going on at the same time, it was like meeting in a Tower of Babel”.<sup>316</sup>

The school was located in a handsome 19<sup>th</sup> century villa in the Arbat district in central Moscow. The villa was situated near several foreign embassies, which was considered risky for the operation of a clandestine training facility. According to the anticommunist memoirs of Benjamin Gitlow, the building was one of Moscow's most modernized buildings with its heating system and hot and cold showers. Gitlow has a tendency to exaggerate things, but considering the poor housing situation in Moscow in the 1920s and 1930s and the willingness of the Soviets to show the best sides of their society to their foreign guests, Gitlow's observations may not be so far from the truth.<sup>317</sup>

The director's post in the Lenin School changed according to political winds. The Comintern's chairman Nikolai Bukharin – who was soon to become a new target for Stalin after he had disposed of Zinoviev and Kamenev – served as the first director of the school. After Bukharin was also ousted in 1929, the vice-headmaster Klavdia Kirsanova became the new director. She had already been running the school in practice as Bukharin – one of the top leaders of the Soviet Union – was busy with his other obligations. Kirsanova – born in 1888 – was a veteran revolutionary who had joined the party already in 1904.<sup>318</sup>

Kirsanova's directorship did not, however, proceed without adversities. She was removed from her position in 1932 as a part of the turbulence that followed Stalin's famous October 1931 letter to the editors of magazine *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya* on *Some Questions Concerning the History of Bolshevism*. The letter was a reaction to an article by historian A. G. Slutsky, whose study questioned some prevailing notions of Lenin's thinking twenty

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314 Lannon 1999, 48. According to Studer, the English-language section was divided in two parts in 1933. British, Irish, Australian, New Zealander and South African students formed one group and U.S. and Canadian students another. All together almost 500 English-speaking communists studied in the Lenin School over the years. About 90 of these came from the United States, Britain and Canada.

315 Harvey Klehr Papers, Federal Bureau of Investigation FOIA Files, box 47, folder 4.

316 Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 129.

317 Gitlow 1948, 242. Gitlow, CPUSA leader who in 1929 was expelled from the Party together with Jay Lovestone and who in the 1930s turned to strict anticommunism, writes in length about Lenin School in his book *The Whole of Their Lives*. He did not, however, study in the school personally.

318 *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, 216-217 and Krekola 2006, 95. Kirsanova made a strong impression on American visitors although some of them had difficulties spelling her name. According to Steve Nelson, “Krisanova” was a “dynamic Russian historian”. Harry Haywood saw “Kursanova” as “handsome, energetic woman” whereas Benjamin Gitlow considered her a “plump, ruddy-complexioned woman who made up for what she lacked in feminine charms by her political acumen and authority”. See Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 128; Haywood 1978, 202 and Gitlow 1948, 243.

years earlier. In his letter, Stalin sharply instructed Soviet historians not to question the existing understanding of party history. Stalin's letter was closely connected to Kirsanova because her husband Yemelyan Yaroslavsky was a specialist on party historiography and responsible for the training of historians.<sup>319</sup>

Stalin's letter caused a massive upheaval among Soviet intelligentsia. Remnants of social democratic thinking had to be weeded out from all instances, including the Lenin School. A resolute purge was carried out in the school in 1931-32, just when Arvo Halberg was studying in Moscow. Several teachers were removed, learning materials were renewed and the control of students' orthodoxy was tightened. The purge seriously hampered the functioning of the school as many of the best teachers had to leave the institution. Kirsanova – who was accused of “liberalism” – was replaced by Wilhelm Pieck who later in 1949 became internationally known as the first president of German Democratic Republic.<sup>320</sup>

Although Kirsanova returned to lead the Lenin School in 1933, the purge of 1931-32 became a watershed in the school's short history. The school – which by no means had been a nest for critical and independent thinking – became an even more controlled and orthodox institution, highly sensitive to Stalin's ideological signals.<sup>321</sup>

#### **2.3.4. Lots of theory, but little practice**

The curriculum of the Lenin School was heavy, filled with highly theoretical and abstract subjects which surely were not easy to grasp for some of the American students who came from very humble origins. During the first year of their studies, the students learned political economy, the history and structure of the CPSU, the history of labor movement, Leninism and Russian language. In political economy classes Marx's *Capital* was studied closely, as were the most important works of Lenin. Leninism and the history of the CPSU were, however, the most central study topics. In these classes the students were taught the correct Bolshevik understanding of revolutionary communism.<sup>322</sup>

During the second study year the students continued studying the above-mentioned subjects more profoundly. In addition to them, they now also learned about imperialism and the world economy, the Soviet economy, historical materialism and the development of the labor movement in different countries. The CPSU's role was emphasized throughout the studies, as it was the model after which the national parties were to be developed.<sup>323</sup>

In addition to above-mentioned theoretical subjects, the students were also taught practical skills needed in starting and implementing a revolution. Some writers have had a tendency

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319 Krekola 2006, 217-229; McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 108-109.

320 Krekola 2006, 217-229; McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 108-109.

321 Krekola 2006, 217-229; McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 108-109.

322 Krekola 2006, 100-101.

323 Krekola 2006, 101. Studer summarizes the Lenin School curriculum as follows: “Students were to acquire a smattering of political economy and Marxist-Leninist ideology, but above all they had to learn about Party organization and the history of the Soviet Party, of the Comintern and of their own party and also about the realities of the Soviet Union.” See Studer 2015, 92-93.

to present the International Lenin School primarily as a school of terrorism and sabotage<sup>324</sup>, but in reality the amount of military teaching was rather limited.<sup>325</sup> There is no information on how much the American students learned practical revolutionary skills. The exact number of lessons dedicated to military training very likely varied over time and from one nationality group to another, but for example in the curriculum of Lenin School's Finnish students during the study year 1930-31, only about ten percent of lessons dealt with practical revolutionary skills. The students learned "organizational work" – i.e. military and practical revolutionary skills – for 128 lessons, whereas for example political economy was studied during 274 lessons and CPSU's history and Leninism during 204 lessons.<sup>326</sup>

According to Joni Krekola's study of the Lenin School, the students were taught during their "organizational work" lessons a wide variety of revolutionary skills ranging from topography and tactics to urban and guerilla warfare.<sup>327</sup> The students learned shooting with different kinds of firearms, ranging from revolvers to machine guns.<sup>328</sup> In addition to this, the students studied skills needed in running a clandestine organization: underground printing, code words and languages and other conspiratorial capabilities.<sup>329</sup>

William Odell Nowell's testimony concerning the military training of the class of 1931 is quite consistent with Krekola's findings. According to Nowell, Arvo Halberg and his course mates were taught street fighting and seizing control of a city, its communication networks and utilities. The students learned how to dismantle and reassemble guns from different countries, how to erect barricades and how to derail trains and destroy their cargo. They were taught how to close down factories by sabotaging them. The aim of all training was revolutionary uprising: the students were taught "how to develop a general strike out of a

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324 See, for example, Gitlow 1948, 246-249; Hoover 1958, 60 and Barron 1995, 22. Probably the most extreme example of this attitude is the curriculum of the "Lenin University" which the former Lenin School student Joseph Z. Kornfeder presented to the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1944. According to Kornfeder's curriculum, the school prepared students primarily for armed insurrection and violent takeover of United States government. Kornfeder's curriculum is included in *Communist Leadership*, 6-9.

325 According Ahola and Schrecker, Lenin School's reputation as a school for saboteurs and violent revolutionaries can be explained by the anti-communist atmosphere in the United States. Ahola writes: "The House Un-American Activities Committee and the Senate Committee on the Judiciary published at different times what was purported to have been the curriculum of the Lenin School. One must approach this information with caution, however, since it was published during a strongly anti-communist era and appears to be selective and one-sided. The curriculum as published gives the erroneous impression that the primary focus of the school was on military subjects like preparation for armed insurrection and sabotage." See Ahola 1981, 94 and Schrecker 1998, 136.

326 Krekola 2006, 133. Also according to David John Ahola, "most of the course material taught at the Lenin School was of a non-military nature". See Ahola 1981, 94-96.

327 Krekola 2006, 141-142.

328 The Finnish students practiced pistol shooting couple of times a month and few times they shot with military rifles. According to one student, the results of the shooting practices were "crappy". See Krekola 2006, 142.

329 Krekola 2006, 141-142. According to Gitlow, the students were also taught riding horses and organizing and training cavalry units. In addition to this, Gitlow claims, the students learned how to drive a locomotive. In light of research concerning Lenin School, these claims seem somewhat exaggerated. See Gitlow 1948, 247.

local strike, how to develop a general strike into a city uprising and how to develop a city uprising into a national uprising”<sup>330</sup>

The forms of military training seem to have changed over years. According to Brigitte Studer, the students received military-type training when taking part in the exercises of Osoaviakhim, a paramilitary civil defense organization.<sup>331</sup> According to a Comintern document, the American students in 1936 received a two weeks training at a military camp where they wore Red Army uniforms and studied among other things military tactics and jiu-jitsu rifle practice. According to the document, the CPUSA’s representative in the Comintern wanted to abolish this part of Lenin School curriculum. He was worried about possible negative publicity in the United States if it leaked out that American communists receive military training in Red Army uniforms in the Soviet Union. Such a leak would have contradicted severely with the CPUSA’s new Popular Front strategy, which emphasized the Americanness of the party.<sup>332</sup>

In addition to their routine classes, the students were regularly addressed by Comintern leaders on contemporary issues.<sup>333</sup> The students could also attend the meetings and lectures of the very top leaders of the communist movement. Arvo Halberg’s class of 1931, for example, attended the 12<sup>th</sup> plenum of the executive committee of Comintern in August and September 1932. The meeting was arranged in the Lenin School’s auditorium which was equipped with the above-mentioned state-of-the-art system for simultaneous interpreting. During the plenum, the students could follow speeches of top Comintern leaders such as Otto Wille Kuusinen and Osip Piatnitsky and visiting international party leaders like Germany’s Ernst Thälmann, Britain’s Harry Pollitt and United States’ Earl Browder. In addition to this, Halberg and his classmates attended the plenum of the Red International of Labor Unions, where they could follow the speech of RILU’s general secretary Solomon Lozovsky.<sup>334</sup>

In the early summer of 1932 Halberg and other American students attended sessions of the American commission of the Comintern. The sessions consisted largely of Comintern – and its executive secretary Otto Wille Kuusinen – telling the CPUSA representatives how to readjust their policies. In the spirit of Stalin’s policies emphasizing industrialization, the American party was told to concentrate its activities upon five major industrial districts in New York, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Ohio and Illinois. In the trade union sector the party was ordered to concentrate on two main key industries, steel and coal. The party should also speed up its policy of establishing a Soviet Negro Republic in the Southern states of the United States.<sup>335</sup> Kuusinen criticized Earl Browder – who was present at the sessions – of

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330 *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities*, 7021 & 7025-26. Nowell’s testimony does not say how much the students spent time studying military issues.

331 Studer 2015, 93.

332 The document is published in Klehr, Haynes & Firsov 1995, 203-204.

333 McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 108.

334 *Communist Leadership*, 41-42. Joseph Z. Kornfeder claims in his curriculum of the “Lenin University” that Kuusinen, Piatnitsky and Lozovsky as well as Stalin’s trustee Vyacheslav Molotov were actual teachers in the Lenin School, but this seems not to have been the case. See *Communist Leadership*, 9.

335 The idea of founding an independent Negro republic in the southern United States was deeply problematic for the CPUSA. As the idea’s father was none else than Joseph Stalin, the

not carrying out the previous directives of the Comintern. According to Kuusinen, the American communists seemed to have thrown the Comintern instructions out of ship's porthole into the ocean while crossing the Atlantic. Browder accepted the criticism and pledged to carry out the directives in the nearest future.<sup>336</sup>

The Lenin School's experimental pedagogics emphasized self-study and students' presentations. The studying was done in study circles of 10-15 students, which were further divided into "brigades" of five students.<sup>337</sup> There were no examinations and no grades given, but at the end of the term there would be evaluation sessions during which students and teachers would discuss each other's work as "a process of comradesly criticism and self-criticism".<sup>338</sup>

Although there were no examinations, at least some students – like for example Steve Nelson – felt that the reading load was "almost impossible".<sup>339</sup> Nelson was not the only one complaining about the heavy curriculum. Already in 1927 the students had complained about the six-day workweek and 11½-hours workdays. Stern vice-headmaster Kirsanova, however, did not yield to the demands of the students.<sup>340</sup>

According to Studer, the curriculum was made a bit lighter in the early 1930s:

The timetable was heavy (up to ten hours teaching a day in the beginning, eight in 1931 and seven from 1933), and there were many complaints about overload, all the more as the course also required much homework, 'self-directed learning' being one of the pedagogical methods adopted. In addition, students had to participate actively in the union and the party and engage in 'societal work', that is to take on collective tasks such as publishing of a wall newspaper.<sup>341</sup>

In addition to weighty workload, the students complained about the teachers' limited English skills and their ignorance of the history and economy of the students' home countries. The teachers could discuss issues in length on an abstract theoretical level, but references to existing reality in students' home countries were scarce.<sup>342</sup> In order to overcome this problem, the Lenin School supplemented its Moscow-based teachers with some American instructors who were more familiar with the American conditions.<sup>343</sup> During Arvo Halberg's studies in the Lenin School, at least William Weinstone and Jacob

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Comintern strongly pressured the CPUSA in the matter. Within the CPUSA very few people supported the idea. Its most prominent advocate was Lenin School graduate Harry Haywood, whose ideological rigidity was criticized by Earl Browder. See Klehr 1984, 324-327.

336 *Communist Leadership*, 42-43.

337 Krekola 2006, 100.

338 Haywood 1978, 207.

339 Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 129.

340 Krekola 2006, 101. In 1931 the students complained of the grand amount of meetings they had to attend. No less than 40 percent of students' time was spent in meetings. See Krekola 2006, 127.

341 Studer 2015, 93.

342 McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 111.

343 According to John David Ahola, the curriculum of American students was adapted to American conditions so the students were also taught the history of CPUSA. In addition to that the students studied the Comintern-supported idea of founding a "Negro state" on the "Black belt" of the southern United States. See Ahola 1981, 95.



“Pop” Mindel – both well-known for their profound knowledge of Marxism-Leninism – seem to have been teaching in Moscow.<sup>344</sup>

Not only were the Lenin School students complaining, but also some communist parties in the students’ home countries were unhappy with the results of the schooling. The British, for example, complained from the very beginning about the “exorbitant” emphasis on theory in the school curriculum. The teaching was too abstract, too Russian and too unrelated to problems at home.<sup>345</sup> The curriculum did not match up with the situations and challenges the organizers and agitators were experiencing in their everyday work. As one leading New Zealand communist put it, the returning Lenin School graduates were “strangers in their own lands.”<sup>346</sup>

Also the American party leadership considered the Lenin School graduates too ideologically rigid. Especially Earl Browder, the CPUSA’s 1930s leader who vigorously tried to Americanize the party, saw this as a problem. Browder’s preferences became apparent as the party chose vice-presidential candidate for William Z. Foster for the 1932 presidential election. Lenin School graduate Harry Haywood was not chosen – partly because of his ideological rigidity – but instead another African American, James W. Ford, was selected.<sup>347</sup>

The discipline in the school was strict. Cases of absenteeism, neglect of work and drunkenness were dealt with harshly and sometimes students were sent back home. Such behavior was usually interpreted as a sign of liberalism, individualism and petty bourgeois mentality. Naturally also the ideological purity of the students was observed closely in order to weed out all remnants of petty bourgeois reformism and social democratic thinking. Some British students of the school were sickened by the continuous “deviation hunting”, comparing it to inquisition and witch hunts.<sup>348</sup>

In addition to theoretical and practical studies the students sometimes on Saturdays participated in voluntary labor sessions. Steve Nelson and his course mates, for example, helped to lay foundations for the University of Moscow whereas Al Lannon and his colleagues helped build a portion of Moscow’s formidable subway system, a well-known showpiece of Stalinist architecture.<sup>349</sup> During their summer breaks the students were assigned to do practical work somewhere in the vicinity of Moscow, studying Soviet manufacturing, agriculture, administration or the Red Army.<sup>350</sup>

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344 Harvey Klehr Papers, Federal Bureau of Investigation FOIA Files, box 47, folder 4. Also J. Peters, a shadowy figure directing CPUSA’s underground work, seems to have been present at the Lenin School in 1931-32, but it is not clear whether he taught there. See Klehr 1984, 160-161 & 440.

345 McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 106-107.

346 Cohen & Morgan 2002, 349.

347 Klehr 1984, 330. Haywood was known as a staunch proponent of self-determination of African Americans in the Black Belt of the southern states. He argued for this aim still in the 1950s even after the Party had dropped the issue. His rigid stance was one of the main reasons for his expulsion from the Party.

348 Cohen & Morgan 2002, 334-335 and McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 108-112.

349 Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 129 and Lannon 1999, 48.

350 Gitlow 1948, 243-244; Haywood 1978, 212-213; Lannon 1999, 49 and Studer 2015, 93.

The school provided the students meals, accommodation and monthly stipend for other expenses. The students lived in dormitories with four to eight beds in a room. The food offered by the school canteen was simple – mostly potatoes, cabbage, fish and black bread – but since it was free of charge, at least Steve Nelson was satisfied.<sup>351</sup> In addition to physical nourishment, the students could on their limited free time enjoy Moscow’s cultural scene, its theaters, operas, concert halls and cinemas. Steve Nelson, for example, saw his first Shakespeare play in a Yiddish theater in Moscow, translated by a Yiddish-speaking comrade from New York.<sup>352</sup>

In addition to making its students staunch Bolsheviks, the Lenin School also aimed at cultivating them. Brigitte Studer writes:

The ‘cultivated’ communist had good manners, treated women with respect, went to the theatre and visited museums. The Lenin School had a department of *kul’trabota*, ‘cultural work’, responsible for the organization of weekly film screenings, museum visits and political discussions. Choirs, too, were established, corresponding to the school’s linguistic or national sections. [...] For students who were workers by origin, who had none of the relevant cultural capital to start with, evenings at the theatre could sometimes be tedious, if not incomprehensible, as the performances were given in Russian, a language they hardly knew.<sup>353</sup>

Holiday trips during the training back to student’s home country were not allowed and postal contact was allowed only through official Lenin School channels.<sup>354</sup> Family members were also not welcome to Moscow but students with family received extra money to help feed their loved ones in their home lands.<sup>355</sup> Sometimes, however, exceptions were made, as was the case with Steve Nelson, whose wife Margaret came to Moscow to work for the Comintern.<sup>356</sup> By the early 1930s costs of the school had become too high and there was pressure to save in lighting and heating expenses. Also the students’ monthly stipend seems to have decreased over the years. If it was 50 rubles in the 1920s, in the early 1930s the stipend was only 30-40 rubles a month.<sup>357</sup>

### 2.3.5. Clandestine operations

The Lenin School students were not supposed to use their own names in the school but for security reasons they were called by code names. By using *noms de guerre* the Comintern wanted to prevent the damage done by possible government informers among the students. According to Hall’s course mate Leonard Patterson, Hall’s code name was “Malone”. The

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351 Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 129-130. According to Benjamin Gitlow, the students’ living quarters were excellent with its plentiful and good food and free laundry service. See Gitlow 1948, 242.

352 Gitlow 1948, 242 and Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 131.

353 Studer 2015, 98.

354 McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 108.

355 Krekola 2006, 102 & 123. According to Benjamin Gitlow, American students received \$50 a month for the support of their wives and \$25 additional for each child. See Gitlow 1948, 242.

356 Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 130.

357 Gitlow 1948, 242 and Krekola 2006, 127.

Irish-sounding code name was more matter-of-fact than some others, as also “George Washington”, “Abraham Lincoln” and “J. P. Morgan” were also attending the Lenin School.<sup>358</sup> The students conformed to this security measure only halfheartedly. According to one British student, students’ real names were also commonly used which caused confusion in the school. The students did not follow the example of Lenin and Stalin in using their *noms de guerre* for the rest of their lives, but the code names were invariably dropped on returning from the school.<sup>359</sup>

Upon entering the school, the students joined the CPSU for the duration of their course.<sup>360</sup> During the first years of the school, the students could mix relatively freely with Russians. As Stalin’s rule tightened its grip, however, the students were told to regulate their contacts with local citizens, since the enemy was considered to be everywhere. If such contact was necessary, the students should reveal nothing about themselves or about the school. If some contact was excessively curious about the school, he or she had to be reported to the school officials.<sup>361</sup>

Although the secretive nature of the Lenin School was emphasized by the teachers, following these dictates was not easy for the students. According to Studer, “the first thing that foreign students at the cadre schools had to learn was the rules of conspiracy”, but following them was a challenge for many:

The rules of *konspiraciia* were the operating key to the all-embracing and ubiquitous principle of secrecy that governed Bolshevik organizations. From this it followed that any information about the party or Comintern matters had to be hermetically sealed off from the “outside”. This wasn’t easy for the Western students, more especially the young ones, not only because they were not accustomed to it in their own parties, but also because neither at home or in Moscow were they allowed to say anything about where they lived or what they did, not even so much as hint at it. Criticisms and self-criticisms at the cadre school were thus riddled with reproaches against such “failings”, as the documents testify.<sup>362</sup>

Tight security measures were not wholly groundless, since the Lenin School served as a handy recruiting ground for the Comintern’s undercover operations. American students were especially sought-after since American passports raised few questions at the borders of 1930s Europe.<sup>363</sup> A significant part of American students carried out some kind of

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358 *Communist Leadership*, 38. Also British students chose their names after ideological role models, as “Bernard Shaw” and “Mary Shelley” were also attending the school. See Cohen & Morgan 2002, 332.

359 Cohen & Morgan 2002, 332.

360 Gitlow 1948, 243; *Communist Leadership*, 39 and Cohen & Morgan 2002, 331.

361 McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 108.

362 Studer 2015, 35-36. According to Studer, “the propensity to secrecy was pronounced in the Communist parties – and especially in the Bolshevik party, which had operated in illegality – which had frequently been subjected to repressive measures”.

363 According to Thomas Sakmyster, “bearers of American passports were usually treated with certain amount of respect and cordiality by border officials throughout the world”. This is also a reason why many Comintern agents traveled around with false, Comintern-manufactured American passport. Sakmyster writes: “Given the great diversity of American society and the presence of large numbers of recently arrived immigrants, almost any individual, regardless of his or her racial or ethnic background, could plausibly pose as an American citizen. Likewise, the fact that a bearer of an American passport spoke with an accent or lacked fluency in English did not

undercover mission for the Comintern after their Moscow studies. Al Lannon, for example, smuggled propaganda material across the border to Poland in a false-bottom suitcase, pretending to be an American businessman.<sup>364</sup> Steve Nelson and Peggy Dennis were both employed by the Comintern for similar purposes.<sup>365</sup> Steve Nelson writes:

During the latter part of my stay, I received a message that Dr. Karlov from the English Commission of the Comintern wanted to see me. This didn't surprise me very much. The Comintern at that time was trying to help the European parties, forced underground by the rise of fascism, get back on their feet as well as service the needs of growing national liberation movements in Asia and Africa. Every now and then some person would disappear from school for a few weeks, and it wasn't hard to figure out what he or she had been doing. This time it was me.

Once I was seated across from Karlov in his office at the Comintern, he came right to the point. "The Nazi rise to power in Germany has forced the German Party to re-establish itself on an underground basis. We cannot continue to communicate with them through the usual channels, so we have to have people go there to deliver and bring back information. We would like to have you go. Someone with an American passport would be less likely to arouse suspicion."

I really didn't have to give it much consideration. If the Comintern wanted me for the job, I would do it. To carry on the fight against fascism, I was prepared to go to any length.<sup>366</sup>

Steve Nelson made Comintern trips to Germany and Switzerland whereas Peggy Dennis travelled widely all around Europe visiting Athens, Berlin, London and Stockholm. The Comintern chiefs seemed to have been satisfied with Nelson's and Dennis's performances since they were subsequently assigned to carry out much wider operations in Asia. They both travelled to Shanghai as Comintern agents in order to support the struggling Chinese communists who were soon compelled to start their famous Long March up north in order to flee from Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist troops.<sup>367</sup>

Was Arvo Halberg assigned to a clandestine Comintern mission during his Lenin School year? As he never shed any light on the details of his study year, it is impossible to be completely certain, but it is highly possible that also he was utilized for such a purpose. Looking at the reminiscences of Al Lannon, Steve Nelson and Peggy Dennis, it indeed seems that a large part of Caucasian American students served as Comintern agents during their study year.<sup>368</sup>

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normally raise undue suspicions of border agents." See Sakmyster 2011, 66.

364 Lannon 1999, 49.

365 Jack Childs was also recruited by the Comintern for similar purposes as he was being trained in radio communications in Moscow in the early 1930s. He made two trips from Moscow to Berlin delivering money for German communists. Childs was used for such a purpose as "the bearer of a U.S. passport could travel anywhere". See Barron 1995, 25-28.

366 Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 136.

367 From Shanghai Nelson returned to the United States but Dennis went back to Moscow and carried out several more Comintern missions. See Dennis 1977, 74-87 and Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 136-149.

368 The African American Lenin School students Harry Haywood, William Odell Nowell and Leonard Patterson never mention taking part in clandestine Comintern operations. This is not surprising as an African American person would certainly have attracted attention in most European cities in the 1930s.

In a 1934 trial in Minneapolis Arvo Halberg was inquired about his trip to Europe that had taken place shortly before the trial. When answering the question, Halberg said that he had spent most of the almost two-year trip in the Soviet Union but had visited also England, Germany, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.<sup>369</sup> Halberg is likely to have visited England, Germany and perhaps also Poland when travelling to or from the Soviet Union. But in what role did he visit Lithuania and Latvia? Did he do it as a Comintern agent? This we cannot know for sure, but it is possible. Both countries had officially banned communist parties, which therefore had to operate in secrecy and were to a large extent dependent on Comintern support.

### 2.3.6. Ideological turning-point

The Lenin School experiences of American students vary greatly. Harry Haywood, the first African American student of the school, praised the content of the curriculum. According to him, the classes were “exciting and challenging” and the students “sharp and on a high political level”. Haywood – a student in the school from 1927 to 1930 – praises especially the classes of historical and dialectical materialism and Leninism and history of the CPSU. The historical and dialectical materialism classes gave Haywood a new perspective to history and such historical events like the French and American revolutions and the American civil war.<sup>370</sup>

Not all students were happy with the curriculum. Peggy Dennis, wife of CPUSA leader Eugene Dennis, started the school in the fall of 1932, one year after Arvo Halberg:

A prestigious institute with high potential, the International Lenin School had inherent weaknesses which no one in the Comintern or the Parties sending the students recognized at the time. Separated from our home base, living in foreign land whose language we did not speak and whose people we did not meet, insulated in the school compound where we were housed, fed, clothed, we studied the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin with professors who communicated through translators. Our academic point of reference was always the Russian Bolshevik Party and the Russian Revolution. Lenin’s mercurial polemics over momentary tactics of a specific period were taught us as irrevocable universal dogma. We eloquently echoed Stalin’s published denunciations of Bukharinism and Trotskyism without even objecting to the fact that we were not allowed to read what Bukharin or Trotsky had said or written. On practical work tours to factories and villages, our glimpses of Soviet life were filtered through speeches made by the Party and economic personnel, never by direct contact and conversation with ordinary Soviet citizens.<sup>371</sup>

For some students, the months in Moscow and in the harsh reality of the young socialist state became a turning point in their ideological development. One such student was Morris Childs who was shocked to see on Moscow’s streets “swarms of gaunt men with

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369 *Communist Leadership*, 19.

370 Haywood 1978, 207-209. Haywood does not mention any kind of military or practical revolutionary training in his memoirs.

371 Dennis 1977, 70.

outstretched hands begging for bread or a few kopecks”. Upon learning that these men were former officers of the tsar’s army and orthodox priests who were prohibited from working, denied ration cards and forbidden to enrol their children in school, Childs remembers questioning the sanity of the Soviet system. According to Childs, this realization was a first step in a development that led to him becoming an FBI undercover agent in the early 1950s.<sup>372</sup> Also for Leonard Patterson, Arvo Halberg’s African American classmate who in 1960 testified before the congressional internal security subcommittee, the visit in the Soviet Union became an experience that undermined his belief in communism. During his visit of almost two years, Patterson travelled widely in the socialist country and noticed that even the discriminated African Americans in the U.S. were better off than the Great Russians – the privileged majority nationality – in the Soviet Union.<sup>373</sup>

For William Odell Nowell – another African American classmate of Arvo Halberg who also later became a government witness – his visit to the Lenin School turned into an eye-opener. According to Nowell, the students had been led to believe that the Communist Party and the Comintern were democratic. The months in Moscow showed that such a belief was an illusion. The top leadership was immaculate and almost divine, standing above everybody else and exploiting the naivety of their subordinates. There was no democracy in the communist system but rather it was a “ruthless dictatorship of a little clique of people”.<sup>374</sup> The Comintern tested the future leaders in a rough manner, wanting to weed out individuals who posed unnecessary questions:

If you showed any independence of thought, any individuality or any individualism, it was a bad sign. You must conform absolutely, be a good stooge and just refuse to think and accept without a question.<sup>375</sup>

The American Lenin School students were not the only ones whose belief in communism was put to the test during their stay in the 1930s Soviet Union. According to Julia Köstenberger, “again and again, the foreign communists were doubtful about the construction of the new order due to the difficult material situation in the USSR”. “Problems were explained to Lenin School pupils as the legacy of Tsarism”, she writes.<sup>376</sup> According to a French study on Lenin School students, many young militants broke with communism after their studies in Moscow “because the students discovered the Russian reality at the moment when it was least brilliant”.<sup>377</sup>

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372 Barron 1995, 22.

373 *Communist Leadership*, 46. The Lenin School years did not, however, end Patterson’s CPUSA membership. The break with the Party came only about five years later when Patterson was leading a communist longshoremen’s group in Philadelphia. Patterson and the CPUSA disagreed on how to handle a labor dispute and as a consequence Patterson left the party which – according to him – was not primarily interested in improving the conditions of American labor but was focused on other things. See *Communist Leadership*, 44-45.

374 *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities*, 7032-33.

375 *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities*, 7025. Nowell – originally an auto worker from Detroit – stayed in the Party after the Lenin School for about four years after the Lenin School, leaving the movement in 1936.

376 Köstenberger 2007, 299.

377 Quoted in Ahola 1981, 97.

When one reads portrayals of the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, it is not difficult to see why many communists changed their minds. Thomas Sakmyster, for example, points out in his biography of Hungarian American communist J. Peters that the Soviet Union in the early 1930s was far from being an ideal place to visit:

Foreign communists who visited the U.S.S.R. in the 1930s were often surprised, even shocked, by the low standard of living, food shortages and the public squalor. [...] Food was rationed and of poor quality and variety. Meat, eggs and butter were ‘virtually non-existent’. [...] The ubiquitous block-long food queues were a constant reminder of the shortcomings of Soviet society.<sup>378</sup>

Brigitte Studer’s description of the 1930s Soviet Union was not any more positive:

The USSR in the 1930s was one vast construction site. The collectivization of agriculture and the need for labour induced by the programme of forced industrialization brought an uncontrollable flood of people into the cities, ruralizing urban culture and disorganizing the economy. The country’s food supply was catastrophically disrupted. The regime reacted in ad hoc, improvised fashion, alternating repression, mobilization and bonuses.<sup>379</sup>

For some students the effects of the visit to the Soviet Union were completely opposite, however. For Al Lannon the time spent in Moscow in 1934-35 cemented his loyalty to the Soviet Union. According to Al Lannon’s biography – written by his son – Lannon became “a Lenin School man”, who applauded the Soviet military action during the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and who abhorred the revisionism of some party members in the late 1950s. During the factional battles of the late 1950s, Lannon staunchly supported Moscow-minded William Z. Foster. For Lannon, Moscow was “a star to steer by” and those who sought an “American road to Socialism” were proclaiming “loyalty to Hollywood, TV and Coca-Cola”.<sup>380</sup>

Steve Nelson, another course mate of Arvo Halberg, surely summarized the feelings of many Lenin School students who – like Nelson – saw a number of deficiencies in the Soviet Union, but considered them as minor obstacles that will be overcome over the years as the construction of the great socialist state proceeds:

There was a creativity and energy in the Soviet Union that I have rarely witnessed since. To me, this outweighed the negative and contradictory aspects involved in the process of development. Naturally I can now see the brutality and arbitrariness that displaced millions in the forced collectivization of agriculture and the essentially undemocratic process by which decisions were made and carried out. I didn’t see these things then. I accepted Stalin’s argument that the class struggle continues under socialism and that “class enemies” must be decisively confronted and eliminated. The idea of converting people who disagreed was lost in the shuffle. We allowed ourselves to take this concept of “class struggle” and pervert its meaning until we reached a point where anyone who disagreed with the position

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378 Sakmyster 2011, 33. Sakmyster continues: “No doubt Peters, like another American Communist living at the time in Moscow, rationalized this as the sad but necessary prerequisite to ‘the new society emerging slowly out of czarist poverty and the devastation wrought by civil war and imperialist intervention’”

379 Studer 2015, 15.

380 Lannon 1999, 48-49 & 142-144.

of the Party could be labeled an enemy of socialism. [...] These mistakes had tragic consequences. But I didn't see this when I was in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s. Then I felt I was in the midst of a vast, almost noble undertaking that required total effort, total support.<sup>381</sup>

As one can see, the experiences of the Lenin School students varied greatly. The persons with most negative experiences – Morris Childs, William Odell Nowell and Leonard Patterson – became later government witnesses or even a secret FBI informer. Steve Nelson and Peggy Dennis both left the party – Nelson in the late 1950s after Khrushchev's revelations and Dennis in the late 1970s – which may explain the critical tone of their Moscow reminiscences. Harry Haywood's and Al Lannon's positive comments concerning the school are in line with the fact that they remained life-long communists.

How did Arvo Halberg experience his visit to the Soviet Union? Was his Lenin School year as inspiring experience as it was for Al Lannon? We do not know, as Hall never publicly talked about his school year in Moscow. He did admit spending almost two years in Europe – mainly in the Soviet Union – in 1931-32 in a Minneapolis trial in April 1934.<sup>382</sup> In media interviews, he was seldom asked about his months in the Lenin School. When one knowledgeable journalist brought up the issue, Hall ended the discussion by saying that he did not seem to have many memories of those times.<sup>383</sup>

The CPUSA also kept completely silent about Hall's school year in Moscow. The trip is not mentioned in any of the numerous biographical texts published by the party. The writers of Gus Hall's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary booklet *Gus Hall – The Man and the Message* never mention the Lenin School although they study his life and career with considerable attention. Neither is Hall's Moscow studies mentioned in the 1985 biography which was published by a Soviet publishing house.<sup>384</sup>

Hall's and the CPUSA's silence concerning Lenin School is of course understandable considering the secretive nature of the schooling and, on the other hand, the Cold War atmosphere towards Soviet Union in the United States. It is natural that a politician who wanted to spread his message as widely as possible among average Americans, did not want to make public his participation in clandestine revolutionary training in the country that was the mightiest enemy of the United States. And, of course, Hall was not an exception, but the party kept silent about all its Lenin School students, including other leadership figures like Robert Thompson, Henry Winston and Betty Gannett.

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381 Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 136.

382 *Communist Leadership*, 19.

383 *Duluth News-Tribune*, Nov 2, 1980.

384 Confusingly both publications claim that in 1932 Arvo Halberg was leading unemployment demonstration in Minneapolis. The demonstration in question took place only in April 1934. See North 1970, 10; Jackson 1970, 48 and Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 28. Another article in Hall's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary booklet claims that Halberg was leading Teamsters' strike in Minneapolis also in 1932 but the strike only took place in 1934. See Meyers 1970, 57.



### 2.3.7. Leaders on both sides of the Iron Curtain

The International Lenin School was closed in 1938 after 12 years of operation. Researchers have given several explanations for the closure. According to one explanation, Stalin in 1938 no longer needed the school's services to institutionalize his authority in the Comintern's affiliates as his position was already unquestioned.<sup>385</sup> According to another, the school was closed due to the major change in the Comintern's politics, as the organization steered its course towards the Popular Front and co-operation with other progressive forces.<sup>386</sup> Naturally the Spanish civil war also affected the school's operation as after the summer of 1936 male students were told to volunteer to fight against Fascism. However, only a fraction of the students joined the fight in Spain.<sup>387</sup>

What was the overall significance of the Lenin School? The school did educate several future communist leaders for countries on both sides of the iron curtain. In Eastern Europe GDR and Poland had Lenin School trained leaders – namely Erich Honecker and Wladyslaw Gomulka – for years during post-WWII decades.<sup>388</sup> Lenin School -trained communists rose to leading party positions in non-communist countries like Finland, France, Greece, South Africa and United States, as Ville Pessi, Waldeck Rochet, Nikos Zachariades, Moses Kotane and Gus Hall became general secretaries of their parties.<sup>389</sup> Some Lenin School graduates focused on security and intelligence activities, like Erich Mielke, who served as GDR's minister of state security from 1957 to 1989.<sup>390</sup> Canadian Lenin School graduate Sam Carr and British Douglas Springhall took part in intelligence operations on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Carr was convicted in the so-called Gouzenko espionage affair in 1949 and Springhall was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in 1943 after having received secret material from the British Air Ministry.<sup>391</sup>

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385 McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 100.

386 Krekola 2006, 351.

387 Krekola 2006, 331-332.

388 Gomulka studied in the Lenin School in 1934-36 and served as a general secretary between 1956-70. Honecker studied in the school in 1930, but did not finish the course. He served as GDR's leader between 1971-89. See *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, 145-146 & 182; *Wer war wer in der DDR?*, 373-374.

389 *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, 167, 359, 400 & 523; [www.sahistory.org.za/people/moses-m-kotane](http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/moses-m-kotane); Cohen & Morgan 2002, 328. Pessi studied in Moscow in 1933 and served as a general secretary between 1944-69. For Rochet the corresponding years were 1930-32 and 1964-72 and for Zachariades 1929-31 and 1935-56. Kotane studied in the Lenin School for a year in the early 1930s and served as a general secretary between 1939-78, almost as long as Gus Hall did in the United States.

390 von Lang 1991, 45-50 and *Wer war wer in der DDR?*, 580. Mielke studied in Moscow in 1932-34.

391 *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, 57-58; Barron 1995, 24; Trahair 2012, 84 and West 2014, 512. Carr studied in Moscow in 1929-31. Morris Childs got to know Carr well in the Lenin School as they studied there simultaneously. The Gouzenko affair began in Canada in September 1945 when Igor Gouzenko, the code clerk of the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa, defected. Gouzenko's documents revealed Soviet espionage activities in the West. The Gouzenko affair has been seen as one of the factors accelerating the beginning of the Cold War as it greatly weakened the trust between East and the West right after the end of WWII. Sam Carr was one of the main spy recruiters for the Soviets in Canada. For more on the Gouzenko affair and Carr, see, for example, Knight 2005, 192-194.

Considering, however, that the Lenin School trained about 3 500 communists from 59 countries, it is slightly surprising that Moscow graduates were not more often seen in top positions of the world's CPs. Lenin School education was not an entrance ticket to the world communist elite, but it seems that many graduates found themselves in mid-level functions in the national party. As Brigitte Studer points out, "graduating students returning home did not generally find themselves appointed to the top leadership of their organization", but they could join "the intermediate stratum located between the numerous 'lower' cadres and regional officialdom and the national leadership of the party".<sup>392</sup> It may be that Lenin School graduates were not considered ideal national leaders as the school's curriculum was considered too theoretical, too abstract, too Russian and too unrelated to problems at home, as took place in Britain.<sup>393</sup>

The role played by Moscow-educated communists of course varied a lot, depending on time and students' home countries. As Julia Köstenberger points out, in the GDR former Lenin School students occupied important positions in media, in ministries, in the parliament and in the SED party – including the very top position of the party.<sup>394</sup> Also in Finland the Lenin School graduates played a central role in the communist party during post-WWII decades. In 1963 nine out of thirteen political bureau members of the Finnish Communist Party had attended the school.<sup>395</sup>

In Britain, the situation was somewhat different. The Lenin School affected British communism most strongly in the early 1930s but after that, its significance seems to have waned. About one third of the members of the central committee of the CPGB in 1932-35 were Lenin School graduates, but never again did the Moscow-educated reach such a position. After WWII there were never more than three Lenin School graduates in the 30-person central committee.<sup>396</sup> According to British Lenin School researchers, the position of Lenin School graduates weakened and became marginal after the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, after which the British party took a more autonomous and Anglicized political line.<sup>397</sup>

In the United States, the position of the Lenin School graduates was clearly stronger than in Britain. If one looks, for example, at the CPUSA's national committee that was selected in 1945, it seems that at least one fifth of the 54 committee members were Lenin School graduates.<sup>398</sup> Based on the FBI's Lenin School Files, *Biographical Dictionary of American*

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392 Studer 2015, 90. According to Studer, some Lenin School graduates "enabled the creation of new parties" while others "spearheaded 'the liquidation of opportunist leaderships'". "A number played leading roles in the Spanish Civil War, while others again had become cadre-school teachers", Studer writes. See Studer 2015, 106.

393 McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 106-107.

394 Köstenberger 2007, 309.

395 Cohen & Morgan 2002, 351.

396 Cohen & Morgan 2002, 347.

397 The relatively weak position of the Lenin School graduates in Britain may also be explained partly by Douglas Springhall's espionage sentence in 1943. The actions of Moscow-educated Springhall may have cast a shadow over all Lenin School graduates within the party. See Cohen & Morgan 2002, 351-355.

398 The national committee elected in 1945 may have included exceptionally many Lenin School graduates which may have reflected the leadership change in the party in 1945. It is hard to say,

*Left*, communist autobiographies and congressional committee hearings it would seem that at least Morris Childs, Ben Gold, Gus Hall, Robert Hall, Roy Hudson, Al Lannon, Steve Nelson, William Patterson, Irving Potash, Robert Thompson and Henry Winston had studied in the Lenin School.<sup>399</sup> The position of Lenin School graduates was even stronger in 1961 if one looks at the CPUSA's national board. According to the FBI and other sources, no less than six of the eleven members of national board – Phil Bart, Gus Hall, Clarence Hathaway, Claude Lightfoot, Irving Potash and Henry Winston – had studied in the Lenin School in the 1920s or 1930s.<sup>400</sup>

### 2.3.8. Interviewees' views on the significance of the Lenin School

While Gus Hall remained silent about his Lenin School studies in public, he did talk about his Moscow experience to some of his party comrades and to at least one of his relatives.<sup>401</sup> Hall's party comrades had, however, very different kind of views on the significance of Hall's Lenin School studies when explaining his political development and ideological choices.

Long-time CPUSA veteran Danny Rubin, for example, argued that the Lenin School had no role in Hall's political development. Rubin pointed out that American Lenin School graduates were politically a very diverse group, which in his opinion suggested that the school did not have a particular effect on its students.<sup>402</sup> Another long-time party member Betty Smith had an impression that Hall did not hold the Lenin School in very high regard. "I don't think he was that enamored by it. [...] I think he thought that they were a bit out of touch with reality there", Smith said.<sup>403</sup>

Gus Hall's close party associate Jarvis Tyner had a completely opposite view on the significance of the Lenin School for Hall. Tyner remembered Hall telling him that the

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however, how many Lenin School graduates usually sat in CPUSA's national committees. According to Harvey Klehr, there were at least 29 Lenin School graduates among the 212 central committee members of the CPUSA between 1921 and 1961. See Klehr 1978, 96-97.

399 The composition of the 1945 national committee was published in *Organized Communism in the United States*, 121. Also Eugene Dennis was a member of the committee, but it is uncertain whether he ever studied in Lenin School. J. Edgar Hoover claims in his *Masters of Deceit* that Dennis was a Lenin School graduate, but for example Peggy Dennis writes in her autobiography that instead of Lenin School Eugene Dennis chose Comintern work in the Philippines, South Africa and China. See Hoover 1958, 60 and Dennis 1977, 60-61.

400 *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.*, 5, 43, 56, 73-74 & 92 and *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 186 & 317. *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.* can be found in in Ernie Lazar's collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 2).

401 Hall's nephew Dennis Hallberg remembers Hall telling him about how he studied Marxism in the International Lenin School. See interview with Dennis Hallberg in Superior, Wisconsin, August 2008.

402 Interview with Danny Rubin in New York City, October 2013.

403 Interview with Betty Smith in New York City, August 2007. According to Smith, Hall's Lenin School experience explained why he was not interested in sending American communist to study in the Soviet school for foreign communists during his term as the general secretary. "He didn't think it was useful for us", Smith said.

Lenin School was “a very profound intellectual experience”. Tyner considered the Lenin School to be a central step in Hall’s political development:

He was able to combine his rich class struggle experience – his experience as a lumberjack and a steel worker and growing up in serious poverty – with the science of Marxism-Leninism. As a consequence he became one of the most able speakers and writers putting Marxism-Leninism in modern and in popular terms. He could turn quite a phrase and simplify the most complex things because he understood them because of his rich experience as a worker and because of his studies. I think that Lenin School was good for him.<sup>404</sup>

Sam Webb, Hall’s successor as the leader of the CPUSA, believed that the Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism which was taught in the Lenin School was indelibly etched in the minds of Hall and his schoolmates. “That became part of their political and ideological DNA. You have to give that a lot of weight when you try to explain and understand their loyalty to the Soviet Union”, Webb said.<sup>405</sup>

Hyman Berman, the Minnesota labor historian who was not a CPUSA member but who knew Hall personally, saw that the Lenin School “reinforced Hall’s sense of discipline and hierarchy and what the Stalinists called democratic centralism”.<sup>406</sup> Jay Schaffner, who joined the CPUSA in the 1960s, thought that Hall’s Lenin School studies strongly affected his ideas concerning CPUSA’s relationship with other left-wing organizations. In Schaffner’s opinion, the CPUSA’s attitude towards the New Left in the 1960s reflected the Comintern’s so-called third period position according to which the Communist Party was the leading organization in the socialist movement and all others were “phonies and enemies”, as Schaffner put it. The Comintern changed its line in 1935 in its 7<sup>th</sup> world congress in which it endorsed the popular front policy to stem the advance of fascism. According to this new policy, communist parties should seek to form a popular front with all parties that opposed fascism.<sup>407</sup> In Schaffner’s opinion, Hall’s reluctance to co-operate with other forces on the left could be explained by the experiences and the studies of his youth. “Gus was in the Lenin School before the change in the Comintern’s line. That was always Gus’s line”, Schaffner said.<sup>408</sup>

Michael Myerson thought that it was perfectly understandable that Hall never talked in public about his Lenin School experience:

Gus’s public persona was that he was the most American of the Americans, born in the Midwest, son of the Iron Range in Minnesota. Such things as his studies in the Lenin School were completely erased from his personal history. The media accused U.S. communists of being Soviet agents. Considering that it is not surprising

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404 Interview with Jarvis Tyner in New York City, August 2007.

405 Interview with Sam Webb in Kingston, New York, September 2016.

406 Interview with Hyman Berman in Minneapolis, Minnesota, August 2008.

407 For more on popular front policy, see, for example, Wilczynski 1981, 447 or *A Dictionary of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Communism*, 634-636.

408 Interview with Jay Schaffner in New York City, October 2013. Schaffner also believed that Hall’s Moscow studies reinforced his view of the Soviet Union as the undisputed leader of the world communist movement.

that Gus didn't want to talk about his ties to the Soviet Union, but he wanted to represent himself as an indigenous American communist.<sup>409</sup>

### 2.3.9. Conclusions

According to British Lenin School researchers, the school aimed to root the basic features of Stalin's version of Marxism-Leninism into the minds of the students: strong state combined to a monolithic, infallible communist party; command economy and coercive industrialization; deepening of contradictions as socialism drew nearer and the normality of terror; the cult of dictatorship and the papal role of Kremlin in the international movement. The education offered by the Lenin School was closer to indoctrination than to independent learning. The school aimed at strengthening party loyalty and improving party discipline. By showing the admirable achievements of the world's first socialist country and by meeting its top leadership, the school wanted to cultivate identification with the Soviet Union among the students.<sup>410</sup>

The British researchers emphasize the Lenin School as a process of socialization which became a formative experience for many young communists from around the world:

It was not simply what went on in the classroom that was important: it was the total package. Induction into Stalinist theory and practice, the values, attributes and principles it taught, the inculcation of hierarchy, discipline and obedience, the identification of the USSR with socialist progress, it was this process of socialization, rather than training in technique, that was primary and effective.<sup>411</sup>

Not all students, of course, turned out as the Comintern officials wanted. Out of the American students, George Hewitt, Joseph Zack Kornfeder, William Odell Nowell, Leonard Patterson and Charles H. White became government witnesses and Morris Childs an FBI informer. Some – like Steve Nelson – left the party during the tumultuous years of the late 1950s and some – like Peggy Dennis – 20 years later after criticizing the leadership severely for marginalizing the party in the American society.<sup>412</sup> Most students, however, turned out to be the loyal party soldiers the Lenin School aimed to produce. Looking at their later lives, Gus Hall and his co-leader Henry Winston would seem to belong to these “Lenin School men” – as Al Lannon's biographer put it – for whom Moscow always was “a star to steer by”.

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409 Interview with Michael Myerson in New York City, August 2010. Sam Webb explained Gus Hall's silence in a similar way: “You have to take in account the Cold War and McCarthy period. At that time everybody were saying that the communists were Soviet spies and foreign agents. So it is understandable that Gus tried to distance himself from the fact that he went to the Lenin School.” See interview with Sam Webb in Kingston, New York, September 2016.

410 McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 100-101.

411 McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell & Halstead 2003, 119. Findings of McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell and Halstead are very similar to Marja Kivisaari's findings when she studied the political education of the French Communist Party. According to Kivisaari, the French students “became politically socialized not only through the deliberate orientation of the teaching dispensed, but also through their entire holistic learning experience”. See Kivisaari 2002, 74-78.

412 See, for example, Dennis's letter of resignation from the CPUSA in Dennis 1978, 289-296.

As Gus Hall never publicly reflected on his time and studies in the Lenin School, it is impossible to know whether the schooling affected Hall as strongly as it affected his South African colleague Moses Kotane. For Kotane, the months in Moscow brought to his heart “a love and comradeship for the Soviet people and the CPSU which was a constant source of strength and encouragement to him throughout his life”. Because of the Lenin School, Kotane’s “loyalty and faith in the Soviet people, his confidence in the CPSU as a guardian of proletarian internationalism never wavered”.<sup>413</sup> Kotane wrote about the school in a following manner:

It was at the Lenin School that I learnt how to think politically. They taught me the logical method of argument, political analysis. From that time onwards I was never at a loss when it came to summing up a situation. I knew what to look for and what had to be done from the point of view of the working class.<sup>414</sup>

## **2.4. Riotous months in Minneapolis**

### **2.4.1. Leading the Minnesota unemployed**

Arvo Halberg returned to the United States sometime in late 1932 or early 1933.<sup>415</sup> He settled in Minneapolis, working as a district organizer for Young Communist League.

The economic situation in the United States had not gotten any better during Halberg’s visit in the Lenin School. Rather, the opposite could be said. Industrial production dropped by almost a half between 1929 and 1932. Unemployment kept increasing, peaking in early 1933 at 25 percent. Severe drought persisted in the country’s agricultural heartland, businesses and families defaulted on record numbers of loans and more than 5000 banks failed. Hundreds of thousands of Americans found themselves homeless and began congregating in shanty towns – so-called Hoovervilles – that began to appear across the country.

A district organizer’s life was not very luxurious, as he or she was paid a mere \$0.38 a day.<sup>416</sup> Hall lived in central Minneapolis together with a few other young activists. One of his housemates was Leo Tuuri, another Finnish American communist, who later changed his family name to Turner. Just like Arvo Halberg, he also came from the Finnish areas in northeastern Minnesota. He had been dragged into YCL activities by Halberg when

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413 *African Communist* 4/78.

414 *African Communist* 4/78. According to James Barber, the South African CP started closely following the Soviet political line in 1939 when Kotane became the general secretary. In 1963 he moved to Great Britain where he acted as the treasurer of the exiled African National Congress. In addition to that, he was “an important link with Moscow”. In this regard Kotane seems to have played very similar role in his party as Gus Hall and the Finnish CP general secretary Ville Pessi – both Lenin School graduates – played in their parties. See Barber 1999, 131 & 197.

415 In a Minneapolis trial in April 1934 Arvo Halberg said that he had lived in Minneapolis for one year and six months after being in Europe for almost two years. See *Communist Leadership*, 19.

416 *Communist Leadership*, 19. In today’s money \$0.38 would be little less than \$7.00.

he worked as a YCL organizer in the northeastern parts of the state.<sup>417</sup> As the incomes of the YCL organizers were scant, the housemates had to resort to rather dubious means for getting themselves some breakfast, as Leo Turner tells us:

There was also a fourth guy that helped to keep us in doughnuts and biscuits and so on. In the morning he'd get up before the rest of us, and he'd follow a bakery wagon. When it would park – at that time they delivered to the homes of people – near one of the homes, he'd wait until the guy went in the home and then he'd go slip over behind the bakery wagon and take out some doughnuts and other things. When we got up an hour or so later we'd find all these biscuits and such on the table... The last I heard of him, he got caught stealing a car and he was put in jail.<sup>418</sup>

Taking food from those who had some seems to have been a standard practice among the unemployed in Minneapolis during the hunger-filled years of the early 1930s. Gus Hall tells us of an incident that took place during a mass demonstration before the time of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal programs:

In the very area where the demonstrations took place, there was a huge central retail outlet owned by the Armour Packing Co. Real hunger was becoming more and more a critical problem for people. [...] We decided to open the packing company building to the hungry who were in this big mass demonstration. The committee in charge was to lead the demonstration to the building and break away the big front windows in a way that would protect the workers from being cut.

It was some sight. As if by plan workers took their places behind the counters to pass out food in a very orderly fashion. In my memory there are many vivid scenes from that particular moment. One worker whose arm seemed to be five feet long pushed it through rows of bologna and was passing the bologna out to the workers on the street.

There was a man walking away from the building taking bites out of a whole slab of bacon he had taken, talking to himself between bites, saying "I'll be goddamned if I'm going to die of starvation". There were women, walking away from the plant with armfuls of food.

What impressed me was how these workers – who were not in on the plans – quickly organized the whole operation. The police stayed out of sight and the whole packing plant was cleaned within a few minutes. The unemployed were hungry and there was food in large quantities, owned by a huge corporation, and the workers felt perfectly justified in satisfying their gnawing hunger by taking from the fat cat corporations.<sup>419</sup>

Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was inaugurated in March 1933, started immediate actions to lift the nation from the depression. Through his New Deal programs Roosevelt sought to stimulate demand and provide work and relief for the impoverished.

One of Roosevelt's numerous programs was the Civil Works Administration which aimed to create manual labor jobs unemployed workers during the winter of 1933-34. Roosevelt, who believed that employment was better form of relief than cash handouts, unveiled the

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417 Leo Turner's oral history interview transcript, 4; Carl Ross's oral history interview transcript, part I, 92-93.

418 Leo Turner's oral history interview transcript, 13.

419 Hall 1987, 343-344.

program in early November 1933. The short-lived program ended on March 31, 1933 after creating construction jobs for around four million people.

The cessation of the CWA was, of course, not merrily received by the millions of people who were depending on it. The news of the CWA's shutdown generated large demonstrations in numerous cities. This was also the case in Minneapolis, where the CPUSA-organized Unemployed Councils were strong. YCL organizers Arvo Halberg and Leo Tuuri were strongly involved in organizing the demonstration that took place in front of Minneapolis's City Hall on April 6, 1934.<sup>420</sup>

According to the Finnish-language *Työmies* newspaper, the demonstration gathered no less than 15 000 protesters.<sup>421</sup> The main demand of the demonstrators was the continuation of the CWA employment system. Although Arvo Halberg himself had not been employed by the CWA, he was one of the "captains" of the demonstration, wearing a red band. He and Leo Tuuri among others gave speeches to the crowd, speaking as loud as possible as they had no loudspeakers. Demonstrators' delegation was received in the City Hall by Minneapolis's city council, upon which the council agreed to the demands. Despite this unanimity the demonstration turned violent. The police shot teargas – for the first time in Minneapolis's history – in order to scatter the crowd. The crowd threw rocks, bottles and chunks of coal at the police and the City Hall, smashing windows and injuring eight policemen. In addition to this, seven demonstrators or by-standers were injured in the melee. According to *Minneapolis Tribune*, the demonstrators seemed to be prepared for violence as two trucks – one loaded with coal and the other with cases of bottles – appeared on Fifth Street during the demonstration. In order to protect the City Hall, the police mounted machine guns at its entrance.<sup>422</sup>

The police arrested the demonstrators' delegation in the City Hall and other leaders of the demonstration including Arvo Halberg and Leo Tuuri, all together around 30 people. Most of them were put on trial in Minneapolis municipal court in mid-April. The defendants were assisted by a famous Philadelphia civil rights lawyer David Levinson. Halberg, Tuuri and other speakers delivered lengthy speeches at the trial, propagating for the CWA system.<sup>423</sup> Arvo Halberg also caused a stir at the trial by telling the court that he had just spent almost year and a half in the Soviet Union and that instead of the present system, he would prefer an America with a Soviet government. He was unwaveringly assured that the depression will end only through a revolution and that Roosevelt's New Deal programs will not prevent this from happening:

A Soviet form of government is a natural conclusion from the developments under the present economic system of the society. There is no way out of the present depression, although schemes have been proposed. The depression will continue

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420 Leo Turner's oral history interview transcript, 1-2.

421 *Työmies* April 8, 1934. The Hall-related biographical materials later claimed that the demonstration had 35 000 participants. They also mistakenly claimed that the demonstration had taken place already in 1932 – the year that Arvo Halberg spent in Moscow's Lenin School. See North 1970, 10; Jackson 1970, 48; Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 28.

422 *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 7, 1934; *Communist Leadership*, 16-19; Leo Turner's oral history interview transcript, 1-3.

423 Leo Turner's oral history interview transcript, 3.



as we have grafters and bankers at the head of the system like those Morgans and Rockefellers, so we say that the only way the working class will finally be able to free itself is to take control.<sup>424</sup>

Halberg also said that he was ready to take up arms and overthrow the U.S. government “when the time comes”. He was assured that the “working class elements” in U.S. Army and Navy would join the fight with the workers and farmers when the time comes. He denied, however, saying during the Minneapolis demonstration that “this is the beginning of a revolution”. According to Halberg, the demonstration was about “bread and butter”, while a revolution was a more serious matter.<sup>425</sup>

The speakers at the demonstration – like Halberg and Tuuri – were given a 35-day sentence at the county work farm.<sup>426</sup> Tuuri, who considered the sentences “fairly light”, saw the whole experience in an almost positive light:

We sort of enjoyed that actually, because you know we were young and didn’t mind it at all. In fact, because of the times, I wasn’t eating too much in those days, but I gained weight in prison because we were eating there.<sup>427</sup>

#### **2.4.2. Helping out the Trotskyists?**

The spring and summer of 1934 were restless times in Minneapolis. In mid-May, only little more than a month after the CWA demonstrations, the Teamsters union started a strike in which most of the truck traffic in the city came to a standstill. The Minneapolis Teamsters strike, which led to massive street fights between workers and employers, became one of the seminal labor conflicts of 1934, together with the San Francisco longshoremen’s strike, Toledo’s Auto-Lite strike and the widespread textile workers’ strike.<sup>428</sup>

Minneapolis, a transportation hub for trucking, had been a notorious “open shop” city where the trade unions were largely excluded from trucking business operations. The radical leaders of Teamsters’ Local 574, however, were determined to change this. The local was led by Vincent Raymond Dunne, a former member of syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World and founder of the Trotskyist Communist League of America. Dunne had been kicked out of the CPUSA in 1928 as Trotskyists had been purged out of the party.<sup>429</sup>

As the Trotskyists were leading the strike, their CPUSA archenemies – whom they called “Stalinists” – did not play a significant role in the strike organization. Local CPUSA leader Sam K. Davis tried to join the strike committee, proclaiming that the rank-and-file strikers did not have “adequate leadership” and offering his help. He had, however, a somewhat

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424 *Communist Leadership*, 19.

425 *Communist Leadership*, 19-20.

426 Leo Turner’s oral history interview transcript, 3. The Hall-related biographical materials later claimed that Arvo Halberg got a four-month jail sentence for his participation. See North 1970, 10.

427 Leo Turner’s oral history interview transcript, 3.

428 *Labor Conflict in the United States*, 327.

429 Korth 1995, 8.

aggressive reception among the strikers. According to Dunne, the strike leaders had to rescue Davis from being beaten up by the strikers. The relationship between the two communist groupings was indeed tense, the Trotskyites calling the CPUSA “a clown” in their newspaper editorial.<sup>430</sup>

The first phase of the strike ended already in late May, but the agreement that was reached proved to be defunct. In mid-July Local 574 went on strike again. Violent clashes continued. On July 20, two strikers were killed and 67 were wounded as police opened fire on strikers attempting to stop an employer truck under police escort. Tens of thousands of people took part in a mass funeral of one of the victims. The atmosphere in Minneapolis was tense and Minnesota governor Floyd B. Olson ordered the National Guard to take control of the city. Truck movement in the city was only allowed to take place under a military permit system. Permits should have been granted to essential foodstuffs deliveries only, but in practice the state militia issued permits in large numbers, which weakened the strike gravely.

Despite the unfavorable conditions, the strike continued until late August, when a compromise agreement was reached. The economic gains achieved by the strikers were modest, but the city was no longer an anti-union bastion.

The CPUSA was highly critical of the Trotskyist strike leadership and the compromise agreement. According to the CPUSA, the strike leaders were “traitors to the working class” who had sold out the workers.<sup>431</sup> Instead of betraying the strike by accepting a compromise settlement the strike leaders should have proclaimed a general strike and aimed for “a sweeping victory”.<sup>432</sup> According Farrell Dobbs, who was one of the strike’s Trotskyist leaders, the Stalinists were at the time on an “ultraleft binge” – following the Comintern’s so-called third-period line, promulgated at the Comintern’s congress in 1928 – which isolated the CPUSA cadres from the living class struggle.<sup>433</sup> James Cannon, a Trotskyist who also had been expelled from the CPUSA in 1928, responded to the criticism by pointing out that the central objective of the strike was union recognition, which the “muddleheaded Stalinists” did not seem to understand:

Every strike settlement is a compromise. [...] Realistic leaders do not expect justice from the capitalists, they only strive to extract as much as possible for the union in the given situation and strengthen their forces for another fight.<sup>434</sup>

Although the CPUSA did not play a significant role in the strike, Arvo Halberg did not remain on the sidelines of the conflict. The 23-year old YCL district organizer took part in the massive street fights on Minneapolis’s streets, wielding a thick wooden stick. His

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430 Korth 1995, 96-97; Dobbs 1972, 183.

431 Korth 1995, 141-142. Interestingly, one of the loudest critics of the strike in the CPUSA was William F. Dunne, Vincent Raymond Dunne’s older brother. William F. Dunne remained in the CPUSA unlike his three younger brothers who were all active in the Minneapolis strike organization. After the strike Dunne published a pamphlet together with Morris Childs denouncing the strike leaders under the title *Permanent Counter-Revolution – The Role of the Trotskyists in the Minneapolis Strike*. See also Dobbs 1972, 183.

432 Dobbs 1972, 106.

433 Dobbs 1972, 105.

434 Quoted in Dobbs 1972, 107.

participation can be verified through photographs that were taken of one of the street fights.<sup>435</sup>

Historians seem to agree that CPUSA's role in the Teamsters' strike was very limited, but Gus Hall does not share this view. According to him, the Communist Party not only played a substantial role, but it helped the strikers to win the whole strike.<sup>436</sup> In Hall's opinion, the strike was already petering out when the CPUSA and he himself stepped in, as the Trotskyists were "playing footsie" with the state governor:

It would have been a lost strike if it were not for the activities and actions taken by the Communist Party. I was one of the comrades assigned to give leadership to the strike. The Mayor of Minneapolis had just deputized 15 000 thugs to break the picket line. Developments came down to a showdown battle. The Trotskyites repudiated confrontation tactics, but it was the only way to win the strike and it was the only thing that did win it.

So it came about that thousands of strikers filled one street for blocks and the 15 000 deputies and the whole police force occupied the same street in the opposite direction. They faced each other with just a narrow street between them. [...]

The workers took up collections among themselves and sent teams to buy eggs. Farmers also donated to the strikers eggs, potatoes – anything that one could throw. At a signal, the workers showered the police and deputies with thousands of eggs. The police chief decided to move his forces a half block away. It was this that gave the strikers enough room to gain the necessary momentum for the attack. In a few minutes the battle was over, with the police on the run. The deputies who didn't get beat up were running all over town throwing away their badges. Even years later, in another strike, the county sheriff and police chief were not able to find anyone who would accept a badge for the purpose of strikebreaking in Minneapolis.

To this day the Trotskyites have never admitted that with their opportunistic maneuvering with the governor they had all but lost the strike. It was our tactic of confrontation at a critical moment and the initiative of the workers that won the strike. Tactics of confrontation are not always correct or not always necessary. They were correct in the Minneapolis situation.<sup>437</sup>

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435 One such photo was published in a 1958 book *The People Together: One Hundred Years of Minnesota 1858-1958*. Carl Ross, who was one of book's editors, said in his oral history interview that Arvo Halberg is featured in a street fight photo. See Carl Ross oral history interview transcript, part III, 32; *The People Together: One Hundred Years of Minnesota 1858-1958*, 29.

436 Also Hall-related biographical material published by CPUSA contains this claim. According to one biographical text, "Communists and other left trade unionists assumed leadership of a badly floundering strike of Minneapolis Teamsters". Mistakenly the writer claims that the strike took place already in 1932 – the year when Arvo Halberg was studying in Moscow's Lenin School. See Meyers 1970, 57.

437 Hall 1987, 349. In his study concerning the Teamsters' strike Bryan D. Palmer straightforwardly rejects Hall's view of the role of the CPUSA. According to Palmer, Hall's views are "fantasy" which "contains not one shred of substantiation, resting on assertions that cite no evidence". Minnesota labor historian Hyman Berman expressed a similar view on the CPUSA's role in an interview with the author of this study, saying that "the Teamsters' strike was completely led by Trotskyists". Also journalist Charles Rumford Walker pointed out in his 1937 book about the Minneapolis strike that CP members did not play – unlike the Trotskyists – a significant role in the conflict. Hall's view of CPUSA's role in the Teamsters' strike does not only contradict with the views of the historians, but also with some of his party comrades. Carl Ross, a Finnish American YCL activist who lived in St. Paul during the strike, said in his oral history interview that the young Communists were not directly involved in the strike. See Walker 1937, 90 & 127; Carl Ross

### 2.4.3. Direct action speaks louder than words

When one looks at Arvo Halberg's months in Minneapolis in 1933 and 1934, one notices that he indeed was a man of direct action, not a person of gradual diplomacy and slow-moving negotiations. Conservative writers who saw the Lenin School primarily as a school of sabotage, urban warfare and other revolutionary skills would surely have explained Halberg's behavior in Minneapolis by referring to his Moscow studies, but Halberg's background offers another explanation for his mode of operation.

As biographical sketches of Hall tell us, his father was originally a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and even a personal friend of IWW's famous leader Big Bill Haywood.<sup>438</sup> Young Arvo read eagerly Haywood's writings which were popular among the IWW-minded Finnish immigrants in Northern Minnesota.<sup>439</sup> The IWW, in turn, was well-known for its tendency of direct action. The Wobblies – as the IWW supporters were known – did not believe in political action, i.e. electoral politics, diplomacy, negotiation and arbitration. Instead they preferred propaganda, demonstrations, strikes and slowdowns as means of bringing the capitalists to their knees. Haywood himself was expelled from the Socialist Party in 1913 after he had publicly announced that he preferred direct action to political action.<sup>440</sup>

The Wobblies were famous for their fiery rhetoric. A well-known example of the aggressiveness of their vocabulary was the frequent usage of the word “sabotage”.<sup>441</sup> The Wobblies gave the word a special meaning. Many of them – like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn – considered sabotage to refer only to strikes and slowdowns.<sup>442</sup> Some – including Big Bill Haywood – did not clearly rule out the violent destruction of property. Haywood's definition of the concept was somewhat ambiguous as he said that “sabotage means push back, pull out or break off the fangs of capitalism”.<sup>443</sup> The concept of sabotage was discussed

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oral history interview transcript, part I, 88-89; interview with Hyman Berman in Minneapolis, Minnesota, August 2008 and Palmer 2013, 212.

438 Meyers 1970, 55; Bonosky 1987, 8.

439 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 17. According to Kostianen, thousands of Finns joined the IWW during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: “During the late 1910s, the IWW movement experienced its heyday, with thousands of Finnish Americans becoming its supporters. [...] Conceivably, the number of Finns belonging to the IWW was somewhere between 5 000 and 10 000.” See Kostianen 2014b, 140.

440 Carlson 1983, 195-200. The so-called reformists of the Socialist Party were angered after Haywood – who was enraged by police cruelty during the 1912 textile mill strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts – announced “I will not vote again”.

441 Also Melvyn Dubofsky pays attention to the different meanings of the concept of sabotage within the IWW in his study of the organization. See Dubofsky 2000, 92-93.

442 For Flynn sabotage was a form of nonviolent resistance and meant “conscious withdrawal of workers' industrial efficiency”. In 1916 Flynn published pamphlet *Sabotage – The Conscious Withdrawal of the Workers' Industrial Efficiency* in which she explained her understanding of the concept. She later regretted publishing the pamphlet and withdrew its new edition from circulation. Her opponents, however, remembered the publication. According to Flynn, the pamphlet “bobbed up like a bad penny from time to time”. In the early 1950s, during a Subversive Activities Control Board hearing and during her Smith Act trial, Flynn was questioned about the pamphlet. See Flynn 1973, 162-165 and Camp 1995, 55-57, 76 & 244.

443 Carlson 1983, 196-197 & 230-231. Interestingly, Haywood seemed also to accept seizing food storages in order to feed the hungry. According to Haywood, also Abraham Lincoln would have

every now and then in IWW publications, and the writers did not always exclude the destruction of machinery. “Sabotage does not necessarily mean destruction of machinery or other property, although that method has always been indulged in and will continue to be used as long there is a class struggle”, Frank Bohn wrote in *Solidarity* in 1912.<sup>444</sup>

According to Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, the Wobblies’ aggressive locution largely explains the strict attitudes towards the IWW in the surrounding society:

IWW rhetoric rang with violent images and fire-breathing talk of dynamite. “I despise the law,” said Haywood, “and I am not a law-abiding citizen.” Wobblies also endorsed, hinted at or suggested that industrial sabotage was a preferred tactic. All this gave Wobblies an image not much different from that of bomb-throwing anarchists.<sup>445</sup>

#### 2.4.4. Conclusions

Looking at Arvo Halberg’s time in Minneapolis in 1933-34 it would seem that he was a hot-tempered young man who was ready to resort to direct action and violent measures if the situation so required. His story of the robbing of the Armour Packing Co. retail outlet shows that he readily accepted the illegal grabbing of the property of large corporations in order to help the unemployed. The concept of class hatred was not alien to the hot-blooded young man who believed that the Great Depression in the United States will end only in a revolution during which the working class will take control of the society. In the trial following a violent demonstration in Minneapolis, Halberg declared that instead of the existing political system he would have preferred an America with a Soviet government. In addition to that, the young communist organizer also said that he was ready to take up arms and overthrow the U.S. government “when the time comes”.

In addition to the demonstrations of the unemployed, Arvo Halberg also took part in the demonstrations related to the Teamsters strike in Minneapolis in 1934. When discussing the role of the CPUSA in the strike, he seems to be in disagreement with historians, according to whom the communists did not play a significant role in the Trotskyist-led strike. As we have seen, this was not the first time when Hall’s narration of the past contradicts the views of established historians. One easily gets the impression that for Gus Hall all the past is something which can easily be molded to fit the needs of the day.

According to Carl Ross, another Finnish American YCL organizer from northern Minnesota, Arvo Halberg actively took part in the street fights related to the Teamsters’ strike. According to Ross, Halberg’s participation can be verified by looking at photos

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accepted such measures. “Take your pickaxes and crowbars and go to the granaries and warehouses and help yourselves”, Lincoln had said according to Haywood. See Dubofsky 1987, 64-65.

444 A little earlier Ben H. Williams wrote similarly in the same publication: “Sabotage ranges all the way from ‘passive resistance’ at one extreme to violent destruction of property at the other. It does not include the destruction of machinery in every instance.” See *Solidarity*, February 25, 1911 & May 18, 1912. Both articles are quoted in *Rebel Voices*, 51 & 53.

445 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 11.

taken of the fights. If Ross's claim is correct, it strengthens the view of young Gus Hall as a roughneck to whom violent measures were an appropriate way of bringing about changes in the society. His inclination to direct action can at least partially be explained by his childhood and teenage experiences in strongly IWW-minded Finnish American surroundings in Northern Minnesota. The Wobblies – as the members of International Workers of the World were called – preferred direct action instead of electoral politics and other traditional means of influencing. The influence of Moscow's International Lenin School – in which Halberg had studied before returning to Minnesota – was most likely much smaller as the school's curriculum focused more on Marxist-Leninist theory and history than on practical street-fighting skills.

## **2.5. Terrorism in a steel town? – Gus Hall and Little Steel Strike**

### **2.5.1. Arvo Halberg arrives in Ohio**

The Minneapolis Teamsters' strike was barely over when Arvo Halberg already left Minnesota's Twin Cities. The strike ended in late August, but already on September 1 the 23-year old YCL organizer was giving a speech at an International Youth Day rally in Youngstown, Ohio.<sup>446</sup>

According to Hall, his move to Youngstown was originally an accident. The YCL national office had already decided to send Halberg to work on the coal fields of West Virginia, but the plans changed as he was hitchhiking through the industrial heartlands of the mid-West. Halberg stopped in Cleveland to meet some CPUSA leaders, including some from Youngstown:

More than anyone else, Joe Dallet, a wonderful enthusiastic comrade, who was later killed in Spain, convinced me to stop at Youngstown while awaiting further instructions from the National Office of the YCL. So I joined the comrades and went to Youngstown that night.

Before I knew it I became fully involved in the struggles of Youngstown, and they were everywhere – the unemployed, the youth, the Black community, steelworkers – everything was in motion. There were continuous demonstrations. In a few weeks it became impossible to leave Youngstown.<sup>447</sup>

Arvo Halberg lived in Youngstown in a dilapidated boardinghouse together with John Gates, Joe Dallet and Dallet's newly-married wife Kitty. There is no information on how Arvo made his living at that time, but Joe and Kitty Dallet survived on government relief checks of \$12.50 every two weeks. Life in Youngstown was especially tough for Kitty Dallet who came from a wealthy German family. "The house had a kitchen", Kitty Dallet later

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<sup>446</sup> *Youngstown Vindicator*, August 31, 1934.

<sup>447</sup> Hall 1987, 341. Joe Dallet was a son of a wealthy silk merchant and a Dartmouth college drop-out who had become a communist in 1927 following the execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian American anarchists accused of murders during a robbery. For more information on Dallet, see, for example, Bird & Sherwin 2006, 156-157.

remembered, “but the stove leaked and it was impossible to cook. Our food consisted of two meals a day, which we got at a grimy restaurant”.<sup>448</sup>

Like all steel industry regions, Youngstown and the surrounding Mahoning Valley area, had been hit hard by the Great Depression. In 1933 over one-third of the work force were unemployed, and many labored only part-time for lower wages. The production of the steel mills had been cut by 40 percent. Families had to resort to small-scale subsistence farming to guarantee their survival, and Youngstown Sheet & Tube, one of the large steel companies in the area, turned over hundred acres of its land for gardening.<sup>449</sup>

Visiting the steel industry towns in Western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio were strong experiences for many left-wing writers in the 1930s. The political rights of the workers were limited as the companies controlled the towns closely in order to prevent union organizing. Pollution and noise problems were considerable problems. The famous investigative journalist Lincoln Steffens called the Pittsburgh steel producing area “hell with the lid off”. Mary Heaton Vorse, a well-known labor journalist and novelist, described the soot-covered areas in the mid-1930s in a somewhat similar way:

No one can realize the might of steel unless he has been in the steel towns and travelled along the rivers on whose banks steel is made, past the mills where night and day a process akin to creation goes on.

For mile after mile the chimneys of the mills are like pipes of giant organs. A pall of smoke forever hangs over these towns, and at night the darkness is perpetually shattered by the nightly hallelujah of the furnaces.<sup>450</sup>

John Gates, a future *Daily Worker* chief editor and later a severe critic of CPUSA leadership, who worked as an YCL organizer in Mahoning Valley in the 1930s described Youngstown in the following manner:

The mills themselves were military fortresses, with small private armies of uniformed, armed company police to intimidate the workers and block organization. City and town government, controlled by the steel corporations, ruthlessly suppressed all union activity. For all practical purposes, trade unions were illegal and subversive; organizers were arrested, beaten up and driven out of town; workers suspected of union activity were summarily fired and blacklisted throughout the industry. To ferret out militant workers, the companies employed large numbers of spies. The threat of deportation was continually held over the foreign-born workers who made up the bulk of the working force in the Valley. Over the steel towns hung a heavy pall of fear, repression and poverty.<sup>451</sup>

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448 Bird & Sherwin 2006, 157. Kitty Dallet lived with Joe in Youngstown in poverty for two and half years, but in the end she could not bear the harsh conditions in the steel industry city. In 1936 Kitty Dallet moved to London, England where her parents were living at the time. In the spring of 1937 the couple reunited in Cherbourg in France when Joe Dallet came to fight in the Spanish civil war. Joe and Kitty Dallet spent a week in Paris with CPUSA member Steve Nelson who was also on his way to Spain. In October 1937 Joe Dallet died in battle in Spain. His death was a major shock for Kitty Dallet. She soon returned to the United States where she in 1940 married physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, who was in a central role in developing the atomic bomb during the WWII. See Bird & Sherwin 2006, 157-162.

449 Blue, Jenkins, Lawson & Reedy 1995, 147-148.

450 Quoted in Zipser 1981, 50.

451 Gates 1958, 34.

Arvo Halberg's description of the depression-hit Youngstown was not any more positive. According to him, life in Mahoning Valley was "raw and brutal":

Hungry families were evicted from their homes. There were soup lines. Death from so-called "natural causes" of people weakened by hunger increased dramatically. There were no unemployment checks, relief checks or old-age pensions. And there were no welfare systems people could turn to for emergency relief.

But, in spite of the hunger and misery, there was hope because there was a fightback. There were strikes. And not a week passed in Youngstown without some kind of mass demonstrations, petitions, hunger marches. And for some of us the county jail became a second home. It was a common sight to see the marshals coming to evict families from their homes and the neighbors getting together taking the furniture off the street and putting it back into the house.<sup>452</sup>

Arvo Halberg did not hesitate to get involved in Youngstown politics in order to change the situation. While acting as a local YCL organizer, in 1935 he unsuccessfully ran for its city council on a Communist Party ticket. In 1936 he served as secretary for Joe Dallet who ran for Congress, also on a Communist ticket.<sup>453</sup> Halberg was also a regular speaker in political rallies arranged by Communists, like the January 1935 meeting that marked the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lenin's death.<sup>454</sup>

In June of the same year, Halberg spoke at a political youth meeting which was covered widely by the *Youngstown Vindicator* newspaper. He sharply criticized the fact that Americans lived in the world's richest country and yet "7 000 000 youths are unemployed and condemned to poverty". One reason for this was the mighty businessmen like Tom Girdler – the chairman of the board of Republic Steel, one of the massive steel companies operating in Mahoning Valley. According to Hall, "the struggle for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness need the abolishment of Tom Girdler and others".<sup>455</sup>

Halberg told the audience of about 200 people of his two-year trip to the Soviet Union. According to Hall, the United States should follow the Soviet example in developing its society:

In the 18 years of Communism it has become the leading industrial nation. The Soviet Union is the only country that has abolished unemployment forever and

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452 Hall 1987, 19-20.

453 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, June 29, 1937.

454 *Youngstown Vindicator*, January 20, 1935. Not all Party work was trite and serious. In his autobiographical manuscript Gus Hall also remembers how he and his Youngstown associates got Sally Rand – the nationally famous burlesque dancer known for her ostrich feather dance and bubble balloon dance – to sign a petition against war and fascism. According to Hall, Rand appreciated that the young Communists "could see that there was a human being who thinks and feels behind the balloons and fans". *Youngstown Vindicator* – which according to Hall was a "reactionary, semi-fascist newspaper" – did not, however, want to take a photo of Rand signing the petition. See Gus Hall's autobiographical manuscript, 31 and *The Cambridge Dictionary of American Biography*, 597.

455 *Youngstown Vindicator*, June 15, 1935. The occasion was presided by Sally Winters – according to *Youngstown Vindicator* "a pretty blonde and Oberlin college graduate" – who between 1938 and 1941 served as Gus Hall's secretary. She later became a widely known political activist in Cleveland area under the name Sally Morillas. See *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, February 27, 1996.



increased wages. Everyone has a seven-hour day and a two-week vacation, with no fear of being laid off, and no fear in old age because there is a substantial pension.<sup>456</sup>

Politics was not the only thing in keeping young Arvo Halberg busy, for in 1935 he also got married. His bride was Elizabeth Turner, daughter of a Hungarian-born communist coal miner from Pennsylvania. Gus Hall later found numerous similarities between his and Elizabeth's family: both families' parents were "refugees from hunger and poverty in Europe", both his and Elizabeth's fathers were miners and "early supporters of socialism and the Soviet Union – the first workingclass state". Elizabeth's parents – their household was known as the "Turner Farm" – were famous for bailing out Mahoning Valley communists when they got arrested. They bailed out also their son-in-law at least once.<sup>457</sup>

The CPUSA's aim was to get jobs at Mahoning Valley's steel mills for its young activists – like Arvo Halberg – in order to be able to organize the steelworkers. Getting a job, however, was not an easy task as there was not much hiring going on. In order to get a job, Halberg and his comrades took an evening course in electric welding.<sup>458</sup>

According to Hall, he finally got a job thanks to his robust physique. In order to get the job he had to, however, change his name. The new name, which he then used for the rest of his life, was chosen in a slight haste:

I joined the men on the hill and was there but a few minutes when one of the ones from the glass building pointed his finger at me and motioned me to come in. I knew that meant a job offer. Slowly I walked down the hill, making some quick decisions on the way: one whether I was skilled enough, and more importantly, I knew that if I gave my real name, Arvo Gus Halberg, I would not last a day, because I had already run for the City Council of Youngstown on the Communist Party ticket. I made my mind to try for the job and in desperation, just as I got to the glass building, I decided to cut both ends of my name and use what was left – Gus Hall. I was hired.

Next morning, when I entered the department I was assigned to, I realized immediately why I was hired so quickly. Everyone in the department weighed 200 lbs. [about 90 kilograms] or more. The job required lifting heavy pieces of steel so they were hiring only big strong men for that department.<sup>459</sup>

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456 *Youngstown Vindicator*, June 15, 1935.

457 Hall 1987, 352.

458 Hall 1987, 342.

459 Hall 1987, 342. Hall was, of course, not the only American communist who changed his or her name in the late 1920s and 1930s. On the contrary, changing names was very popular among CPUSA activists, as a large part of them were of Eastern European or Jewish background and as the Party simultaneously wanted to appear more Anglo-American. In the late 1920s and 1930s, for example, Sol Regenstreif became John Gates, Stjepan Mesaros became Steve Nelson, Joseph Cohen became Joe Clark, Sol Auerbach became James Allen, Benjamin Isgur became Ben Dobbs, Regina Karasick became Peggy Dennis and Dorothy Rosenblum became Dorothy Ray (and later Dorothy Ray Healey). See Gates 1958, 26-27; Dennis 1977, 24; Klehr 1978, 41; Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 67; Healey & Isserman 1990, 35; Johanningsmeier 1994, 283-284.

## 2.5.2. Organizing the steel industry

Before the 1930s, the steel industry in the United States was mainly a non-union industry. Steel workers associations had existed already in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (AA) – founded in 1876 – was repeatedly defeated in bitter conflicts like the 1919 steel strike. As a consequence, AA was a small and poor union of only a few thousand members as the Great Depression took hold.

The Great Depression and the New Deal changed things, however. The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 which guaranteed trade union rights sparked widespread union organizing throughout the country. Tens of thousands of steel workers joined the AA, but many of them were disappointed as the union followed the cautious policies of its aged leader Michael F. Tighe. At the same time most steel companies tried to stem union organizing by setting up company-dominated employee representation plans.

The National Industrial Recovery Act was found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in May 1935, but already in July of the same year President Roosevelt signed the National Labor Relations Act which, again, guaranteed the rights of employees to organize in the trade unions. At the same time, a revolt was brewing in the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the country's leading federation of labor unions. The conservative AFL supported the idea of craft unionism, wanting to organize workers along the lines of craft. Most of its leaders opposed the idea of industrial unionism, i.e. organizing all workers of the same industry in the same union. The AFL included also industrial unions like United Mine Workers (UMW), but craft unionists had a strong hold on power within the federation. Industrial union leaders like UMW's John L. Lewis were, however, getting distressed as the Great Depression was decreasing their unions' membership. Lewis and some of his colleagues came to the conclusion that their unions would not survive if the great majority of workers in basic industries remained unorganized. According to Lewis, strikes could not be won if workers were split in separate craft unions. Lewis started to press the AFL to change its policies in this regard.<sup>460</sup>

The three victorious strikes of 1934 – the Minneapolis Teamsters strike, the West Coast Longshoremen's Strike and the Toledo Auto-Lite strike – also contributed to the change. None of these strikes was led by the AFL, but industrial unions with militant leadership, including some people with communist and socialist leanings. At the same time, the AFL did not have a very good track record in winning strikes. According to Lewis, "for 25 years or more American Federation of Labor has been following this precise policy" and has compiled "a record of 25 years of constant, unbroken failure".<sup>461</sup>

The AFL did start organizing steel, auto and rubber industries, but financial support for these projects remained modest. The dispute boiled over in AFL's convention in Atlantic City in 1935, where John L. Lewis after a derogatory exchange of words ended up punching William Hutcheson, the conservative leader of carpenters' union, who was a vigorous

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460 Zieger 1988, 78-83.

461 Zieger 1988, 79.

opponent of industrial unionism.<sup>462</sup> After the convention Lewis called together a meeting of eight leaders of the AFL's industrial unions. The group decided to form a new group within the AFL in order to carry on the fight for industrial organizing. The creation of the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) was announced in November 1935.<sup>463</sup>

Organizing the steel workers was one of Lewis's main aspirations, as steel industry was closely linked to mining, Lewis's own industry. During the first half of 1936 Lewis was able to press the AA into joining the CIO. The AA became a part of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC), which was formed in the summer of 1936. Lewis appointed his long-time ally from the miners' union, Philip Murray, to lead the new organization. SWOC started a broad organizing campaign with some 200 organizers gathering members for the new union. Lewis's prominent manoeuvres enraged AFL leader William Green, and in November 1936 AFL suspended the ten unions that belonged to the CIO.

The new organization grew only slowly. During its first three months only around 15 000 steel workers – around three percent of almost all 500 000 workers in the industry – had joined SWOC.<sup>464</sup> This, however, did not discourage John L. Lewis, as the first months of 1937 were highly successful for him. The United Automobile Workers (UAW) had started a major sit-down strike at the General Motors' factory in Flint, Michigan in December demanding union recognition. The police attempted to evict the workers from the occupied plant, but the strikers were able to keep the police out by turning fire hoses on them and by pelting them with car parts. The UAW had started the strike independently without CIO assistance, but as the strike continued, John L. Lewis began representing the strikers in negotiations with the employer. Finally in mid-February, after a six-week strike, General Motors – the country's largest automaker – agreed to recognize the UAW. It was a great victory for Lewis as other major automakers signed agreements with the UAW in the following months and the CIO membership swelled.

Another major success followed shortly. The CIO's victory over General Motors had convinced the directors of United States Steel Corporation, the country's leading steelmaker with more than 220 000 employees, to compromise with the workers. Lewis began negotiations with U.S. Steel's director Myron C. Taylor in January and in late February the two leaders reached an agreement that granted a modest wage increase, 40-hour week, overtime compensations, grievance procedure and – most importantly – recognition of the union. The historical agreement came as a surprise since U.S. Steel had until then been a steadfast nonunion company. GM's strike and the subsequent agreement surely affected Taylor's thinking, but his unexpected decision has also been explained by U.S. Steel's good financial situation and the current political atmosphere after Roosevelt's and New Deal Democrats' landslide election victories.<sup>465</sup>

After the U.S. Steel agreement, SWOC signed tens of contracts with all kinds of metal industry companies. Before the U.S. Steel agreement the union had signed only about half a dozen agreements, but in mid-May the figure was already 110 contracts with companies

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462 For more detailed description of this famous incident, see Zieger 1988, 82-83.

463 Zieger 1988, 83-84.

464 Zieger 1995, 55.

465 Galenson 1960, 93-95.

employing about 300 000 workers.<sup>466</sup> One of its greatest successes came about in May, when Jones & Laughlin – the fourth biggest steel producer in the country – signed a contract with the union after a brief, two-day strike. Just like U.S. Steel, Jones & Laughlin had been known for its harsh anti-union policy especially in its company-owned mill town Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, where 10 000 steel workers led their lives under strict company rule with limited freedoms of speech and assembly.<sup>467</sup>

As the summer of 1937 approached, SWOC seemed to be on its way to unionizing all major steel companies. Lewis and Murray were also encouraged by Roosevelt landslide victory in the recent presidential election, especially since the CIO had supported Roosevelt's campaign with vast sums and Lewis had personally campaigned for the president's re-election.<sup>468</sup> Lewis and Murray interpreted the election results as an endorsement for the CIO's efforts to organize industrial workers and believed that New Deal -minded officials in National Labor Relations Board and Department of Labor – or even in the White House – could help them out if needed. Help might be needed, as the many of the so-called Little Steel companies – including Republic Steel, Youngstown Sheet & Tube, Inland Steel and Bethlehem Steel<sup>469</sup> – which had not yet signed an agreement with SWOC, were strongly anti-union.

### 2.5.3. Eager organizers

By the spring of 1937 Gus Hall – as Arvo Halberg was now known – was already an experienced steel worker. He had worked in both Republic Steel and Youngstown Sheet & Tube, but had been fired from both for trying to organize employees. After being kicked out of Youngstown Sheet & Tube, Hall joined the full-time staff of Steel Workers Organizing Committee.<sup>470</sup> According to SWOC's office secretary Sally Morillas – who later worked as Hall's own secretary – Hall was a socially gifted and well-liked organizer:

Gus was considered by each individual as a personal friend. As such he won steel workers' confidence in the difficult days when filling out a union organizing drive card meant the possible loss of a job, the mortgaged house and physical attacks

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466 Bernstein 1970, 473-474. According to Vincent D. Sweeney, the agreement with U.S. Steel "broke the dam": 35 000 steel workers signed union cards in the ten days following March 2, 1937, when the deal with U. S. Steel was announced. See Sweeney 1956, 29.

467 Bernstein 1970, 474-475 and Galenson 1960, 97-98. Tom Girdler, the president of Republic Steel had worked as Jones & Laughlin's general superintendent in Aliquippa. In his autobiography, he admits maintaining a "benevolent dictatorship" in the steel mill town in the 1920s. See Girdler 1943, 171-177 and Sofchalk 1961, 21-23.

468 According to Dubofsky and Van Tine, the UMW spent almost \$600 000 – an unprecedented sum – to re-elect the president, which made Lewis expect "a substantial return" for the investment. See Dubofsky & Van Tine 1986, 184.

469 These large companies were collectively named Little Steel in order to distinguish them from the dominant company in the industry, the U.S. Steel Corporation.

470 *The Vindicator*, August 2, 1987 and Hall 1976, 4. At Republic Steel's Truscon plant Hall's task was to weld prison gates. Later on, Hall tells us in his autobiographical writings, as he often was locked behind the bars, he always looked for the gates he had welded, but he never could find any. See Hall 1987, 342.

by goons. But when I watched him in the office talking to the steel workers and listening to the bantering, laughing and horsing around, I knew this guy will walk out of the office with a union card in his pocket and a hearty handshake from Gus accompanied by a pleasant grin of satisfaction on the part of both.<sup>471</sup>

Hall was assigned to work as a SWOC leader in the Warren-Niles area, which consists of two smaller towns located right next to Youngstown. Hall's assignment to Warren may partly be due to the town's once vital Finnish working-class population. During the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Warren – along with Cleveland, Ashtabula and Conneaut – was one of the main concentrations of Finnish American population in Ohio. According to the local newspaper, the town of 40 000 people had about 2 000 Finnish American inhabitants in the late 1920s.<sup>472</sup>

Like all other Finnish American communities, Warren also had a workers' association, which in Warren's case had been founded in 1912. And like in most other towns, the Warren Finns built themselves a workers' hall, in which a restaurant served Finnish dishes and in which theater and music performances, dances and political discussions were arranged. Over the decades the association experienced several splits as communists, socialists and Wobblies all wanted to have their own associations. In the early 1920s the Finnish American left-wing associations in Warren had more than 200 members, but 15 years later the number had dropped to a mere 35. The sharp drop can be partly explained by Karelian Fever as many Finnish American communists in Ohio traveled to the Soviet Union to build their dream society there in the early 1930s. Not all travelled that far, though. As the Great Depression severely hit Mahoning Valley's steel industry, many Finnish Americans – some blacklisted due to their union activism – moved to Baltimore and other cities where work was available. Another reason for the sharp drop was the fact that second-generation Finnish Americans were not at all interested in left-wing activism, so the associations aged and withered away along with their first-generation members.<sup>473</sup>

Most of SWOC's organizers came from Lewis's and Murray's miners' union UMW, but Hall was not the only Communist organizer in SWOC's ranks. According to CPUSA leader William Z. Foster, almost one third of the 200 organizers were Communists. The formation of SWOC was of special interest to Foster, who had been a leader in the unsuccessful steel strike of 1919. As soon as the SWOC campaign began, the CPUSA set up a special Steel Organizing Committee and ordered all party members to aid SWOC in every possible way. In Ohio's steel areas, the entire staffs of the party and the Young Communist League were ordered into SWOC. In addition to Hall, among the 60 Communist organizers were for example John Steuben, who was assigned to Youngstown, and Ben Carreathers, who

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471 Quoted in Brandt 1981, 4.

472 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, October 26, 1927.

473 Hannula 1991, 110-112; *Neljäkymmentä vuotta*, 161-163; Kolehmainen 1977, 188-212 and Hall 1995, 4. Although the Finnish participation in Warren's leftist organizations decreased over the years, the legacy of the Finnish American labor activists still lived on in the 1990s. In a 1995 steelworkers' demonstration one of the demonstrators participated by carrying a Finnish flag. According to him, it was a "tribute to the many Finns who pioneered in early union battles in Warren and to Gus Hall, the Finnish-American chairman of the Communist Party USA, who led the 1937 strike". According to another demonstrating steelworker Mark Kujala – Kujala is a typical Finnish name – Gus Hall was a "living legend". See *People's Weekly World*, September 9, 1995.

was organizing the African American steel workers in Pittsburgh. In addition to them, Bill Gebert was working in SWOC's foreign-language organizing team.<sup>474</sup>

Communists served not only as grass-roots organizers but also in SWOC's and CIO's top leadership. Lewis appointed Lee Pressman, a Harvard-educated lawyer who had been a CPUSA member briefly in the mid-thirties, as SWOC's legal counsel in June 1936. In 1938, Pressman became the legal counsel of the whole CIO, thus becoming one of most central figures in the organization. In addition to Pressman, also Len De Caux rose to an important position in the CIO. British-born De Caux, who had been a member in both British and American Communist Parties, worked as a labor journalist before Lewis hired him as publicity director of the CIO in 1935.<sup>475</sup>

David J. McDonald, SWOC's secretary-treasurer in 1937 and later the president of USWA, claims in his memoirs that the communists had secretly infiltrated the union organization before the summer of 1937. According to McDonald, for example Bill Gebert and Gus Hall had infiltrated the organization but were kicked out as soon as the SWOC leaders learned about their political leanings.<sup>476</sup> Such a claim seems surprising in light of the fact that Gus Hall had been a prominent communist activist in Youngstown for some years before the strike and also Gebert had been a visible member of the CPUSA.<sup>477</sup> Having been born in Poland in 1895 and immigrated to the United States as a teenager, Gebert was a founding member of the CPUSA. He worked as a journalist and a leader in the Polish-language Communist organizations and later as a district organizer in the CPUSA's Chicago and Pittsburgh districts.<sup>478</sup>

According to William Z. Foster and other left-wing writers, SWOC leaders like John L. Lewis and Phil Murray were well aware of the role that the communists played in the organization.<sup>479</sup> Labor historians seem to agree with Foster. According to Harvey A. Levenstein, for example, Lewis deliberately hired communists because the staff of his United Mine Workers was limited in quality as well as in numbers. Communists were known to be eager and skilled organizers so Lewis – a staunch anti-communist – cynically took advantage of them. When one of his colleagues warned him of communists' growing position within the CIO, Lewis assured him that hiring communists was only a temporary arrangement and “when it gets too difficult, we'll get rid of them”.<sup>480</sup> Lewis's attitude is

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474 Foster 1968, 349; Levenstein 1981, 49-50 and Shields 1986, 216-222.

475 Levenstein 1981, 46-48 and *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 318-319.

476 McDonald 1969, 97-98. According to McDonald, he found out about Gebert's CPUSA membership from a friend in FBI. McDonald claims to have made a middle-of-the-night exploration in Gebert's office, found his a notebook of his contacts within the SWOC and copied them down. One of those names was Gus Hall.

477 According to Shields, Phil Murray was well aware of Gebert's CPUSA membership as Gebert was his “chief Party contact”. See Shields 1986, 217.

478 Gebert led indeed a colorful life, as after WWII he was deported back to Poland where he continued his careers in labor movement and journalism, later becoming a high-ranked diplomat serving as Poland's ambassador in Turkey. See Shields 1986, 221-222.

479 Foster 1968, 349 and Gordon 1982, 180-182. CIO official James B. Carey agrees with Foster and Gordon. According to Carey, Lewis desperately needed trained organizers in the early days of the CIO, and the “seasoned Stalinists” of the CPUSA were often “hot-shot labor salesmen”. Carey is quoted in Cochran 1977, 98.

480 Levenstein 1981, 48. Also when Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins warned Lewis about Lee

well reflected by the often-repeated anecdote about Lewis who, when asked about the communists role in the union, is claimed to have replied “Who gets the bird, the hunter or the dog?”<sup>481</sup>

The CPUSA members were not the only radicals who were used by Lewis and his associates:

At the same time, Lewis knew that to build a steelworkers union, he needed shrewd, intelligent and experienced organizers. The ranks of the UMW provided some, of course, but many of the best organizers available were socialists, communists and veterans of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Lewis did not hesitate to sign them on. Here were men (Lewis and his cohorts regarded the hard and dangerous work of organizing to be a male preserve) steeled in the fires of industrial combat. [...] The Communist party, the Socialist party, the IWW and other anti-capitalist groups provided a rich education in organizing, public speaking, editorial and publicity work and in other skills needed by a union representative. One estimate held that of the 250 or so organizers recruited by SWOC, nearly 100 came out of these parties and groups.<sup>482</sup>

According to Levenstein, getting rid of communists was easy in SWOC, which was built from the top down, with power firmly concentrated at the top. SWOC organizers were all hired and paid by the head office. The communists’ influence was also cut by moving them to another area after they had organized a local. Thus communist organizer could not stay around to entice leaders of the new locals to join the Communist Party.<sup>483</sup>

In light of the above-cited comments, it indeed seems that the SWOC leaders were knowingly taking advantage of the eager organizers that the CPUSA was filled with. John L. Lewis, who mainly supported Republican presidential candidates, and Phil Murray, a devout Catholic, surely did not cherish the idea of having communists in their union. However, skilled and ardent organizers were not easy to find, so SWOC leaders were tempted to brush aside their awkward political orientation, at least for time being.

#### **2.5.4. Shutting a mill “tighter than a drum”**

As mentioned above, the strongly anti-union Little Steel companies formed a serious stumbling block for SWOC’s plans to unionize the whole steel industry. Unlike Jones & Laughlin, other Little Steel companies were willing to fight SWOC and defend their traditional open-shop policy. The companies prepared for the worst as they bought large

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Pressman being a communist, Lewis replied that he was aware of this, but was only using Pressman and was going to “shake him out” when he no longer wanted his services. See Levenstein 1981, 47.

481 See, for example, Cochran 1977, 97; Levenstein 1981, 36; Zieger 1988, 101 and Schrecker 1998, 28.

482 Zieger 1988, 100-101. Zieger’s view is supported by another Lewis biographer Saul D. Alinsky. According to him, Lewis had noticed that in United Auto Workers communists had been tireless union builders which also he could utilize. In Alinsky’s opinion, “the Communists worked indefatigably, with no job being too menial or unimportant”. The communists “literally poured themselves into their assignments” and thus made a major contribution to the organization of the CIO. See Alinsky 1970, 152-155.

483 Levenstein 1981, 51. See also Brody 1987, 28.

amounts of small arms and tear gas as the summer drew closer. For example, Republic Steel – led by the fervently anti-union Tom Girdler – bought munitions for almost \$50 000 in May 1937.<sup>484</sup>

What explains the staunch anti-unionism of Tom Girdler and his associates? According to Michael Speer, one explanatory factor in Girdler’s case was his high level of ambition:

He hoped to make the Republic Steel Corporation so large that it would be able to rival U.S. Steel. For his projected merger schemes and for maintenance of cheap production, he absolutely needed a docile labor force. Commitment to a signed contract would not allow him sufficient room for economic maneuvering.<sup>485</sup>

The Little Steel leaders’ motivation was, of course, also ideological. They shared the fear of many business leaders in the United States in the 1930s that Roosevelt’s New Dealers and their radical ideas were eventually going to destroy – or at least seriously damage – the traditional American economic system based on laissez-faire capitalism. The CIO was seen as a harbinger of this development and was therefore so strongly opposed. Business leaders and right-wing politicians did not hesitate to stamp out the CIO as a “red menace”, a violent and coercive communist organization.<sup>486</sup> Girdler – who was the leading figure among the Little Steel directors – was famous for announcing that he would rather grow apples for the rest of his life than sign an agreement with a union.<sup>487</sup> According to Donald G. Sofchalk, Girdler was indeed a product of liberal capitalism:

Above all, he was an individualist par excellence who harbored an honest nostalgia for the days when one could make steel or anything else without worrying about interference from a prying government or an irresponsible union.<sup>488</sup>

On the other hand, Little Steel leaders – informed by their numerous spies in the union – were well aware of the unsteady economic situation in SWOC and reasoned that by winning the strike they could not only beat SWOC but also unbalance the whole CIO.

SWOC’s financial position indeed was not as strong as one would have thought. Although its membership had risen rapidly, its financial situation was weak as it had borrowed at least \$1.5 million to finance the unionizing drive and it had had problems gathering dues from its members. Union support on Little Steel plants was patchy, and companies

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484 Bernstein 1970, 482. By May 25, Republic’s Police Department of 370 men had 552 pistols, 64 rifles, 245 shotguns, 143 gas guns and 2 707 gas grenades at hand. Youngstown Sheet & Tube’s Youngstown district had acquired 453 revolvers, 369 rifles, 190 shotguns and 8 machine guns. See Sweeney 1956, 33-34.

485 Speer 1969, 275-276.

486 Speer 1969, 276 & 284-285.

487 Girdler originally said in a speech in a meeting of American Iron & Steel Institute in May 1934 that “I have a little farm with a few apple trees, and before spending the rest of my life dealing with John Lewis I am going to raise apples and potatoes”. See Sofchalk 1961, 29.

488 Sofchalk 1961, 19. According to Sofchalk, Girdler was “not a personality that inspired widespread friendship, admiration or consideration. His sardonic wit, his irascible disposition and his celebrated ability to overwhelm opponents with invective and profanity were perhaps of deeper flaws in his character and outlook.” John L. Lewis’s characterization was not any better: “Tom Girdler is a heavily armed monomaniac with murderous tendencies, who has gone berserk. Potter and Grace have turned him loose upon the unarmed steel workers. Girdler should be restrained and disarmed by the government before he turns the steel districts into bloody shambles and looses all the pent up forces of human passion.” See Sofchalk 1961, 19 & 249.



had infiltrated many union locals with their spies. SWOC's organization was new and inexperienced and there were few indigenous steel workers in the organization, as many of the organizers were outsiders coming from the miners' union or elsewhere.<sup>489</sup>

In order to counter SWOC's unionizing efforts, Little Steel companies had raised their wages, similar to what the U.S. Steel had done after their agreement. The companies' position was strong. In employer-dominated steel towns the companies controlled the newspapers, local government and law enforcement. They hired experienced public relations firms like Hill & Knowlton to assist them. In May Tom Girdler bought more than 40 000 copies of a pamphlet entitled *Join the CIO and Help Build a Soviet America*. In addition to all this, new orders at the steel mills declined sharply in May which made it easier for employers to fight unions.<sup>490</sup>

Despite SWOC's weak position, the strike sentiment was strong among the activists as the union's "war council" met in Youngstown in the afternoon of May 26, 1937. Representatives from almost all plants of Inland Steel, Republic Steel and Youngstown Sheet & Tube were present. According to the reports of the organizers the SWOC membership levels varied widely between the plants. Many plants had membership levels between 65 to 95 percent, other were said to be about fifty-fifty. Republic Steel's Warren plant was one of the plants with weakest membership levels.<sup>491</sup>

The atmosphere at the meeting was tense and heated as the plants in Canton and Massillon were already striking as a protest to employer's lockouts earlier in May. Economic historian Robert R. R. Brooks writes:

The feeling of the delegates from the striking lodges was contagious. A somewhat overenthusiastic consensus was expressed by a Youngstown delegate who reported "We've had a hell of a time holding the men in. If I go back without word to go out at eleven o'clock tonight, I will get my throat cut." At 5:10 P.M. Delegate Walker, Lodge 1098 of Youngstown, moved that the strike be called for eleven o'clock that night. The motion was seconded by Delegate Halvechs, Lodge 1126, and unanimously carried. Within three days the strike was almost completely effective against all three companies. About eighty thousand men were affected.<sup>492</sup>

Associated Press reporters were reporting from the strike scenes from the very first moments of the walkout:

Picket lines took form in the Mahoning Valley district early tonight. Union sound trucks cruised through industrial areas with loud speaker equipment carrying word of the scheduled strike and notifying members of different locals where to report for picket assignments. Canteens to serve pickets with coffee and doughnuts were set up in union halls near the mills.

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489 Zieger 1995, 61.

490 Zieger 1995, 61 and Bernstein 1970, 482-483.

491 Brooks 1940, 137.

492 Brooks 1940, 137-138. Republic Steel had around 46 000 employees, Youngstown Sheet & Tube 23 000 and Inland Steel 11 000. According to an Associated Press report the strike affected 34 plants in five states, in Ohio, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Indiana and New York. The aggregate output of these plants equaled 16 percent of the total output of the American steel industry. See Brooks 1940, 134 and *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, May 27, 1937.

John Mayo, sub-regional SWOC director, said the union would have 8 000 or more pickets operating in the district, 2 000 on each four shifts of six hours each.

Observers estimated 500 men had assembled before five entrances to Republic's nearby Warren unit, where between 5 500 and 6 000 are employed. They utilized railroad ties found in the vicinity to erect barriers approximately five feet high before each entrance.

"We'll shut this mill down tighter than a drum", declared Gus Hall, SWOC field representative, "and we'll keep it down until a contract is signed."<sup>493</sup>

The strike had a shocking start, as on the fourth day of the strike, May 30, a horrifying incident later known as the Memorial Day Massacre took place in Chicago. The local SWOC leaders had organized a demonstration on Memorial Day to protest the police actions against union picketers at Republic Steel's South Chicago plant. Chicago police and the company guards had skirmished with SWOC pickets regularly from the first day of the strike. As the demonstrators – a crowd of 1 000 to 2 500 people, including many women and children – reached the police line of around 250 policemen near the mill, the demonstrators asked to be permitted to proceed to the mill gate in order to picket there. The police refused to allow them to advance any further. A melee broke out and the police opened fire at the demonstrators, killing ten people and wounding thirty. In addition to this, twenty-eight protesters received hospital treatment after being beaten by the police. Although the police claimed that the demonstrators had guns, no such evidence was found and no policemen suffered wounds from gunshots. Of the ten killed protesters, seven received bullets in the back, three in the side.<sup>494</sup>

Although the ghastly massacre increased the pro-union sympathy around the country, it did not give SWOC the moral advantage over the steel companies that might have led to a strike victory. Rather vice versa: many people say the massacre was a consequence of anarchism and chaos induced by the CIO. As Michael Speer writes, "after the violence on Memorial Day, the companies were able to capitalize on the American myths of law and order, the right-to-work, the sanctity of private property, and the chronic American fear of Communist subversion."<sup>495</sup> The steel companies stubbornly stuck to their refusal to negotiate and their open-shop principles. In some cities like Cleveland the unions had managed to close the striking mills, but in others the operations continued, at least partially.

One of the mills where the operations continued was Warren where Gus Hall was the local SWOC leader. The large and rambling Republic Steel mill just outside the city limits employed about 6 000 workers, of whom many were first- or second-generation immigrants from Italy or Eastern Europe. Many of the immigrant workers lived close to the mill whereas the American-born workers and the middle class lived on the other side of Mahoning River which runs through the town. The majority of the SWOC membership were immigrants whereas many of the American-born steel mill employees – of whom many were foremen or worked in better-paid jobs at the mill – opposed the strike.<sup>496</sup>

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493 *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, May 27, 1937.

494 A more thorough account of the Memorial Day Massacre can be found in Sofchalk 1961, 160-184 and Bernstein 1970, 485-490.

495 Speer 1969, 278-279.

496 Sofchalk 1961, 152-153.

The gap between the two parts of the town could be seen already during the very first night of the strike. Thousands of workers gathered on the street in front of the plant with their wives and children to mark the beginning of the strike. Meanwhile on the other side of the Mahoning River, a group of prominent business and professional people met at the Chamber of Commerce and arranged to have the streets around the mill blocked off and the liquor stores closed.<sup>497</sup>

As mentioned earlier, in Warren the SWOC membership had remained low compared to most other striking mills. Between one and two thousand steel workers had remained inside the massive plant as the strike began. As the pickets surrounded the plant and stopped all deliveries, feeding the workers became a major challenge for Republic Steel. Pickets stopped rail deliveries to the plant by piling timber on the railroad tracks. The company tried to send food in through U.S. Mail on May 28, but the pickets did not let the mail trucks through to the plant. Meanwhile U.S. Mail had decided not to get involved in strike battles by deciding that it would only deliver “regular” mail to the plants surrounded by pickets.<sup>498</sup> U.S. Mail’s decision attracted wide-spread attention and angered many people who saw that with such a decision the postal officials were supporting the strikers. So severe was the disagreement that the issue was examined thoroughly in a congressional postal committee.<sup>499</sup>

As Republic Steel had no other choice for feeding the workers, the company began purchasing airplanes on May 29. The large parking lot within Warren mill area was hastily converted into a landing strip. On May 30 the company planes started delivering food and other supplies to the Warren plant from Cleveland. According to Tom Girdler, Republic Steel had to acquire an eleven-plane fleet to feed the workers at the surrounded plants. The company leased an old airfield in Cleveland to be able to maintain a continuous airlift to its plants.<sup>500</sup> The same planes delivered supplies also to Republic Steel’s plant in Niles. There, however, was no room for a landing strip at the mill, so the deliveries had to be dropped from a low-flying airplane. In addition to food, the planes delivered clothing, bedclothes, medicines, newspapers and magazines and even films for the surrounded workers. Also some workers flew to the Warren plant from Cleveland. Operating in such exceptional circumstances was not easy for the pilots and two of the planes crashed as they were landing to the plant. According to Girdler, the planes delivered almost 134 000 pounds of supplies to the Warren plant.<sup>501</sup>

The strikers did not remain idle as Republic Steel started its airlift, as Gus Hall tells us:

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497 Sofchalk 1961, 153.

498 Sofchalk 1961, 153-155. According to Tom Girdler, 2 300 men remained inside Republic Steel’s Warren plant area. See Girdler 1943, 285.

499 Sofchalk 1961, 194-201 & 264-270 and Speer 1969, 282-283.

500 The operation of the airfield in Cleveland caused a stir in the city as some pro-labor politicians wanted to prohibit Republic Steel’s food flights. Residents living near the airport complained about the noise and safety risks the frequent and heavily loaded flights caused. The airfield got, however, an operating permit from the city authorities. See *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 3, 1937; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 5, 1937; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 8, 1937.

501 Sofchalk 1961, 155; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 2, 1937; *Youngstown Vindicator*, June 2, 1937 and Girdler 1943, 302-304. 134 000 pounds is about 60 tons of supplies.

But Republic underestimated the determination and ingenuity of the workers. [...] Many of them were deer hunters, so they got out their guns and placed themselves in the swamps waiting for the planes to come. They shot at the scab planes enough so that two of them crashed upon landing inside of the plant. This brought Republic's scab flights to an end.<sup>502</sup>

The firing was sometimes heavy. One plane was reported to have 20 bullet holes in it after landing to Warren.<sup>503</sup> According to Hall, the shooting of the planes was a "workers' initiative", which later was also used in another battle against American capitalism:

Later on, the Vietnamese people developed this tactic into a science: with the concentration of small rifle fire on fast planes they brought down many U. S. jets based on this tactic.<sup>504</sup>

During the first days of the strike, local SWOC leaders – including Gus Hall – and company representatives held meetings with town's sheriff in order to produce some kind of mutually acceptable agreement on the conduct of the strike. Company representatives wanted a limitation on the number of pickets as well as free access for food. The union leaders indicated that such an arrangement might be worked out if Republic Steel would disarm its private police forces and refrain from enticing any additional strikebreakers into the plant. These negotiations, however, ended after a few days without results.<sup>505</sup>

SWOC leaders had hoped that the federal government would step in and demand a settlement as the strike went on, but this did not take place. Nor did the Little Steel companies' resistance weaken. On the contrary, the companies stepped up their efforts to win the conflict. The companies followed more or less exactly a strikebreaking plan called the Mohawk Valley formula. The plan had been developed by James Rand Jr., the president of typewriter manufacturer Remington Rand in 1936. The workers of Remington Rand's factory in Mohawk Valley in upstate New York had started a strike in May 1936 which continued until April 1937. President James Rand Jr.'s article on his strikebreaking formula was widely disseminated in pamphlet form by the National Association of Manufacturers.<sup>506</sup>

The main elements of the Mohawk Valley formula were organizing a citizen's committee with the help of local businessmen to oppose the strikers, arranging public mass meetings to support the employer and creating a back-to-work movement in order to demoralize the strikers. The employer should also co-operate closely with the local police and gather an armed volunteer group to intimidate the strikers. The strike leaders should be branded agitators dangerous to law and order. The back-to-work movement should ask for the reopening of the plant, and finally the reopening should be dramatized by arranging a big

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502 Hall 1987, 346-347. According to Donald G. Sofchalk, the flights did not end because of the shooting. On the contrary, the shooting was stopped after SWOC leader Phil Murray had visited Warren. According to *Warren Tribune Chronicle* newspaper, the service flights to the Warren plant ended only on June 24. See Sofchalk 1961, 157 and *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, June 25, 1937.

503 *Youngstown Vindicator*, June 2, 1937.

504 Hall 1987, 347. Another example of "workers' initiative" according to Hall was the street battle between workers and the police during the Minneapolis Teamsters' strike in 1934. See Hall 1987, 348-349.

505 Sofchalk 1961, 156-157.

506 Bernstein 1970, 478; Brooks 1940, 138 and Speer 1969, 276-277.

march in to the plant.<sup>507</sup> Citizen committees were founded in several strike towns including Warren, where the Girdler-financed organization was called the John Q. Public League. As in other towns, the committee called for law and order and armed its members.<sup>508</sup>

On June 11, the majority of the workers in Bethlehem Steel's large plant in Johnstown, Pennsylvania walked out and joined the strike. Bethlehem Steel was by far the largest of the so-called Little Steel companies with its 80 000 employees. The Johnstown plant employed about 15 000 workers of which 10 000 to 12 000 joined the strike.<sup>509</sup>

The spreading of the strike did not, however, turn the heads of the employers who remained staunchly against union recognition. Their attitude seemed to bear fruit as the Republic Steel's plant in Chicago – at which the Memorial Day Massacre had taken place two weeks earlier – resumed normal operation in mid-June.<sup>510</sup> In Warren the firm grip of the strikers had also begun to slip. In mid-June Republic Steel was able to deliver a few trainloads of raw materials to the plant with the help of heavily armed railway police. These deliveries were followed by the destruction of railway tracks which, according to Republic Steel, again proved that the strikers were defying “all law and decency”.<sup>511</sup>

As most of the striking plants were in Ohio, the state governor Martin L. Davey tried desperately to mediate in the dispute, but Tom Girdler and Frank Purnell, the president of Youngstown Sheet & Tube, completely refused to cooperate. Worried about the tense situation in his state, Davey finally wired President Roosevelt on June 16, requesting him to intervene in the conflict. On June 17 Roosevelt issued an executive order creating a Federal Steel Mediation Board to settle the dispute. On the same day, Roosevelt called Girdler and asked him to cooperate with the Board and “really work towards a settlement”.<sup>512</sup>

There was indeed need for a mediation board, because on June 19 another lethal shooting incident took place, this time in Youngstown where two men were killed. Gus Hall reported the incident to Spain in a letter to John Gates, who – before joining the international volunteer troops in Spain in early 1937 – had for years worked as an YCL organizer in Warren and Youngstown, and had lived in the same boarding house with Hall in Youngstown:

He [Hall] wrote that a strike had broken out in Little Steel – actually huge steel companies that are little only alongside US Steel. The walkout was solid, but several workers had been killed on a certain day on the picket line in Youngstown. That day

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507 Bernstein 1970, 478-479. According to James L. Baughman, the Mohawk Valley formula did not determine the outcome of the Little Steel Strike – as some historians have maintained – because the organizations created by the employers remained small and unimportant. Baughman argues that labor historians have exaggerated the role of the Mohawk Valley formula in their studies concerning Little Steel Strike. See Baughman 1978, 188-190.

508 Bernstein 1970, 484. According to James L. Baughman, Warren's John Q. Public League remained very small and its money raising campaigns drew few donors and miniscule funds. See Baughman 1978, 183.

509 Galenson 1960, 105. Also National Steel, Wheeling Steel, Armco Steel and Crucible Steel were so-called Little Steel companies, but their plants were not included in the strike, largely due to low SWOC membership levels.

510 Galenson 1960, 103.

511 Sofchalk 1961, 255.

512 Bernstein 1970, 494.

had been a particularly quiet one in Spain: it was evidently more dangerous to be a striking steel worker back at home than a soldier in the Spanish war.<sup>513</sup>

Tom Girdler had little respect for the presidential intervention. On June 21, together with Purnell he announced that Republic Steel and Youngstown Sheet & Tube were going to reopen their plants the next morning. The announcement was a shock for governor Davey as the reopening would almost certainly lead to serious violence. The atmosphere was indeed fraught, as there had been a shoot-out in Youngstown on June 19 where two strikers had been killed. Late in the evening of June 21, President Roosevelt dispatched telegrams to Girdler and Purnell, urging them in the interest of public safety not to reopen their mills the next morning. As the steel directors did not reply, governor Davey had no choice but to declare martial law and send National Guard troops to Youngstown and the surrounding towns. He also ordered a status quo until the mediation board had come to a conclusion, thus putting a stop to the steel companies' reopening plans.<sup>514</sup>

Meanwhile in Warren, the atmosphere became even more fraught as the local Court of Common Pleas on June 21 issued an injunction which forbade picketers from carrying weapons of any kind and from obstructing streets and interfering with rail traffic. In addition to this, the amount of pickets allowed at the plant gates was reduced sharply. According to newspaper reports, the injunction only infuriated the strikers and increased the length of picket lines.<sup>515</sup>

The injunction was indeed harsh from the strikers' point of view. In order to protest against the injunction, Warren's CIO leaders – including Gus Hall – decided on June 23 to call a general sympathy strike of all CIO members in Warren and Niles. As a consequence, several thousand workers walked off their jobs and paraded through Warren to support the steel workers. The general strike was, however, called off the next day. According to Sofchalk, it is highly probable that Gus Hall and his associates had to abandon the strike after receiving orders from the top leaders of SWOC who did not want to complicate the union's position in the mediation board negotiations.<sup>516</sup>

Also on June 24, the mediation board set up by Roosevelt suggested a federally controlled voting at the striking plants on an agreement similar to the U. S. Steel contract that had been approved in March. Not surprisingly, the employers bluntly rejected the proposal. As the unsuccessful mediation had now come to an end, governor Davey ordered the National Guard troops to protect the steel workers who wanted to return to work. Girdler and Purnell could now reopen their plants.<sup>517</sup>

On June 25 Phil Murray, who was about to experience a bitter defeat, implored Roosevelt to intervene to save the collapsing strike, but the president was already thoroughly disgusted by the messy situation. His advisers strongly warned the president not to get involved in

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513 Gates 1958, 43. In 1956 Gates became the leading dissident in the CPUSA, left the party and was heavily criticized by those who remained.

514 Bernstein 1970, 494-495.

515 Sofchalk 1961, 335.

516 Sofchalk 1961, 336-337. According to John Steuben, 6 000 workers walked out to support the steel strikers in the action led by Gus Hall. See Steuben 1950, 156.

517 Bernstein 1970, 496; *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, June 25, 1937.

a dangerous situation.<sup>518</sup> In a press conference on June 29 the president commented on the dispute by quoting a famous line in *Romeo and Juliet*: “A plague on both your houses.” Such a comment angered Lewis bitterly, and the Republican labor leader who in 1936 had exceptionally supported Roosevelt in the presidential election, became his fierce opponent.<sup>519</sup>

### 2.5.5. Explosions in Ohio summer night

In the night between June 24 and June 25 – shortly after governor Davey had ordered National Guard troops to protect the steel workers returning to work – an incident took place, which made Gus Hall a notorious celebrity and a household name at least in Ohio, if not nationally. Although there were no serious casualties and no real damage to property, Hall’s name and picture were frequently on the front pages of Ohio newspapers and also on the pages national publications like *Time* magazine.<sup>520</sup>

Soon after midnight a loud explosion was heard from the direction of Republic Steel’s Warren plant. The massive blast shook houses a mile away from the scene, and Warren police officials were swamped with telephone inquiries concerning the explosion. The National Guard sent an eight-man patrol car to investigate the explosion.<sup>521</sup>

The patrol car started pursuing a suspect vehicle on the Main Avenue near the steel plant. As the vehicle approached the Main Avenue Bridge which crosses Mahoning River, a bomb was hurled out of the car. The bomb exploded near the escaping car, damaging its windows and lights. The car with three men in it escaped but was found later abandoned nearby. Blood was found in the car, indicating that someone might have been injured in the explosion. Although the bomb exploded about 20 to 30 feet from the patrol wagon, the guardsmen assumed that the bomb was meant to damage them, but Warren police chief B. J. Gillen believed that the bomb was thrown out of the car in order to dump it in Mahoning River. The bomb had accidentally hit the bridge and exploded. Sheriff Roy S. Hardman shared Gillen’s view. CIO’s Ohio leader John Owens claimed, however, that the explosions were carried out by strike breaking agencies in order to terrify people in Warren.<sup>522</sup>

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518 Roosevelt’s close adviser Harry Hopkins told him not to get involved in the unionization of the mass-production industries as it was a “complicated situation, and full of all kinds of dynamite, political as well as social”. See Dubofsky & Van Tine 1986, 231.

519 Bernstein 1970, 496 and Sofchalk 1961, 352-354. Roosevelt’s comment reflects the pressure coming from the largely anti-labor and anti-CIO Congress. Lewis later said about Roosevelt that “it ill behoves one who has supped at labor’s table [...] to curse with equal fervor and fine impartiality both labor and its adversaries when they become locked in deadly embrace”. In the presidential election of 1940 Lewis supported Republican candidate Wendell Willkie. After Willkie lost the election, Lewis resigned from CIO leadership. He was succeeded by Philip Murray whom Lewis had chosen to be his successor. See Speer 1969, 284 and Dubofsky & Van Tine 1986, 241.

520 See *Time*, July 12, 1937.

521 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, June 25, 1937.

522 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, June 25, 1937; *Youngstown Vindicator*, June 25, 1937 and *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, June 25, 1937.

Soon after the explosions, National Guard troopers arrested a man who was suspected to have something to do with the blasts. He was sitting in a car near the explosion sites. Several feet of quick-burning fuse was found in the car. The National Guard started an investigation on the case and within next few days arrested several more men. Meanwhile the workers were gradually returning to the Warren plant after the lost strike. On June 28 the Republic Steel announced that already 4 700 men were working in its plants in Warren and Niles.<sup>523</sup>

On June 29 the authorities announced that they were looking for Gus Hall, who was suspected of being a leader of a bombing plot which aimed to stop the operation of the steel mills in Warren and Niles. According to the confession Arthur Scott – who was one of the arrested men – Hall had plotted to bomb bridges, railroad tracks, steel mills and the homes of non-strikers.<sup>524</sup> Among the targets was also Republic Steel’s storage tank near the Warren plant containing 40,000 gallons of highly volatile fuel. Scott and two other arrested men George Bundas and John Borawiec – all of whom were Warren residents and SWOC strikers – were charged with unlawful possession of explosive devices which could in the worst case send them to prison for 20 years. The authorities said they would throw all available forces into hunting Hall. Nobody seemed to know about his whereabouts. Harry Wines, another member of the executive strike committee, said that Hall had left Warren on business on June 28 and that he was not a fugitive.<sup>525</sup> In Pittsburgh, SWOC leader Phil Murray said that his organization was opposed to violence and destruction of property. According to Murray, his organization was “prepared to join with the proper, unbiased and duly constituted authorities to clear the atmosphere of any misunderstanding”. He also said that he did not know who Gus Hall was.<sup>526</sup>

According to their confessions, Bundas and Borawiec had acquired two and half gallons of nitroglycerine in Oil City, Pennsylvania on June 18. Gus Hall provided the money for purchasing the explosives. The nitroglycerine had been stored in a milk can in CIO headquarters in Warren for several days before the first explosions. Police officers were horrified to hear this as, according to them, two and half gallons of nitroglycerine was “enough explosive to wreck the entire block”. From the headquarters the explosive had been taken to Borawiec’s house where it was bottled, capped and fused.<sup>527</sup>

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523 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, June 25, 1937; *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, June 26, 1937 and *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, June 28, 1937.

524 Arthur Scott’s testimony was later published in *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor 1939*, 12986-13003. Also the testimony of Edward J. Herzog would indicate that Gus Hall was the leader of the bomb ring. Herzog, a former CPUSA member who in 1937 was doing undercover work for the American Legion, testified before Special House Committee on Un-American Activities in November 1938. Due to the nature of the American Legion, however, his testimony has to be read with caution. The testimony is quoted in *Communist Leadership*, 26-27.

525 According to Edward J. Herzog, Gus Hall “blew out of town” as soon as he heard that the bombing ring members had been arrested. See *Communist Leadership*, 27.

526 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, June 29, 1937; *Youngstown Vindicator*, June 29, 1937 and *Cleveland Press*, June 29, 1937.

527 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, June 29, 1937 and *Youngstown Vindicator*, June 30, 1937. The CIO’s Warren headquarters was located on Pine Street not far from the Republic Steel’s plant in a closed Hollycock Gardens nightclub and gambling place, which was owned by notorious Warren gangster Jim Munsene. Only one year earlier a rising star called Perry Como – a son of a near-



Warren was not the only place where bombs were exploding. In Johnstown, Pennsylvania two explosions destroyed the main pipelines feeding water to Bethlehem Steel's Cambria mills. The explosions paralyzed production completely and threw 6 000 men out of work until repairs could be made.<sup>528</sup> In Canton, Ohio a bomb demolished a porch of the home of a steel worker who had been working at the local Republic Steel mill during the strike. Another explosion blew up railroad tracks near Canton.<sup>529</sup>

*Youngstown Vindicator*, the newspaper of Hall's hometown, had difficulties understanding the logic of the bombers in Warren and Johnstown. According to the newspaper, such bombings were indeed a handicap to the steelworkers' union as they aroused the public sentiment against the union:

Perhaps the bombers thought nitroglycerin would be a shortcut to victory. Or is there a small Communist ring in the large mass of the union, more intent on stirring up civil commotion than on winning unionization? At any rate, these men will find dynamiting a shortcut to defeat.<sup>530</sup>

SWOC's legal counsel Lee Pressman arrived to Warren soon after the arrests. He criticized the Warren authorities for securing confessions from Scott, Bundas and Borawiec by "fraud, duress, intimidation and threats by military officers". He and the CIO's Ohio chief John Owens emphasized, however, that "if our pickets are guilty of unlawful action they should be punished". Pressman said they will start a thorough investigation concerning the case. Meanwhile the National Guard destroyed the remaining nitroglycerine by shooting at the containers on a field outside Warren. According to a newspaper report, "holes large enough to hold a small building were torn into the ground".<sup>531</sup>

Hall himself was in Chicago when the Warren authorities announced that they were looking for him. Hall sent a telegram to the Warren police and, through Lee Pressman, made the telegram also available for the press:

I have just read in the Chicago papers that I stand charged there with a serious criminal offense. I have committed no offense. I am returning there today and on my arrival will deliver myself to you, whatever the charge against me.

It is an unadulterated frame-up inspired by Republic Steel and associated companies.<sup>532</sup>

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by town of Canonsburg, Pennsylvania – had been performing at Hollycock Gardens. According to Gus Hall, Jim Munsene had a grudge against steel companies because when he was a boy, a steel company had fired his father. "As a result we had the most elaborate, well-equipped strike headquarters in all of labor history, and it didn't cost us a penny", Hall writes. See Hall 1987, 348 and *Youngstown Vindicator*, December 11, 1940.

528 *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 30, 1937.

529 *Cleveland Press*, June 25, 1937.

530 *Youngstown Vindicator*, June 30, 1937. The newspaper also called for a "prompt cleanup" within CIO's ranks by "the more responsible CIO leaders, backed by the law-abiding elements of its membership", as there are organizers in the union who are "a menace to their own cause and, more importantly, a menace to public order and safety".

531 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, June 30, 1937 and *Western Reserve Democrat*, July 1, 1937. Police had found two quart ginger ale bottles filled with nitroglycerin at Borawiec's home and a quart whisky bottle filled with the explosive on the railroad tracks near the Republic Steel mill. A quart is almost one liter. See *Cleveland Press*, June 29, 1937.

532 *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 1, 1937. CIO's counsel Edward Lamb claimed in his



*26-year-old Gus Hall in Warren, Ohio in July 1937 after he had been arrested as an alleged leader of a bomb ring. As he entered the Warren police headquarters, Hall smiled, posed for the photographers and chatted “cockily” to the reporters, the local newspaper reported.*

Source: Ohio History Connection / Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor

Gus Hall’s colleagues in the CIO did not seem to be assured of his innocence. While Hall was on his way back to Warren from Chicago, John Owens, CIO’s Ohio leader, announced that Hall was expelled from the CIO as “troublesome and undesirable”. He was replaced by Harry Wines<sup>533</sup> and John Grajciar, who were both experienced veterans of the old Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers and had already been leading the strike in Warren alongside Hall. At the same time Owens expelled also Bob Burke<sup>534</sup>, chief

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autobiography that he located where Hall was hiding and persuaded him to return and surrender. See Lamb 1963, 53.

533 Harry Wines seems to have been slightly more easy-going strike leader than Gus Hall. He later recalled that during the strike he maintained “good relationships” with city and county law enforcement agencies. Hall’s relationship with the local sheriff seems to have been a lot more troubled. According to Gus Hall, Warren police chief called him “Public Enemy Number One”. See Baughman 1978, 184 and *People’s Weekly World*, May 31, 1997.

534 Robert Burke had become a celebrity in 1936 as he had been expelled from Columbia University after arranging an anti-Nazi demonstration against Columbia’s participation in the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the University of Heidelberg in Germany. Burke – coming from an Irish-background working-class family in Youngstown – worked for the rest of his life for labor unions in Ohio, New York and California. Burke’s expulsion from Columbia University is studied thoroughly in Norwood 2012. According to Youngstown authorities, he was “the cause of trouble around here”. See *Cleveland Press*, June 11, 1937.

organizer of the Republic Steel plant in Youngstown and John Stevenson<sup>535</sup>, the organizer of Youngstown Sheet & Tube's main plant.<sup>536</sup> According to Sofchalk, the expulsions were a reaction to the fact that "a genuine feeling of hostility toward SWOC was spreading rapidly throughout the general public". The bombings that had occurred in Warren, Canton and Johnstown "made it all the more imperative for the SWOC leadership to publicly disavow the extremist elements". The CIO's leaders seemed to agree with Pennsylvania's pro-labor governor George Earle who said that the CIO had conducted the strike carelessly and that the organization should get rid of the "damned Communists".<sup>537</sup>

As Gus Hall's communist past as prominently featured in Ohio newspapers, local CPUSA chapter decided to send out a press release. The press release, distributed by Phil Bart, Mahoning Valley secretary of the Communist Party, reflects clearly the Popular Front thinking that prevailed in the party after the seventh world congress of the Comintern in 1935:

Of course the Communist Party and its members in the steel mills participated in the drive to organize steel and all other unorganized industries. The Communist Party joins with all democratic forces in the struggle against reactionaries, open shop and Fascism.

Today's Communism is twentieth century Americanism. The American people heard Tom Girdler shout 'Communist' against President Roosevelt in the last election, but the answer of the American people was clear and decisive. Today this same un-American gang shouts 'Communism' against the CIO and SWOC.

There is just as much truth in the present day charge as there was against Roosevelt. A great people's movement uniting labor, storekeepers, middle-class folks, farmers, professionals and all who defend the Americanism of Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln is needed to drive out these would-be imitators of Hitler.<sup>538</sup>

Gus Hall arrived at the Warren police headquarters at noon on July 1, 1937. Hall, who was accompanied by Lee Pressman, was smiling, posing for photographers and chatting "cockily" to reporters, as *Warren Tribune Chronicle* reported. He was arrested and a judge set him a bond of \$50 000. Pressman criticized Hall's massive bond reminding that "a bond in a second degree murder would probably be only about \$10 000". On the same day the police also arrested Sidney Watkins, who was also suspected of being a member in the alleged bombing ring. On July 2, the police arrested Charles Byers who was suspected to

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535 The expelled John Stevenson seems to be John Steuben (1906-1957), who according to CPUSA sources was assigned as a strike leader in Youngstown. According to Tom Girdler, Steuben also used the names Stevenson and Stevens. According to the CIO's treasurer-secretary David J. McDonald, Steuben was a communist "fire-eater" whose antics in Youngstown caused a lot of trouble to CIO leaders. Steuben later wrote a book called *Strike Strategy* (1950) in which he writes in length about the Little Steel Strike. Ukrainian-born Steuben – originally Itzhak Rijock – left the CPUSA in 1957 after Khrushchev's revelations and the Hungarian uprising. See Girdler 1943, 275-276; Steuben 1950, 209-229; *The New York Times*, January 19, 1957; McDonald 1969, 112-117 and *The Cambridge Dictionary of American Biography*, 696.

536 *Kentucky New Era*, July 1, 1937; *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, July 3, 1937 and *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, July 3, 1937. For an example of Burke's and Stevenson's straightforward actions, see Sofchalk 1961, 193-194.

537 Sofchalk 1961, 349-352.

538 *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, July 3, 1937.

have been the driver of the car that was damaged in the blast a week earlier. The seventh defendant Andy Marsh was also arrested in early July.<sup>539</sup>

On July 3 Gus Hall's bond was reduced from \$50 000 to \$20 000. At the same time, the bonds of other arrested men were reduced from \$25 000 to \$10 000.<sup>540</sup> The CIO lawyers had already been protesting against the exceptionally high bonds. According to SWOC's counsel Anthony B. Smith the bonds violated the federal and state constitutions. In Smith's opinion, the purpose of fixing a bond is to permit a man to get out of jail, but "in this case the bond was set for the purpose of keeping them in".<sup>541</sup>

Although the bonds of the defendants were reduced, they remained in custody until July 17 when they were released after obtaining an aggregate bond of \$80 000. Elizabeth Hall's parents Steve and Mary Turner helped Gus Hall in obtaining his bond of \$20 000.<sup>542</sup> Hall was probably happy to get out of the old and decayed Warren prison because he later complained about the deplorable conditions in the prison. According to Hall, rats came directly from the garbage dump through the sewer into the jail. As the rats were big as cats, the prisoners had to assign rat guards during the nights.<sup>543</sup>

Around the same time John Orawiec, the last remaining bombing ring suspect, was caught in Buffalo, Wyoming and was returned to Ohio for a trial. Orawiec was working as a haying hand at a Wyoming ranch when the local sheriff heard "ranch gossip" about a new employee who might have something to do with the Warren bombings.<sup>544</sup>

Meanwhile the strikers were rapidly losing their strike. In Youngstown the workers returned to work within a few days after the plants were opened but in Warren it happened a little slower. However, on July 7 Republic Steel could report that 5 400 men were now working at its plants in Warren and Niles. According to the company, the normal work force of the area's plants was between 6 000 and 7 000. The strike had indeed been lost.<sup>545</sup>

In Massillon and Cleveland the strike continued a little longer but not without bloodshed. In Massillon the tension erupted on July 11 when two strikers were killed in a shoot-out.<sup>546</sup> On July 26, one striker was killed in Cleveland when a car driven by a strikebreaker hit SWOC picket outside a Republic Steel mill.

According to SWOC secretary-treasurer David J. McDonald, the strike was largely lost because of financial reasons. McDonald complains in his autobiography, that the great majority of the tens of thousands of steel workers who joined the union in the spring of

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539 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, July 1, 1937; *Youngstown Vindicator*, July 1, 1937; *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, July 2, 1937 and *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, July 17, 1937. Coincidentally, on July 1 also Gus Hall's wife Elizabeth was arrested in Youngstown, accused of reckless driving. Police reported finding a club in her car. See *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, July 1, 1937.

540 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, July 3, 1937.

541 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, July 3, 1937.

542 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, July 17, 1937.

543 CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 193, folder 15. According to Hall, "no country in the world would tolerate the kind jails we have in the U.S."

544 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, July 20, 1937; *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, July 23, 1937 and *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, July 27, 1937.

545 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, July 7, 1937 and Sofchalk 1961, 347.

546 Sofchalk 1961, 358-360.

1937 ignored their dollar-a-month dues. According to McDonald, SWOC was suddenly “rich in members but starved for funds”. “We needed to set up soup kitchens, and we couldn’t even buy the pots”, he writes.<sup>547</sup> Little Steel companies simply had more staying power:

If an epitaph is ever written for the Little Steel Strike, that would have to be: “We have no money and we’ll have to close down the kitchens.” It was as simple as that. We couldn’t collect dues and we couldn’t get help and we couldn’t keep the kitchens open. So over the months, the men slowly drifted back to work without the recognition they sought and without return on the high price already paid – the months of hunger and privation and the dead and wounded from a dozen different fronts.<sup>548</sup>

### 2.5.6. Bombers on trial

The trial began on July 31 with a surprise. All seven defendants, who had been suspected of being bombing ring members under Gus Hall’s leadership, had so far pleaded not guilty, but now they had changed their minds and pleaded guilty of illegal possession and control of explosives. The men were assisted by a CIO counsel. Hall’s trial was postponed because of the illness of his attorney F. R. Hahn.<sup>549</sup> On August 9 the court handed down its sentences to six of the eight defendants. Scott, Orawiec, Watkins and Byers were sentenced to spend one to 20 years in Ohio State Penitentiary. Judge Lynn Griffith strongly condemned the actions of the four men:

“In your frenzied passion you have violated the law, insulted the dignity and decency of the State of Ohio, endangered lives and property and overwhelmed this peaceable and quiet community by your indefensible course of conduct,” declared Judge Griffith in passing sentence of the four men. [...]

“I do know that no labor union in our land approves or condones the erratic course you have pursued. The objects of a labor union are humanitarian ones: they aim to improve the mental, moral and financial conditions of its members. You do not represent union labor in its struggles and aspirations.”

“Your acts are the offspring of a loathsome fanaticism, bent on mischief and revenge. You represent a wayward and unstable element of society, a miserable remnant of those who believe in revolution, anarchy, discord and hostility to all government, and who believe they can reach their ends by the use of nitroglycerine and other explosives.”<sup>550</sup>

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547 McDonald 1969, 108-112. Not only SWOC was starving for funds, but this was the case with the whole CIO. According to labor historians, CIO spent between June 1936 and September 1937 more than \$1.7 million but collected in dues mere \$300 000. Lewis’s United Mine Workers had provided the CIO almost \$1.25 million. See Dubofsky & Van Tine 1986, 204 and Zieger 1988, 101.

548 McDonald 1969, 118. James L. Baughman agrees with McDonald’s analysis. According to him, the strike was not lost because of the Mohawk Valley formula applied by the steel companies and because of third-party involvement in the strike – as many labor historians claim – but because of SWOC’s weak resources. See Baughman 1978, 188-190.

549 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, July 31, 1937 and *Youngstown Vindicator*, July 31, 1937.

550 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, August 9, 1937.

Bundas and Marsh were placed on parole for the next five years. Judge Griffith said he did not believe that Bundas and Marsh were the real criminals in the case but were “deluded and duped” by others. Also John Borawiec was paroled two days later.

Edward Lamb, the CIO counsel speaking for the sentenced men, emphasized that the six men were “clean-cut American citizens with families” whose actions had not caused damage to anyone.<sup>551</sup> He reminded the court that Republic Steel was violating the law by having in its possession machine guns and other “instruments of murder”.

“They [the defendants] have violated the precept of trade unionism in their conduct but all they are guilty of is being workers and strikers against the most reactionary company in the world,” Lamb declared.<sup>552</sup>

Gus Hall’s trial was supposed to take place in September 1937, but it was postponed several times during the fall, mainly because Hall’s counsel could not attend the court sessions.<sup>553</sup> Meanwhile Hall was working as an organizer for SWOC in New York and for UMW in Upper Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, driving around in a brand new Buick.<sup>554</sup> As the trial was finally about to start in January 1938, an unexpected turn took place. County prosecutor Paul J. Reagen recommended that instead of prosecuting Hall for illegal possession and control of explosives the court accepts Gus Hall’s guilty plea to a lesser charge of malicious destruction. On January 21 the court did as the prosecutor recommended. As a consequence Hall did not receive a prison sentence but was fined \$500.<sup>555</sup>

How come did Reagen end up making such a surprising recommendation? According to him, evidence in the case was so meager that winning the case would have been doubtful. Prosecution’s main witness in the case would have been Arthur Scott, who was the only witness to implicate Hall directly in the case, but he had suddenly decided not to testify in the trial. “I’m taking my rap and I don’t want to send anyone else to the pen”, the prosecutor quoted Scott saying. The statements of the six other men did not definitely tie Hall up in the matter, Reagen said.

“I think that the best interests of the county will be served by the acceptance of the plea,” Reagen continued. “We’ll save the taxpayers the cost of a trial and bring in some revenue.”<sup>556</sup>

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551 Edward Lamb became a well-known labor lawyer in Ohio after he helped the workers to win the Toledo Auto-Lite strike in 1934. He later became a successful businessman and a media millionaire. See *The New York Times*, March 25, 1987.

552 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, August 9, 1937.

553 See *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, August 27, 1937; *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, November 1, 1937; *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, November 4, 1937 and *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, December 13, 1937.

554 Matt and Helvi Savola’s oral history interview transcript, 13; Hall 1972b, 15 and *The Community Dispatch*, July 1999. According to Matt Savola, Hall was driving around in a “John L. Lewis Buick”. The labor leader had acquired a number of Buicks for his organizers and Hall was driving one of them. Matt and Helvi Savola met Hall for the first time in 1937 as Matt Savola was organizing a timber workers’ strike on Michigan’s Upper Peninsula and Helvi Savola worked as his secretary.

555 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, January 22, 1938.

556 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, January 22, 1938. Reagen’s thinking is also unraveled in *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor 1939*, 12809-12810.

Hall's counsel Edward Lamb was surprised of the outcome of the trial. According to him, the outcome "demonstrated the merit of our American judicial system":

Though the employers raged and the newspapers screamed, a left-winger was given a legitimate hearing before an outside judge who seemed to be above pressure.<sup>557</sup>

According to Lamb, also Gus Hall seemed to be surprised of trial's outcome:

Hall admitted to me later that if he had been on the bench – in a trial held in his own "court" – he probably would not have been so lenient with a man accused of transgressing the law. He said flatly that this was a jungle war between two irreconcilable classes and that the end justified the means.<sup>558</sup>

Reagen's decision caused fury among Warren inhabitants, as many of them had considered Hall to be a dangerous individual for the surrounding society. *Warren Tribune Chronicle* received several angry letters from its leaders.<sup>559</sup> In its editorials, the paper also severely criticized Reagen. On its first Hall-related editorial on January 22 the paper proclaimed amazement over four men being sent to a penitentiary because of their participation in the bombing ring, while the ring's alleged leader only got a "slap on the wrist":

The prosecutor, so it is said, informed the court that he had insufficient evidence against Hall. Would not the confessions of his associates have been pretty good evidence?

The law abiding citizens are apt to be indignant at Mr. Reagen for his favor to Gus Hall. They will wonder what kind of justice this is to which Mr. Reagen apparently subscribes.

We are not passing judgment upon the guilt or innocence of Mr. Hall, but in view of the circumstances and in view of the confessions of his associates, it occurs that a jury should have been permitted to do so.<sup>560</sup>

Two days later *Warren Tribune Chronicle* criticized Reagen's decision even more strongly:

Prosecutor Paul J. Reagen of Trumbull County should be in a better position than any outsider to judge the evidence in the case of Gus Hall, Warren strike leader who was implicated in a series of bombings. Yet Mr. Reagen's reduction of the charge against Hall lets the dynamiter off with a penalty shockingly incommensurate with the gravity of his crime.

Four of Hall's associates have been convicted of dynamiting and sent to the penitentiary for one to 20 years. The original charge against Hall, that of criminal possession and use of explosives, was reduced last week to a charge of malicious destruction of property. He pleaded guilty and was fined \$500.

Mr. Reagen explains that his evidence was weak and his witnesses unreliable. It seems that those who worked under Hall in the strike are now unwilling to testify against him. The prosecutor apparently thought it better to accept an outcome which would prove Hall's guilty complicity in the bombings, even though the penalty did not fit the crime, than to risk an acquittal which would let him go

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557 Lamb 1963, 53-54. An outside judge was assigned to the case after a request by Edward Lamb. The trial was presided by Judge Frank F. Cope from nearby town of Carrollton. See *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, January 17, 1937.

558 Lamb 1963, 54.

559 See *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, January 25-28, 1938.

560 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, January 22, 1938.

entirely free. Still, Hall's willingness to plead guilty to the lesser offense indicates that he feared the outcome of a trial on the graver charge. The responsibility for judging the evidence, which Mr. Reagen has assumed, would better have been placed on a jury.<sup>561</sup>

So great was the aggravation among the law-abiding citizens of Warren that the John Q. Public League – the anti-union citizens' committee which had been founded during the previous summer's steel strike – demanded a "complete investigation made of the manner in which the Prosecutor's Office has handled this important case". The league published a newspaper advertisement in order to gather funds for an investigation.<sup>562</sup> Paul J. Reagen welcomed the investigation but said that John Q. Public League would not be the proper party to conduct the probe. Instead he suggested that the investigation should be conducted by a three-man group consisting of *Warren Tribune Chronicle's* editor, Republic Steel's legal counsel and a Warren attorney. Reagen again defended his decision regarding Gus Hall, saying that it was "not only the best possible solution for the protection of the interests of Trumbull County, but the only course under the circumstances":

I am unable to understand how it will be in the public interest of this community to further conduct a discussion of the unwholesome controversy arising out of the recent strike. Certainly the public welfare demands that good will and co-operation again be established among the people of Warren. This cannot be accomplished by forever keeping alive the issues and fortunate incidents arising out of the tremendous and unprecedented industrial controversy which occurred last summer.<sup>563</sup>

Nothing seems to have come out of John Q. Public League's demand for an investigation on the Gus Hall case. *Warren Tribune Chronicle* announced the case closed in its editorial on February 3, 1938. The newspaper had a clear idea on who was the winner and who was the loser in the court case:

But the Hall case is closed, so far as Mr. Hall is concerned. No power on earth can again bring him before the bar on the matter under discussion. He is a free man. He is the winner. Mr. Reagen is the loser.

We doff our hat to Gus Hall. We express without reservation and with sincerity our admiration for him and we congratulate him upon his great victory over Mr. Reagen, Trumbull County's duly elected prosecuted attorney. The victory was overwhelming and complete. Mr. Hall is evidently a gentleman of parts, a man of courage, resourcefulness and ingenuity. He should go far in his present line or in any line which he may care to devote his talents. We have no word of censure for Gus Hall. He was in a tight pinch and he got out of it. We would have done the same, and so would you, had we or you been in Mr. Hall's shoes. He comes out of this mess as the victor. Mr. Reagen holds the bag.<sup>564</sup>

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561 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, January 24, 1938.

562 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, January 29, 1938.

563 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, January 31, 1938.

564 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, February 3, 1938.



### 2.5.7. An Ohio hellraiser?

Although CIO's Ohio leader John Owens had prominently expelled Gus Hall from the organization already in early July, SWOC paid Hall's \$500 fine and trial costs.<sup>565</sup> Hall and other Warren bombers – who all in the end pleaded guilty – also received legal help from CIO's lawyers although the organization had clearly denounced all violence and destruction of property. *Warren Tribune Chronicle* paid attention to this contradiction in its editorial:

When a union condones dynamiting by retaining leaders who take part in it, the public has good reason to be suspicious of the union's motives. From labor's viewpoint it is a grave tactical error, to say the least, since it arouses public opinion against labor. Unions should have better sense than to arm their own enemies.<sup>566</sup>

One explanation for SWOC's behavior could be the fact that the Communists still had a relatively strong position within the union in early 1938. The brand new union needed its radical organizers and had to listen to their opinions. The Communist views could be heard in SWOC's top leadership as former CPUSA member Lee Pressman worked as the union's legal counsel. According to some sources, he remained committed to the party and often functioned as an intermediary between the party and CIO's leaders.<sup>567</sup>

For CIO leaders the relationship with communists was a balancing act. They needed the small but active communist grouping within the union, but – at the same time – had to keep the anti-communist members from leaving the organization. In such a situation the wisest solution was to downplay the whole issue. The sensitivity of SWOC's internal situation could be seen in the union's first convention in late 1937. An anti-communist delegate wanted to amend a resolution condemning fascist aggression by adding a condemnation of communist aggression as well. SWOC chairman Phil Murray, however, announced that the motion in question was out of order and thus prevented the issue from coming to a vote. Murray apparently did not want his union to become a battleground for communists and anti-communists, at least not yet.<sup>568</sup>

According to labor historian Harvey A. Levenstein, Murray started weeding out communists from SWOC in 1938 and continued the operation quietly until 1942, when Republic Steel, Youngstown Sheet & Tube and Inland Steel finally signed union contracts. Until that happened, the communists were needed in the organization.<sup>569</sup>

According to Gus Hall's autobiographical writings and biographical material published by the CPUSA, Philip Murray "said publicly that the Warren strike was the best organized

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565 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, January 25, 1938.

566 *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, January 24, 1938.

567 Cochran 1977, 95-96 and Levenstein 1981, 47.

568 Galenson 1960, 111.

569 Levenstein 1981, 51. In the summer of 1939 SWOC was already openly fighting the Communists in the union. Secretary-treasurer David McDonald communicated SWOC's attitude clearly in a public address in July 1939: "There are people who would like to use steel workers' union to build a classless society. Agents of the Communist Party quite naturally would like to turn the SWOC into an instrument for their own use. The steel workers do not want to join the Communist Party, nor be guided by it. They will not subscribe to any political or economic theory which is anti-union or anti-American. They are not deceived by purveyors of false doctrines." See Galenson 1960, 111-112.

labor strike he had ever seen in his life”.<sup>570</sup> Although Hall and the CPUSA repeat this claim in several publications, they never mention where or when Murray had said this. Such a claim is surprising in light of the fact that the SWOC membership level was exceptionally low at Republic Steel’s Warren plant when the strike started. The claim is also surprising considering the fact that the Warren strikers seemed in many cases to act differently than what the SWOC leaders would have hoped, shooting at Republic Steel’s airplanes and calling a general strike on June 23, for example.<sup>571</sup>

In addition to this, Hall and CPUSA repeatedly claim that Philip Murray offered Gus Hall a well-paid job in SWOC organization after the Little Steel Strike, but Hall astonished the union leader by turning the offer down and choosing a low-paid job in the CPUSA organization instead.<sup>572</sup> Again, Hall and the CPUSA never mention where or when such a job offer has taken place. Such an offer would have been surprising after CIO’s Ohio leader had earlier announced that Hall was expelled from the CIO as “troublesome and undesirable”. Such an offer would also have been surprising considering that the profoundly Catholic Murray – who, according to one writer, drew his labor ideology from the papal encyclicals *Quadragesimo Anno* and *Rerum Novarum*<sup>573</sup> – was known as a staunch anti-communist. Once again a critical reader starts doubting Hall’s narration of past events as it is unlikely that Murray would have offered a job to a communist who had just been a central character in a much-publicized bombing trial.

As mentioned earlier, Gus Hall claimed in his telegram on July 1 that the bombing charge was an “unadulterated frame-up inspired by Republic Steel and associated companies”.<sup>574</sup> This is how Hall explained the incident also in the decades to come.<sup>575</sup> As Hall never challenged the charge in the court room but instead pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of malicious destruction, it is difficult – if not impossible – to say for sure what Hall’s role actually was in the bombing case.

In light of Gus Hall’s own recent past, his participation in the Warren bombing incident would not have been very surprising. Violence was not an unfamiliar solution for Hall in the 1930s. If one looks at the three labor conflicts in which Arvo Halberg was involved in Minneapolis in the early 1930s – demonstrators’ raid on Armour meatpacking company, CWA demonstrations of April 1934 and Teamsters’ Strike in the summer of 1934 – in all three cases the conflict situations ended with some form of violence. In all three cases Hall later commented the violence in his autobiographical writings in a positive if not in a glorifying manner.<sup>576</sup> In a similar way Gus Hall extolled the steelworkers who shot

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570 Hall 1972b, 2 and Hall 1987, 345-346.

571 Also SWOC’s secretary-treasurer David J. McDonald criticizes Warren organizers in his autobiography. As he was making a speaking tour through steel industry towns, the organizers in Warren promised him a big audience in their town. In the end, “four people showed up in a hall that seated five hundred”. See McDonald 1969, 96.

572 Hall 1972b, 2 and Hall 1976, 4.

573 Filippelli 1987, 11.

574 *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 1, 1937.

575 The CPUSA published also other kind narrations related to Hall and the Little Steel Strike. In one of CPUSA’s Little Steel Strike -related texts the party claims that the frame-up “was exposed as the work of a company agent and the charges against Hall were dropped”. See Hall 1972b, 2.

576 Hall 1987, 343-344 & 348-349.

at Republic Steel's airplanes in Warren during the Little Steel Strike.<sup>577</sup> When taking all these writings into consideration, violent solutions seem to have been a potential mode of operation for the SWOC field representative in Warren.

As pointed out earlier, Gus Hall may have learned to accept violence and sabotage as potential modes of operation already in his youth as he read the writings of IWW leader Big Bill Haywood who was known for his inflammatory rhetoric and preference for direct action. And as mentioned in the previous chapter, the concept of sabotage was often used in IWW rhetoric. Although some Wobblies emphasized that for them "sabotage" meant only striking and slowdowns, Haywood, for example, did not rule out violent destruction of property.<sup>578</sup> Although Hall apparently never was a member of IWW, the Warren bombing incident sounds slightly like an echo from Hall's Wobbly-colored youth.<sup>579</sup>

Although it is difficult to determine Hall's guilt or innocence from today's perspective, few details do raise questions. If Hall's bombing charge was indeed a frame-up, it is surprising that Hall's lawyer Edward Lamb does not say a word about the frame-up in his memoirs although he was very closely involved in the trial and spends a couple of pages of his memoirs describing his dealings with Hall.<sup>580</sup> Neither do Hall's closest SWOC associates Harry Wines and John Grajciar mention the frame-up in their oral history interviews. On the contrary, Harry Wines straightforwardly accuses Hall of misleading the strikers who took part in the bombing ring:

They [the sentenced strikers] were youngsters. They were not real active officers of the committee of the union. They were misled by Gus Hall, who contributed very little. His idea was to raise hell.<sup>581</sup>

## 2.5.8. Conclusions

The Little Steel Strike was the bloodiest labor dispute of the 1930s. Seventeen people – all of them strikers or strike sympathizers – died during the conflict and approximately two to three hundred people were injured.<sup>582</sup> The congressional La Follette Civil Liberties Committee – which closely investigated the labor conflicts of the 1930s – concluded in its Little Steel Strike report that the emergence of the riots in which the deaths and injuries

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577 Hall 1987, 346-347.

578 Carlson 1983, 196-197 & 230-231. See also Klehr & Haynes 1992, 11.

579 As mentioned earlier, Gus Hall's father was originally an IWW member and – according to Hall – also a personal friend of Big Bill Haywood. See Meyers 1970, 55 and Bonosky 1987, 8.

580 See Lamb 1963, 53-54.

581 Interview with Harry Wines, 7. According to Wines, the strike in Warren and Niles was very orderly – no one killed or seriously wounded and no property damage – "even though Gus Hall was in charge". Wines pointed out that "whenever trouble would break loose, Gus Hall was never to be found". Also John Grajciar saw Gus Hall as a troublemaker. When he was asked in his oral history interview about a "communist problem" in Youngstown area, he answered by saying "We had Gus Hall up there, you know". See Interview with Harry Wines, 6-7 and Interview #2 with John Grajciar, 3.

582 Sofchalk 1961, 373-374. In addition to the ten deaths in Chicago, three people died in Massillon, two in Youngstown, one in Cleveland and one in Beaver Falls in Pennsylvania.

occurred “can be traced to the biased or intemperate conduct of local law-enforcement authorities, acting frequently under the pressure and clamor directed against the strike by company officials and citizens’ committees”<sup>583</sup>

The anti-union steel companies unquestionably won the Little Steel Strike in 1937. The strike was an exceptional setback for the CIO which otherwise marched on triumphantly in the late 1930s. In the longer run, however, the defeat turned into a victory as the companies had to give in to the workers’ demands. SWOC continued its efforts to organize the workers and in the beginning of the 1940s the work started to bear fruit. In 1941 SWOC attained a signed agreement with Bethlehem Steel after it had won majorities in the elections arranged at the company’s mills. In 1942 Republic Steel, Youngstown Sheet & Tube and Inland Steel followed Bethlehem’s example and signed union contracts. They, however, did it without arranging elections at their mills after having learned that a clear majority of employees support a SWOC agreement.<sup>584</sup>

Not only did SWOC win signed contracts, but the union also won reinstatements for union members who were fired during the organizing drive and strike. Youngstown Sheet & Tube had to pay back wages for about \$170 000 and Republic Steel for about \$500 000. In addition to this, Republic Steel had to pay \$350 000 to the men who had been shot and beaten by the company thugs during the strike.<sup>585</sup>

With all its violence and rioting, Little Steel Strike is not so very different from other major American labor conflicts of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. But according to Donald G. Sofchalk, Little Steel Strike was a sort of a swan song of the old form of labor relations:

But, though the Little Steel Strike was conducted with all the traditional weapons of unrestricted industrial warfare, it nevertheless presaged the beginning of a new approach to labor problems and relations, an era in which such techniques would no longer be of any major importance. Since 1937 few if any strikes have involved a degree of violence comparable to that which accompanied the Little Steel conflict, and in the main, labor disputes have been resolved across the bargaining table rather than on the picket lines.<sup>586</sup>

The 1930s was, as Harvey Klehr states in the title of his study, “the heyday of American Communism”. The 1930s, as Klehr puts it, “marked the height of Communist influence in America” as the party “emerged from the fringes of national life and managed to play a supporting role in some of the greatest dramas of the day – the fight for unemployment insurance, industrial unionism, collective security against fascism and others”.<sup>587</sup> Especially the unprecedented advance of the labor movement during the decade and the founding of the CIO were highlights for the CPUSA in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Never before had and never since have the communists played such a prominent and constructive role in the development of American society.

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583 La Follette Committee’s report is quoted in Sofchalk 1961, 374.

584 Sweeney 1956, 50.

585 Sweeney 1956, 39.

586 Sofchalk 1961, iv.

587 Klehr 1984, ix.

Gus Hall was certainly aware of the exceptionality of the 1930s in this respect. Understanding the political value of his experience, Hall made sure that his contribution to the CPUSA's greatest achievements was not forgotten. Hall's role as a leader in the Little Steel Strike was always carefully mentioned even in the briefest biographical summaries of his career. One can indeed say that Hall's participation in the Little Steel Strike became an essential feature of his identity and the narration of his life.<sup>588</sup> He saw himself as one of the founders of the United Steelworkers of America, which, in turn, caused irritation among some later-day USWA officials.<sup>589</sup> Hall closely followed and commented on the issues related to Mahoning Valley's steel industry and steel workers union for the rest of his career and was moved when he was asked to give a speech at Youngstown's steelworkers' meeting in 1995.<sup>590</sup>

Although Hall was never convicted of leading the bombing ring, in Mahoning Valley many were certain of his guilt even decades after the steel strike. Youngstown's newspaper brought the issue up in a straightforward way 22 years after the strike when Hall became the general secretary of CPUSA:

The 1937 steel strike is not a pleasant memory, and one of the major factors in making it unpleasant was the noisy bully Gus Hall. He insinuated himself and other Communist sympathizers into the Little Steel Strike and by violent measures he advocated gave the infant C.I.O. some of its earliest black eyes. There was little question of his guilt in one bombing episode in Trumbull County, even though the records show a fine for a lesser forms of violence.<sup>591</sup>

Within the CPUSA Hall's participation in the bloodiest strike of the 1930s was a significant political asset for him, an experience through which he could strengthen his image as a true proletarian leader. By being a leader in the Little Steel Strike, Hall could be raised to the same level with William Z. Foster who was the leader of the Great Steel Strike of 1919.<sup>592</sup> Whether Hall's narration of the strike is completely congruent with what actually took place, however, is another question.

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588 According to two of my interviewees, Hall's participation in the Little Steel Strike was his "claim to fame" as it had had a central role in the development of his subsequent party career.

According to Michael Myerson, Hall's actual role in the strike was small but in the CPUSA publications it was "blown up" into a major role. See interview with Jack Kurzweil in Berkeley, California, August 2010 and interview with Michael Myerson in New York City, August 2010.

589 In August 1971 Raymond W. Pasnick, the public relations director of USWA and editor of *Steel Labor* journal, sent Hall a letter inquiring upon what grounds he claims to be one of the founders of USWA. Hall gave him a thorough answer in his pamphlet *Steel and Metal Workers – It Takes a Fight to Win*. According to Hall, the USWA had by the 1970s become a bureaucratic and inefficient organization whose leaders wanted to hide the militant past of the union and the fact that people like Hall had once been building the organization. See Hall 1972b, 11-15.

590 Hall 1949, 67-70; Hall 1972b, passim; *Daily World*, December 20, 1977; *Youngstown Vindicator*, April 25, 1981 and *Tribune Chronicle*, June 21, 1995.

591 *Youngstown Vindicator*, December 16, 1959.

592 One CPUSA text straightforwardly equates Foster's and Hall's leadership in the 1919 and 1937 steel strikes. Such equation is, however, grossly misleading as Foster was a top leader of the whole strike whereas Hall was only one local-level leader among many in the large strike organization. See Hall 1972b, 3.

## 2.6. Fighting fascism and imperialism – Gus Hall’s WWII years

### 2.6.1. More legal problems

Although Gus Hall’s SWOC associates like Harry Wines and John Grajciar and the leaders of the organization were unhappy with Hall’s actions during the strike, the Communist Party seemed to appreciate his work. He was made the executive secretary of the Communist Party in Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana counties, i.e. an area covering Youngstown, Warren and Niles. As an executive secretary, Hall commented eagerly on the threat of fascism on the pages of *Youngstown Vindicator* and demanded a complete boycott of German products as well as the lifting of the arms embargo on Republican Spain. According to Hall, defeating Hitler on Spanish front would have been a tremendous help in defeating Hitler in Germany.<sup>593</sup> Hall was also shortly a Communist candidate for governor of Ohio in 1938, but withdrew his candidacy. Anticomunist critics claimed that Hall withdrew his candidacy in order to support the unsuccessful bid of Democratic candidate Charles W. Sawyer in the election race, but Hall denied such claims.<sup>594</sup>

Although Hall withdrew his candidacy from the Ohio gubernatorial election in 1938, the turn of the decade would suggest that a change had taken place in Hall’s modes of operation. In 1939 Hall ran for president of Youngstown’s city council and in 1940 he ran for county commissioner in Mahoning County. Hall had already in 1935 ran for Youngstown’s city council, but now taking part in elections seems to have become a standard mode of operation for him and he no longer got involved in violent clashes. He was now no longer a “hellraiser” – as Hall’s SWOC associate Harry Wines had put it – who could resort to violent measures to further the cause of the working class as had happened repeatedly during the 1930s, but he seemed to be more committed to the principles of representative politics.

One can only speculate about the factors bringing about this development. Hall turned 30 years old in October 1940, and often people tend to become calmer as they grow older. Another factor which may have affected Hall’s behavior was the birth of his first child Barbara who was born in March 1938.<sup>595</sup> The birth of the first child can often put the values of the father’s life in a new order, and this may have also happened to Hall.

Hall’s election campaign radio speech which he delivered in November 1939 when running for president of Youngstown’s city council is the oldest available text which – presumably

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593 *Youngstown Vindicator*, May 1, 1938; *Youngstown Vindicator*, May 29, 1938 and *Youngstown Vindicator*, November 29, 1938.

594 *Youngstown Vindicator*, November 7, 1938. Hall’s candidacy for governor of Ohio is mentioned also in Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 43 and North 1970, 17. Charles W. Sawyer later served as U.S. Secretary of Commerce from 1948 to 1953. See *Political Profiles – The Truman Years*, 491-492.

595 According to *Daily Worker*, Barbara Hall was 11 years old in June 1949 when the newspaper reported – in a somewhat sentimental way – of the encounters between Gus Hall and his daughter during the Smith Act trial in New York City. According to Barbara Hall’s cousin Kristin Koskela, Barbara Hall was born in March 1938. See *Daily Worker*, June 13, 1949; *Daily Worker*, June 30, 1949 and interview with Kristin Koskela in Cherry, Minnesota, August 2008.

– was written by Hall. As such, it clearly reflects the CPUSA’s policies in the fall of 1939. In his speech, Hall clearly spells out his opposition to American involvement in the war that had just two months earlier broken out in Europe. According to Hall, the war only served the interests of English and French financiers and therefore it would be un-American to send American soldiers to fight in the war.<sup>596</sup> Hall’s comments were in line with the CPUSA’s policy in 1939. Before the fall of 1939 the party had been a staunch opponent of fascism, but after the Soviet Union and Germany signed their Nazi-Soviet Pact in late August the CPUSA suddenly changed its policy. The party strongly opposed American involvement in such an imperialist war.<sup>597</sup>

Hall’s 1939 radio speech also reflects the CPUSA’s 1930s policies in other ways. During Earl Browder’s leadership CPUSA emphasized its Americanness declaring that “Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism”. Also Gus Hall seems to have wanted to present himself as an unwaveringly American character. Perhaps therefore the names of Marx, Engels and Lenin – not to mention Stalin – do not appear even once in his speech. Also the concepts of socialism, communism and Marxism-Leninism are completely absent in the speech. As such, Hall’s 1939 speech is very different from his post-WWII speeches which are often filled with Marxist-Leninist jargon and references to classic theoreticians.

Hall’s speech also reflects the CPUSA’s Popular Front thinking of the late 1930s. In 1935 after the Comintern had decided to co-operate with socialists and even with bourgeois liberals to form a united front against Fascism, the CPUSA also changed its policies. In comparison to Hall’s later speeches, his 1939 speech is surprisingly reform-minded. As all references to revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat are absent, the speech could well have been written by a moderate socialist. Hall demanded more appropriations for Work Projects Administration, relief for all needy people without bureaucracy, better old age pensions and more inexpensive public housing. In addition to these measures, he demanded hospitalization for all people who need it, free medical and dental care for needy school children, more school buildings to eliminate overcrowded class rooms, the establishment of a municipal electric plant and the reduction of gas, street car and bus fares.<sup>598</sup> Despite Hall’s numerous demands his election bid was unsuccessful.

The bombing ring trial in 1937-38 was not the last time when Hall had problems with Mahoning Valley’s legal authorities. In 1940, Hall ran for county commissioner as a Communist candidate in Mahoning County but his campaign soon ran into trouble. In April, Hall was indicted on charges of forgery and misrepresentation of the Communist Party nominating petition. After a lengthy trial, Hall was sentenced to Mahoning County prison for 90 days in October 1941. Also Hall’s associates – including his secretary Sally Winters Morillas – received prison sentences.<sup>599</sup>

According to the Joseph North, the trial and prison sentence were an outcome of a manhunt arranged by Youngstown’s reactionaries:

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596 Gus Hall’s radio speech on November 8, 1939. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7.

597 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 92-93.

598 Gus Hall’s radio speech on November 8, 1939. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7.

599 *Communist Leadership*, 29 and *The Plain Dealer*, February 27, 1996.

This time the workers got the required number of signatures, but the newspapers and powerful reactionary pressures began a calculated campaign of intimidation. The names of those who signed petitions for Gus to go on ballot were published in the newspapers, their homes were visited, their families frightened, their jobs threatened. Some weakened under this fierce barrage and claimed the signatures were fraudulent. This gave the authorities the pretext they sought: Hall and seven others were arrested.<sup>600</sup>

Sally Morillas remembered the court case in a somewhat similar way more than fifty years later:

“We did the work honestly and truthfully,” she said. “We legitimately got the signatures, but the *Vindicator* newspaper published the entire list. They printed the name of every person who signed the petition nominating a Communist candidate. Well, some of the people were very upset by this and denied ever signing it.”<sup>601</sup>

Although Hall was thoroughly unhappy with his prison sentence “in one of the crumbiest jails that existed”, not everyone in the justice system was rotten to the core. In his autobiographical manuscript Hall exceptionally gives credit – with a slightly bitter undertone, though – to Mahoning County Judge Erskine Maiden, “a judge who had some human touch left”:

After a week or so, I sent a word by way of Elizabeth [Hall’s wife] that I had stomach pains. Without hesitation, he ordered me taken to a local hospital that was close by. That was his first human action. Sure enough I had an ulcer. The judge had a unique idea. He called in Elizabeth and asked whether she could pick me up at the jail at 1 PM each day and take me home, feed me, let me rest and return me to jail at 3 PM. That was Judge Madden’s second human act. I qualify his humanity because in the first place, caving in to steel corporation pressure, he sent an innocent man to jail.<sup>602</sup>

Sally Morillas also had positive memories of Judge Maiden:

To this day, we will respect Judge Erskine Maiden, who treated us very fairly. When Gus’ mother died, Judge Maiden let him fly to Minnesota unescorted to attend the funeral because he knew Gus would return, which he did. Another time, Gus was feeling sick and the judge allowed him to leave jail and go to the hospital.<sup>603</sup>

Morillas’s positive memories may partly be explained by the fact that thanks to Judge Maiden, she was released from prison after serving only 45 days of her 60-day sentence. According to Maiden, she was released “for good behavior and as an indication to the defendant of the difference between our system and that of the Kremlin.”<sup>604</sup>

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600 North 1970, 17-18.

601 *The Plain Dealer*, February 27, 1996.

602 Gus Hall’s autobiographical manuscript, 27-28. Hall mistakenly calls Judge Maiden “Madden”. According to *Youngstown Vindicator*, Maiden allowed Hall to leave the hospital to receive medical care but the time spent outside the jail would be added to his sentence. See *Youngstown Vindicator*, February 1, 1942.

603 *The Plain Dealer*, February 27, 1996. Susanna Halberg’s death and Hall’s subsequent ten-day prison leave was also reported in *Youngstown Vindicator*, November 13, 1941.

604 *Youngstown Vindicator*, December 2, 1941. Maiden (1891-1967) served as Mahoning County judge from 1931 until his death in 1967.



## 2.6.2. On the Radio

Gus Hall was in jail in Youngstown when Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Like thousands of other American Communists, Hall immediately volunteered for military service. The eager anti-fascist, however, received no reply. Later – after Hall and his family had moved to Cleveland in 1942 – he was drafted but the draft board turned Hall down due to legal charges still pending in Warren and Youngstown. According to Hall, the legal charges were related to Little Steel Strike and unemployed struggles. Hall challenged the pending legal cases stating that the charges “stood in the way of entering the military struggle against fascism”. He demanded that either the charges are dropped or that the trials proceed. To his surprise, after a few weeks, both the judges in Warren and Youngstown, dropped all the cases.<sup>605</sup> Only then could Gus Hall start his military career.

All this took time. Several CPUSA sources claim that Hall served in the Navy from 1942 to 1946<sup>606</sup> but in reality he entered the Navy only in January 1945<sup>607</sup>. While struggling to get into the armed forces, Hall served from 1942 as the CPUSA chairman in Cleveland.<sup>608</sup> As the chairman of the party in the biggest city of Ohio, Hall – a steelworker coming from a major steel industry state – was elected to CPUSA’s national committee in 1944.<sup>609</sup>

As the local party leader, Hall gave regular weekly radio speeches in the mid-1940s at the Cleveland radio station WHK, with topics ranging from twists and turns of the war to U.S. labor politics. He gave these speeches during two periods: between September 1944 and January 1945 – i.e. before his navy service – and between April 1946 and July 1946 – i.e. after his release from the navy.<sup>610</sup> The radio program was sponsored by the Ohio CP.<sup>611</sup>

These speeches are highly interesting from a researcher’s point of view as there is very little written material available related to Hall’s political thinking in the 1940s. He published only a couple of articles in CPUSA publications – and none in any other publications – before the 1950s.<sup>612</sup>

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605 Gus Hall’s autobiographical manuscript, 10.

606 See for example Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 47. Interestingly Hall himself said in the congressional hearings that he served in the Navy only for 14 months. See *Communist Leadership*, 2.

607 Swearingen 1971, 585.

608 Brandt 1981, 5.

609 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 52. According to Joseph North, Hall was serving overseas when he was elected to the national committee in 1944, but this does not seem to be the case as Hall entered the Navy only in January 1945. See North 1970, 19.

610 Hall gave his last speech before a 16-month break in the beginning of January 1945. Arnold Johnson, Ohio state secretary of the new Communist Political Association, took Hall’s place as the party’s Cleveland radio commentator. See *Gus Hall Bibliography*, 105-106 and Gus Hall’s radio speech on January 6, 1945. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7.

611 *Gus Hall Bibliography*, ii. According to the bibliography, the scripts of the radio programs were offered by the defense attorneys during the Smith Act trial as evidence to prove Gus Hall’s thought and advocacy. Gus Hall Bibliography states: “However, the prosecution rejected the offer on the grounds that the radio programs were self-serving documents, despite the fact that the essence of the trial was prosecution for thinking and advocating.”

612 According to *Gus Hall Bibliography*, Hall published only four articles in *Daily Worker* and three in *Political Affairs* in the 1940s. Hall’s first pamphlet *Hands off Korea and Formosa* was

Hall's speeches clearly reflected the CPUSA's policies at the time. Whereas Hall had in his speeches before Hitler's attack to the Soviet Union strongly opposed American involvement in the war and criticized Roosevelt for serving the interests of Wall Street, he was now ardently supporting FDR and American participation in the fight against Fascism. In his speech in late September, Hall urged his listeners to register and vote and help Roosevelt to win in the state of Ohio in the presidential election of 1944. According to Hall, the supporters of the Republican candidate Thomas E. Dewey included many "anti-semitic, anti-labor and pro-fascist" characters like Gerald L.K. Smith, who ran for president as a candidate of the America First Party, and isolationist congressman Martin L. Sweeney:

I would not accuse Candidate Dewey of being a fascist or even a fascist sympathizer; but because of the fact that the Republican Party is in the firm grip of reactionary, anti-labor, isolationist, defeatist forces, I think it is fair to judge that these open pro-fascist elements are supporting the Dewey-Bricker ticket because they hope that Dewey will be the American Hindenburg.<sup>613</sup>

In his speech just few days before the presidential election of 1944, Hall straightforwardly equated Dewey with Hitler, both of whom were fervent anti-Communists. Hall found striking similarities in Hitler's and Dewey's main theses:

The fact that the Nazis in Germany and the GOP ideologists here are talking the same language does not prove they borrow from one another. It proves something more important – that they represent identical forces in the two countries, the forces of Fascist reaction, attempting to divide the American people, panic the electorate and gain power by an anti-Communist ruse in order to destroy democracy.<sup>614</sup>

Hall, who only three years earlier had seen the war as one big capitalist conspiracy, was now a warm supporter of the so-called no-strike pledge which aimed at eliminating workers' strikes in the United States during the war in order to support U.S. war efforts.<sup>615</sup> Hall's opinions could indeed change rapidly as new situations developed. In November 1944, Hall praised Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill as "world's greatest team of leadership"<sup>616</sup> but only a month later the Cleveland radio commentator had grown strongly critical towards Churchill. The reason for this sudden change could be found in newly liberated Greece where the British troops were fighting local Communists. According to Hall, the British were co-operating with Greek Fascists, carrying out dictatorial policies and suppressing all civil liberties.<sup>617</sup>

Interestingly Hall, who later in his life was a severe critic of his predecessor Earl Browder, seemed to approve Browder's politics and the dissolution of the CPUSA without any

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published in 1950 and his first book *Imperialism Today – An Evaluation of Major Issues and Events of Our Time* in 1972. See *Gus Hall Bibliography*, 86-94.

613 Gus Hall's radio speech on September 30, 1944. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7.

614 Gus Hall's radio speech on November 4, 1944. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7.

615 Gus Hall's radio speech on November 25, 1944. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7.

616 Gus Hall's radio speech on November 11, 1944. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7. In another speech three weeks later Hall volubly praised Cordell Hull, the long-time U.S. secretary of state, who had just resigned from his office. "In Cordell Hull the world has a great statesman", Hall said. See Gus Hall's radio speech on December 1, 1944. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7.

617 Gus Hall's radio speech on December 16, 1944. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7.

problems in 1944.<sup>618</sup> Browder had been strongly impressed by what he considered to be the spirit of the Teheran conference between Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt in late 1943. Following the conference Browder believed in class reconciliation within the United States and in a national reconciliation between the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>619</sup> The dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 seemed to prove that the confrontation between communism and capitalism would soon be history and old-fashioned communist parties would no longer be needed. In the summer of 1944 the CPUSA was transformed into a Communist Political Association which would work through existing parties and organizations, especially the Democratic Party. When mentioning the dissolution of the CPUSA in one of his radio speeches, Hall showed no signs of criticism toward Browder. He quoted in length the general secretary, according to whom the communists had “no illusions about any advance of Communism in America” and who had “dissolved their own party as a signal of their long-term adherence to the democratic front”. Hall’s approving tone was indeed far from his later wrathful comments concerning Browder.<sup>620</sup>

Also when it came to economic policies, Hall sounded now very different in comparison with his comments in the 1930s or in the end of the 1940s. In a radio speech in November 1944, Hall discussed the future of U.S. economy in the post-war world. His comments could have been written by a moderate social democrat. Gone were the predictions of imminent revolution and praise for the Soviet form of government:

The 64-dollar question for our post-war plans is: Can we find employment for the 17½ million men and women who will be released from the business of war? Can we keep our industry producing at present levels without making any basic changes in our economic system, changes for which the American people are not ready today? Yes, I think we can.

And why not? For we have plenty of raw materials, we have all of the factories and mills and we have sufficient manpower and the skill to continue such production? Yes, we have within our reach everything that is necessary for a prosperous, happy America.<sup>621</sup>

Like a true social democrat, Hall emphasized the need to take care of the purchasing power of the ordinary Americans. “The consumption of goods by the American people as a whole, on an expanding scale, is the only way in which American economy can be kept in full operation”, Hall pointed out.

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618 Also Gerald Horne pays attention to Gus Hall’s positive attitude towards Browder in 1944 in his Ben Davis biography *Black Liberation / Red Scare*. See Horne 1994, 134.

619 Browder presented his views concerning the Teheran spirit in a speech to a CPUSA meeting in January 1944. Excerpts of the speech can be read in Fried 1997, 330-334.

620 Gus Hall’s radio speech on November 11, 1944. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7. Hall strongly attacked Browder, for example, in his keynote speech at the CPUSA’s 17<sup>th</sup> national convention in December 1959. According to Hall, Browder’s ideas were a “right-opportunist distortion”. Browder remained a source of disgust for Hall for decades to come. In CPUSA’s “ideological conference” in Chicago in July 1989 – more than 40 years after Browder’s expulsion – Hall “warned against the corrupting influence of bourgeois ideas and recalled earlier heresies like Browderism”. See Hall 1960b, 18 and Lewy 1990, 301.

621 Gus Hall’s radio speech on November 18, 1944. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7. The “64-dollar question” referred to the 1940s popular radio quiz show *Take It or Leave It*, in which the main prize was 64 silver dollars.

It is basic policy for the prosperity of our nation that the working class, which is the largest group of consumers, should continue as a minimum to receive a take-home wage equal in volume to that it now receives, regardless of any change in working hours. Because of technological improvements during this war, it is evident that to give employment to 17½ million men and women it will be necessary to reduce the working day to 8, 7, or even 6 hours; and this without any reduction in the take-home wage.<sup>622</sup>

For Hall the even distribution of income was a key factor in keeping the economy running. “One of the difficulties that holds back the whole market is that a small section of our population, a section that physically cannot consume anything additional, holds in its hands huge sums of finances that are not in circulation and therefore are not in use for buying up the products that we produce”, Hall said. His vision of U.S. post-war economy and society came very close to social democratic models which had been developed especially in northern European countries:

In our post-war plans we must consider as part of the reconversion responsibilities of government the extension of our social security system. Old age and sickness benefits, maternity and death benefits, a national medical and hospitalization fund – these are essential factors in adjusting our economy to the long road ahead. Such an expanded social security system must provide for shock absorbers that will cushion the rough road from a war to peace economy.<sup>623</sup>

In one of his last radio speeches before joining the armed forces, Hall sharply commented on the war-time policies of his parents’ country of birth. Hall criticized severely the concept of “poor little democratic Finland” which was used to gather support for the Nordic nation during the Winter War against Soviet Union in 1939-40. According to Hall, treacherous Finland was far from being democratic as it was in close co-operation with Hitler’s Germany. The help Finland received from the United States, Britain and France during the Winter War only helped Hitler in his fight against the Soviet Red Army – when helping Finland, the Western powers were actually “filing Hitler’s front tooth”. Luckily Finland’s machinations with Hitler did not result in defeat of the Soviet Union. Hall’s unorthodox take on Northern European military history does not quite correspond with today’s WWII historiography:

The assistance to Finland did not result in catastrophe, but it did unnecessarily take the lives of many of our heroic men. We helped “poor, little Finland”, and a year later the Nazi dive bombers rose from their Finnish air fields and sent to the bottom of the Arctic hundreds of our sons – sailors and men of the Merchant Marine. German submarines used the Finnish bases that we had helped build only a year before and blasted hundreds of our ships.

Hitler was able to use these Finnish bases not because he conquered Finland, but because the Fascist rulers of Finland were always hand in glove with Hitler. That

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622 Gus Hall’s radio speech on November 18, 1944. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7.

623 Gus Hall’s radio speech on November 18, 1944. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7. According to Hall, the reconversion of American economy and society to a post-war was going to be an expensive undertaking, but in his opinion it was necessary in order to avoid a new Great Depression. “Reconversion will be a war in itself, a battle to be won as decisively as any fought against the Axis”, Hall pointed out.

was so even in the days when the Finnish government appealed for help for a “poor, democratic, small nation”.<sup>624</sup>

Hall’s comments on Finland reflect the fact that the Soviet invasion of Finland created a very difficult situation for American Communists. The Soviet invasion generated widespread sympathy for Finland in the United States and showed the Soviet Union in a very negative light.<sup>625</sup> When Finland then joined Germany in its attack against the Soviet Union in June 1941, American communists claimed it proved that Finns had been Fascists from the very beginning. Hall’s comments also reflect a “red” view of Finnish history which prevailed strongly among Finnish American communists: Carl Gustav Mannerheim, who had lead the so-called White troops against the Red revolutionaries in the Finnish Civil War in 1918 and who lead the Finnish army also in WWII, was considered an outright Fascist and a dictator comparable to Hitler and Mussolini.<sup>626</sup>

### 2.6.3. In the Navy

As mentioned earlier, Hall’s military career got started only after he could notify the draft board that he had been cleared of all pending legal charges in Warren and Youngstown:

I was recalled to the draft board. The army representative turned me down without a cause; the air force representative on the board did likewise. An old salt, representing the Navy, was different. He was an experienced old Navy man. He studied my record, with all the court cases and trials and fights I had been in, including a file of clippings detailing the struggles and arrests. He finally said, “Well, Mr. Hall, if you fight half as hard as a U.S. sailor as you have in civilian life you’ll make one helluva good Navy man.” With that he dramatically stamped the papers and I was in the U.S. Navy.<sup>627</sup>

A few weeks later Gus Hall was sworn in with a group of young men and sent to a boot camp in the Great Lakes Naval Training Center near Chicago for three months of basic training. Thus Hall became one of the 965 000 men trained in the massive Great Lakes Naval Training Center during WWII.<sup>628</sup>

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624 Gus Hall’s radio speech on December 30, 1944. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7.

625 Isserman 1982, 53-54.

626 Hall’s “red” view of Finnish history can well be seen also in one of his *Daily World* columns decades later. This time he claims that Finland was building military bases on Finnish soil together with Nazi Germans, which led to the Soviet-Finnish war. Modern historiography of the Winter War has no knowledge of joint Finnish-German bases in Finland before the war. However, the existence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 between Soviet Union and Nazi Germany is a widely recognized fact among historians. See *Daily World*, August 25, 1973. For more on the impact of the Finnish Civil War on the Finnish American communists, see Kostainen 1977, 229-233 and Karni 2001, 94-95.

627 Gus Hall’s autobiographical manuscript, 10.

628 Illinois may be seen surprising location for a major naval training center, but the Navy had founded it in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the Navy leaders noticed that “the Midwest was a surprisingly rich source of ambitious young men, looking for training and life out of the cornfields”. The training center was officially opened in 1911. At that time, its training capacity was 1 500 men at one time but over the years the capacity was increased to more than 100 000 in 1944. During the WWII from 10 000 to 40 000 new recruits arrived to the Great Lakes training center

As a CPUSA member serving in the armed forces, Hall was not an exceptional case. According to Maurice Isserman, 15 000 party members served in the armed forces during WWII. Hundreds of them had gained valuable combat experience in the Spanish civil war.<sup>629</sup> As the United States now fought shoulder to shoulder with the Soviet Union, communists were enthusiastic and well-motivated fighters. CPUSA's staunch opposition to United States' participation in the war had vanished quickly in June 1941 when Germany attacked Soviet Union. The party now strongly supported an Allied invasion of continental Europe which would open a new front against the Germans and would thus relieve the pressure on the Soviet Union.<sup>630</sup>

Although the communists were exceptionally enthusiastic soldiers, their reception in the armed forces was mixed. While some communist soldiers – like the future chairman of New York CP Robert Thompson – were sent to combat, many were assigned – as official army rules regulated – to units “in which there is a minimum opportunity for damage”. Such treatment was ordered for all “potentially subversive personnel” who in addition to communists included Fascists and enemy aliens. The military intelligence closely monitored communists serving in the armed forces by rifling their lockers, reading their mail and questioning their barrack-mates. Their confidential files were marked with notation “S.D.” (“suspect of disloyalty”). The communists were usually allowed to complete training with their outfits and some were even accepted into officer training schools. But when their units were shipped to England, Africa or the Pacific, many communists suddenly found themselves being reassigned to supply, service or medical units within the United States.<sup>631</sup>

Many communist soldiers found the army policy highly frustrating. Among them was highly motivated Spanish civil war veteran John Gates – the future chief editor of CPUSA's *Daily Worker* newspaper – who was sent to serve in the remote Aleutian Islands. Later, however, Gates managed to volunteer for the paratroopers and could finally join the battle in Europe in the spring of 1945.<sup>632</sup> Junius Scales – another prominent party member – had very similar frustrating experiences during his military service. After many disappointments Scales was finally sent to Italy only a few weeks before the war in Europe ended in May 1945.<sup>633</sup>

Gus Hall was sent overseas, but his military career did not proceed without glitches. Hall, already clearly over thirty years of age, was the oldest person in his unit. At the end of the basic training the men of the company elected by secret ballot a so-called honor man of company. The winner of the title had – among other things – the privilege of selecting the naval training school where he wanted to continue his training. Hall was elected as the honor man of his company<sup>634</sup>, but the High Command of the Great Lakes Training Center had decided not to give the honor certificate to him. When Hall inquired about the details

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every month. See Gonzalez 2008, 7, 9 & 71.

629 Isserman 1982, 180.

630 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 92-97.

631 Isserman 1982, 181.

632 Gates 1958, 84-100.

633 Scales & Nickson 1987, 131-148.

634 Gus Hall's autobiographical manuscript, 11. According to Brandt, Hall's "popularity among workingmen in the steel mills followed him among the sailors, most of whom were also workingmen." See Brandt 1981, 5.

of the decision, he learned that one of the top officers of the base had been a top officer in the Republic Steel Corporation during the Little Steel Strike and had sworn that he would never agree to “give that Communist bastard a certificate of honor in the U.S. Navy.”<sup>635</sup>

Gus Hall could also experience the strict control of the communists when the war in Europe ended in May 1945:

A week or so later I was in Honolulu and some naval board called me in. It was all so official and formal that after it was over I had a big laugh. As if the victory over Japan depended on what I said, they asked me: “Now that the war against Germany and Italy is over, will you still continue to support the U.S. war effort?” Behind this concept was the idea that if the Soviet Union was not in the war I would not continue supporting it. Obviously they weren’t aware of the nature of the war. [...]

I replied to the Navy board, as formally as they had to me: “I will continue to support the war until the whole anti-democratic access is defeated.” With that the proceedings were over, salutes were exchanged and I was dismissed.

The war continued and I was in it till the very end.<sup>636</sup>

During the summer of 1945, Gus Hall sailed to the island of Guam where he would serve the rest of his military service as a machinist’s mate. Hall was placed in charge of motor repair in Guam’s naval base.<sup>637</sup>

Guam is the largest and the most southern of the Mariana Islands in the western Pacific Ocean, located about 1 500 miles east of the Philippines. The island was colonized by the Spanish in 17<sup>th</sup> century. The United States gained control of the island in the Spanish-American war in 1898. The Japanese captured Guam within a few days after the attack to Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The Americans recaptured the island after three weeks of fierce fighting in August 1944.<sup>638</sup> After the recapture Guam’s airfields were used as bases for B-29 bombers bombing Japan. Guam’s naval base became a major cargo port, repair facility and a submarine base. Japanese soldiers kept hiding in Guam’s forests for years after the war, last one famously surrendering only in 1972.<sup>639</sup>

Gus Hall was in Guam when the first atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. The B-29 bomber Enola Gay had departed for its lethal mission from the island of Tinian just hundred miles northeast of Guam. For Hall the bombing of Hiroshima was not a moment of national pride:

I felt terribly ashamed of my country. I was fighting against the inhumanity of fascism and for a world of peace. That horrible bomb bursting on the defenseless people of Hiroshima made me realize that the new danger to mankind was going to come from the mad dogs I had met during my days on the picket lines of the steel strike.<sup>640</sup>

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635 Gus Hall’s autobiographical manuscript, 12. See also North 1970, 18 and Brandt 1981, 5. According to Brandt, Hall was “qualified for officer training school but his Republic Steel dossier had been passed on to the Navy. His commanding officer rejected his application.”

636 Gus Hall’s autobiographical manuscript, 12-13.

637 North 1970, 18.

638 According to Lapitsky and Mostovets, Hall took part in fierce fighting with the Japanese in Guam, but this does not seem to be the case as the island had already been recaptured in the summer of 1944. See Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 47.

639 Rottman 2002, 385-393.

640 Quoted in North 1970, 18-19 and Brandt 1981, 5.

## 2.6.4. Back in Ohio and back on the radio

Gus Hall returned to Cleveland in the spring of 1946 after a 14-month Navy service and an honorable discharge. The Cleveland party chairman also soon returned to the radio waves of Northern Ohio, continuing his Saturday evening news commentaries at the radio station WHK.

A lot had changed during the 14 months Gus Hall had been away. The Allies had defeated both Germany and Japan in 1945, but the seemingly friendly relations between the Soviet Union and its Western allies had already started to cool down. The Gouzenko spy affair, which was disclosed in the Canadian capital in September 1945, showed Americans that the benevolent wartime alliance had indeed been an illusion. And indeed, just when Gus Hall was about to finish his service at Guam, Winston Churchill gave his famous speech in Fulton, Missouri stating that an iron curtain had descended across the European continent.

Major changes had also taken place in the American Communist Party. Earl Browder, who had led the party since 1934, had been ousted from leadership in the summer of 1945. As mentioned earlier, Browder had been strongly impressed by the dissolution of the Comintern in May 1943 and by what he considered to be the spirit of the Teheran conference between Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt in November and December 1943. These events seemed to prove that the confrontation between communism and capitalism would soon be history and old-fashioned communist parties would no longer be needed. In the summer of 1944 CPUSA was transformed into a Communist Political Association. Its members would from now on work through existing parties and organizations, especially the Democratic Party. The Soviets, however, seriously disagreed with Browder's policy and made their opinion known by publishing a highly critical letter in a French communist journal *Cahiers du Communisme* under the name of French communist leader Jacques Duclos. The so-called Duclos letter led to Browder's ousting and to the re-establishment of the CPUSA in the summer of 1945.<sup>641</sup> Eugene Dennis and William Z. Foster took the reins of the party which now veered closer to the Soviet Union, back from Browder's more independent policies.<sup>642</sup>

All this seems to have also affected the Cleveland radio news commentator. The tone of Gus Hall's radio speeches is strikingly different when one compares the speeches before and after 1945. Before his Navy service, Hall very seldom mentioned socialism or communism in his speeches. The names of Marx, Engels and Lenin were almost completely absent in his speeches. The Soviet Union was mentioned as an important ally in the fight against fascism, but its role as the motherland of international communism was not emphasized.

Hall's new tone could be heard already in his very first post-war speech in late April 1946. The recently discharged Navy man criticized starkly the massive military presence of the United States all around the world. U.S. armed forces, which just a little earlier had been heroic fighters against fascism, had now become evil tools of American imperialism. Hall

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641 *Cahiers du Communisme* published Duclos's text in April 1945 and the *Daily Worker* reprinted it on May 24, 1945. Excerpts of the letter can be read in Fried 1997, 344-345.

642 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 96-105.



saw no reasons for having U.S. troops in 58 countries and he certainly did not agree with President Truman's explanation that "we still have to protect and preserve American property all over the world":

Now I believe it is true that 99 percent of our people have no property in any foreign land because most of us don't even have property in America. So whose property is it that we must protect with such a large standing army? As I see it, it is the property of the Wall Street bankers and big industrial firms. Large standing armies not only keep away competitors, but help to keep the democratic forces of the people from becoming strong in these nations.<sup>643</sup>

This was only the beginning. Hall, who before 1945 hardly ever mentioned the words "socialism" or "communism" in his speeches, suddenly became a straightforward propagandist for a Soviet-style society, starting from the very basics of Marxism:

We all know that the present system of capitalism is an improvement over feudalism, the economic system based on slave labor. We communists are convinced that socialism is a tremendous improvement over the system of capitalism. Socialism would do away with the ever-growing lust for profits and markets which leads to war. So, as a consequence, socialism would put an end to wars for all time. Poverty and slum areas would disappear. Socialism means a full, free and prosperous life for all Americans.<sup>644</sup>

In early June Hall severely attacked two new labor bills – the so-called Case Bill and Truman Bill – which, according to Hall, attempted to steal from labor its bitterly-won rights to organize, bargain collectively and strike. Hall accused the U.S. Congress, the Truman administration and the National Association of Manufacturers of a conspiracy against the United States and its people. According to Hall, these three instances attempted to throw back social progress for 140 years. "They attempted to replace our democratic unions and methods with the rule of military forces: to replace collective bargaining with the bayonet", Hall said. According to Hall, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt were friends of labor and supported its right to strike, but the same could not be said of Harry S. Truman:

The beliefs of Jefferson, Lincoln and Roosevelt were based on the fact that yes, labor and common people have certain inalienable rights. From their actions President Truman and the majority of the Democratic-Republican reactionary coalition seem to think that only Wall Street, only the man with million dollars has any rights.<sup>645</sup>

In Hall's opinion, the U.S. Congress, the Truman administration and the National Association of Manufacturers "moved in the direction of foisting on America the policies and philosophies of Fascism and Nazism":

Think. Search your memory for a minute or two. Who was it that used military forces against labor to wreck the trade union movement? Who passed anti-labor legislation and used the armed forces to break strikes? Yes, it is shameful, but we cannot evade the comparison: It was the military might of Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo that crushed the labor movements of their respective countries.

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643 Gus Hall's radio speech on April 27, 1946. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 8.

644 Gus Hall's radio speech on May 18, 1946. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 8

645 Gus Hall's radio speech on June 1, 1946. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 8.

Fascist dictators found it impossible to lead their nations into a war of world conquest until they had wrecked the trade unions; and, of course, jailed and murdered the staunchest defenders of labor's rights, the Communists.<sup>646</sup>

On July 27, a hot Saturday evening, Gus Hall gave his listeners a presentation on the question "what is socialism?". According to Hall, there was no better way of explaining socialism than to look at the Soviet Union, a country which had – under the leadership of Lenin and Stalin – managed to make socialism reality instead of a mere dream.

Hall told his listeners of a society where all natural resources and means of production were state property and thus belonged to all the people; where small-scale entrepreneurship was permitted, provided it was based on personal labor and not on profits made from the labor of others; where the rights of individuals to own private property such as homes and cars were fully protected; the production was organized for use and not for profit, and was planned on a national scale to meet the needs of the people and where no one is entitled to an income except in return for useful work.<sup>647</sup>

According to Hall, the Soviets had managed to implement the most rapid industrialization in history, developing a backward agricultural country into a first-rate industrial power where unemployment and economic crises had been abolished and where one could find the most advanced system of social security in the world. In addition to this, the Soviets had achieved a far greater degree of democracy than existed in any other nation. As a consequence, the Soviet people possessed the basic freedoms "in the fullest sense".<sup>648</sup> Hall emphasized the scientific nature of the ideology on which the Soviet society was built upon:

This is socialism, based on the scientific theories of Marx and Engels. They showed that the socialized production of modern industry is incompatible with private ownership, and will work only with socialized ownership and operation. They also showed that it is the working class which must wage the fight for socialism. When the working class recognizes the need for a socialist society and is prepared to fight for it, it can become reality.<sup>649</sup>

A week later, Hall listed a long series of racist crimes that had recently taken place in the United States and after doing so he argued that the U.S. should clean out the fascists from its own front yard before it complains about wrong-doings in other countries. He then continued to give an orthodox Leninist lecture on U.S. imperialism. According to Hall, U.S. economy was in the hands of 60 ruling families, who through their cartels fixed prices in order to create enormous superprofits. The need for natural resources and new markets in which to invest these superprofits lead inevitably to wars between imperialist countries, as the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century already clearly showed. In Hall's opinion the United States was rapidly moving in the direction of Nazi Germany as its armed forces were spreading

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646 Gus Hall's radio speech on June 1, 1946. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 8.

647 Gus Hall's radio speech on July 27, 1946. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 8.

648 Hall speaks about "four freedoms" which apparently refers to Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous Four Freedoms speech which he gave in the U.S. congress in January 1941. According to Roosevelt, people everywhere in the world ought to have freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear. See *Dictionary of American History*, 445.

649 Gus Hall's radio speech on July 27, 1946. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 8.

all over the world and at home the attacks against minorities were increasing, as well as attacks against the communists.

Such a program can lead only to war and fascism, and to untold suffering of the American people. It betrays, in our opinion, the utter bankruptcy and decadence of the capitalist system.

Monopoly capitalism is the final stage of capitalism. Imperialism can be destroyed only through the destruction of the monopolies, that is, through the establishment of socialist society.<sup>650</sup>

In his last weekly radio speech on August 10, 1946 Hall discussed a theme that later became a frequently recurring feature in his writings and speeches: the scientific nature of Marxism. When studying the means to prevent wars, Hall paralleled Marxism with medical science. Just as medical science found causes for illnesses and could thus find ways of preventing them, so could Marxism find ways to prevent wars. Marxism showed us that wars are caused by the imperialist states' pressing need for power, new markets, raw materials and cheap labor. Such wars, supported by financiers making massive profits by selling war goods, were unjust, whereas wars which are fought for freedom and a decent life – such as the American War of Independence in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Russian revolution in 1918 – were justified.

Now that we know the cause, what then is the cure? The cure is simply to remove the cause, which is the profit system, and replace it with a system wherein people will live, work, study and play in brotherhood and prosperity – with socialism.

We can postpone and shorten wars by exerting mass pressure against the plans of the war-makers. We can abolish wars by abolishing capitalism.<sup>651</sup>

### **2.6.5. Conclusions**

Looking at Gus Hall's radio speeches, it seems that his political thinking changed fundamentally in the mid-1940s. Before the spring and summer of 1945, Hall sounded like a reformist social democrat who was ready to accept the capitalist market economy system and to develop the U.S. economy and society through gradual changes. He was a staunch supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt and spoke highly also of other Democrat statesmen like Cordell Hull.

In the spring of 1946 the tone of Hall's radio speeches had changed dramatically. No longer was he a moderate reformist but rather a fervent proponent of the Soviet model of society. Roosevelt's successor Harry S. Truman was no longer a potential associate but rather a part of a mean capitalist conspiracy against ordinary U.S. citizens. The capitalist system was to be abolished and replaced by a communist one.

What explains this change in Hall's thinking? Between these two sets of radio speeches Hall served 14 months in the U.S. Navy, taking part in the American war effort against the

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650 Gus Hall's radio speech on August 3, 1946. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 8.

651 Gus Hall's radio speech on August 10, 1946. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 8.

Japanese in the Pacific Ocean. As Hall's Navy service was relatively short and uneventful – he arrived to the island of Guam only shortly before the end of the war and served at a Navy motor repair shop far from the front lines – it is unlikely that his war experiences caused this change in his thinking. The explanation has to be found elsewhere.

A more likely explanation can be found by looking at CPUSA's development in the mid-1940s. As mentioned above, the CPUSA – or CPA, as it was then known – experienced a dramatic change in the party leadership in the summer of 1945, as Earl Browder was removed from his leading position and the CPUSA was reconstituted. Browder's ideas about the so-called Teheran spirit and peaceful coexistence and collaboration between capitalism and communism were discarded. Under the leadership of William Z. Foster the party returned to orthodox Marxism-Leninism after a Browder-led aberration.

The change in Hall's radio speeches reflects clearly this change in the CPUSA line. His pre-1945 speeches were good examples of Browder-like, Americanized communism which focused on timely topics in American society and international politics and played down the theoretical legacy of Marxism-Leninism and significance of the Moscow-led international communist movement. Conversely, Hall's post-1945 speeches were good examples of straightforwardly Soviet-minded Marxism-Leninism which saw the United States as an aggressive imperialist power which was gradually moving in the direction of fascism. At the same time the Soviet Union was represented as an ideal society and as a model to be followed also on the American continent.

Such a change in Hall's thinking is of course understandable as he most likely wanted to continue his party career which had been in a nice upward swing in the early 1940s. He did not want to experience the destiny of Morris Childs, the editor of *Daily Worker*, who eventually was removed from his position because of his alleged Browderism. The fact that Hall was on a faraway island of Guam during the intra-party squabbles of the summer of 1945 was a positive factor for him. In the spring of 1946, after his honorable discharge from the Navy, Hall could return to party functions as a fresh face not stained by the controversies of the previous summer.

This change in Hall's thinking can of course be seen as a sign of his opportunism. During his months in the U.S. Navy, Hall retuned his conception of Marxism-Leninism in order to make it more compatible with the views of the new party leadership. Such opportunism can of course be criticized, but on the other hand, certain ideological flexibility was needed if one was to succeed in the CPUSA. The party's political line was not always wholly coherent but it sometimes zigzagged – often following the needs of the Soviet Union.

## 2.7. Gus Hall and the Foley Square communist trial

### 2.7.1. Climbing up the party ladder

The 1940s was a decade of rapid career development for Gus Hall. When the decade started, he was a local-level party leader in the counties of Trumbull, Mahoning and Columbiana – i.e. in the Eastern Ohio area covering Warren and Youngstown – but during the WWII years he first in 1942 became the party leader in Cleveland, which was at the time Ohio's largest city, and in 1944 a member of CPUSA's 55-member national committee. In 1947 Hall became the chairman of the Ohio party organization and member of the party's 12-member national executive board.<sup>652</sup>

Such a career development is not surprising when one looks at Gus Hall's character, his background and his actions. Hall was indeed a suitable – if not perfect – person to rise into CPUSA leadership. Hall's truly proletarian family background combined with his experiences as a lumberjack and a steelworker was an asset in a party which raised blue-collar workers – especially those coming from basic industries like steel – onto a high pedestal. Representatives of the working class had good chances of making headway in the party organization, while college-educated intellectuals, middle-class professionals or white-collar office workers were not credible leaders for a truly proletarian party.

Hall's personal traits, his social skills and charisma surely also explained his rise. The party could indeed use a leader who knew how to crack jokes with ordinary shop floor workers and popularize Marxism-Leninism for an average American listener. Hall's tall and husky lumberjack character surely did not hamper the progress of his party career.

Also Hall's ethnic background may have played a role in his rise to the leadership. As the CPUSA wanted to present itself as an all-American party, persons with Western or Northern European background had an advantage over Eastern European, Jewish or African American persons when competing for the top leadership positions.<sup>653</sup> And although a large part of Finnish American communists had left CPUSA during its Bolshevization in the 1920s and many had also travelled to the Soviet Union to build a workers' paradise in the 1930s, Hall's Finnish background may have also helped his rise, as many Finns still remained in the party.

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652 North 1970, 19 and Brandt 1981, 5. It was natural that Ohio's party leader was a member of the national executive board since Ohio was one of the states with most party members. According to U.S. Senate figures, in 1951 Ohio was the fifth biggest membership state after New York, California, Illinois and Pennsylvania. The Ohio party had almost 1 300 party members whereas New York had more than 15 000 of CPUSA's 32 000 members. See *The Communist Party of the United States of America*, 34.

653 Klehr 1978, 24. Indeed, CPUSA has not had any top leader of Eastern European or Jewish origin since the expulsion of Jay Lovestone in 1929 (Lovestone – originally Jacob Liebshtein – was born in a Jewish family in Lithuania). William Z. Foster, Earl Browder and Eugene Dennis had their family roots mainly in the British Isles. Although Gus Hall's parents' home country is geographically located in North-Eastern Europe, it is not – due to historical and cultural reasons – usually considered to be an Eastern European country in a similar sense as, for example, Lithuania.

Ideologically Hall was also fit for leadership positions. As we saw in the previous chapter, Hall could well sense the current ideological atmosphere. During Earl Browder's leadership, Hall's radio speeches were well in tune with Browder's Americanized communism. Hall concentrated largely on domestic issues and mentioned the Soviet Union and communism only in passing. Marx, Engels and Lenin were not mentioned at all. After the expulsion of Browder and the re-establishment of CPUSA under the more Soviet-minded leadership of William Z. Foster and Eugene Dennis, the tone of Hall's speeches changed noticeably. The Soviet Union was now a model country to be followed and Marx an ideological beacon in the pitch-black night of capitalism.

### 2.7.2. Cold war, red scare

While Gus Hall was gradually climbing up the party ladder, the relations between the great powers were continuously tightening. While the Soviet Union was strengthening its position in Eastern Europe by helping communists to power, the United States helped Western European nations to rebuild their economies through its Marshall Plan. At the same time, the United States was following the Truman Doctrine and giving military aid to Turkey and Greece in order to contain the spread of communism on the shores of Mediterranean Sea. The tension between the great powers led eventually to the Berlin crisis in mid-1948 as Stalin tried to starve out the American, British and French forces in West Berlin by blockading all land routes from West Germany. The Western powers managed, however, to overcome the blockade through their 10-month Berlin airlift.

The international tension reflected also to the domestic situation in the United States. Although the times of Joe McCarthy were still ahead – McCarthy began his anticommunist campaign in early 1950 – the communist threat and the ways to counter it were already a hot topic in Washington. The 1948 presidential election was drawing closer, and as Truman was willing to continue in the White House, his administration could not appear to be soft on communism. Truman and his attorney general Tom Clark did not originally consider CPUSA to be a significant security threat<sup>654</sup>, but as Republicans criticized the Truman administration for not acting against domestic communists, Clark decided to do something.

The attorneys of the Justice Department had already been building a case against the CPUSA before Clark's term of office, which had begun in June 1945. In 1946 and 1947 the FBI and Justice Department attorneys jointly produced a massive, 1850-page study on CPUSA's aims and activities. After the Republican-controlled House Un-American Activities Committee in February 1948 criticized Clark for not acting against communists,

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654 Truman believed that the communist threat the United States was facing was almost entirely a foreign one. According to Belknap, Truman dismissed the CPUSA as "a contemptible minority in a land of freedom". At the same time, however, more than 60 percent of Americans wanted to outlaw the Communist Party. See Belknap 1977, 43-44.

Clark requested to see FBI's vast CPUSA study. The study served as a basis for indictments against the CPUSA leaders filed by a federal grand jury in New York on July 20, 1948.<sup>655</sup>

The indictments were based on the so-called Smith Act, which President Roosevelt had signed in June 1940. The act got its name from Democratic U.S. Representative Howard W. Smith. Smith, a conservative lawyer from Virginia, was a key leader among the southern Dixiecrats and an opponent of many civil rights reforms, including the historical Civil Rights act of 1964.<sup>656</sup> The Smith Act was indeed a rare piece of legislation as it was the first peacetime sedition law in the United States since the Sedition Act of 1798.<sup>657</sup> The heart of the act was section 2, which made it unlawful for any person

(1) to knowingly or willfully advocate, abet, advise or teach the duty, necessity, desirability or propriety of overthrowing or destroying any government in the United States by force or violence or by assassination of any officer of such government;

(2) to print, publish, edit, issue, circulate, sell, distribute or publicly display any written or printed matter advocating, advising or teaching the duty, necessity, desirability or propriety of overthrowing or destroying any government in the United States by force or violence;

(3) to organize or help to organize any society, group or assembly of persons who teach, advocate or encourage the overthrow or destruction of any government in the United States by force or violence, or to be or become a member of or affiliate with any such society, group or assembly of persons, knowing the purposes thereof.<sup>658</sup>

Originally the Smith Act was aimed against American communists but because of the Soviet-American war alliance, the Communist Party had not been prosecuted before 1948. Instead the U.S. government had used the act against Trotskyists and American fascists during WWII. In 1941 eighteen Trotskyists from the Socialist Workers Party – many of whom had taken part in the 1934 Teamsters strike in Minneapolis – were sentenced to prison for 12 or 16 months for advocating forceful overthrow of the government.<sup>659</sup> In 1944 thirty-one fascists were indicted for conspiring to cause insubordination in the armed forces, but the case ended in mistrial as Judge Edward C. Eicher died in November 1944 after being exhausted by the tumultuous trial. The U.S. authorities were unwilling to continue the complicated judicial process especially as the war was ending and fascists were being soundly beaten. In both cases the CPUSA had warmly welcomed the prosecutions

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655 Belknap 1977, 45-52. The grand jury in New York had been investigating Soviet espionage in the U.S. since June 1947 but had filed no indictments. Considering the prevailing political atmosphere, the attorney general Clark was under pressure to get some results from the grand jury. It was therefore not surprising that he approved to seek Smith Act indictments from the grand jury.

656 Martelle 2011, 3-4.

657 The Smith Act is also known as Alien Registration Act as it required all noncitizens to register with the U.S. government. It also barred admission to the United States of people who had been active in the Communist Party in their native countries. See Martelle 2011, 6.

658 Quoted in Klingaman 1997, 340.

659 According to Belknap, the Smith Act trial against the Trotskyists was initiated by the long-time Teamsters leader Daniel Tobin who had supported Roosevelt in the 1940 election. The Trotskyists were causing trouble for Tobin within the Teamsters, so he appealed to the President for help. See Belknap 1977, 38-39.

since Trotskyists and fascists were both archenemies of the Stalinist communists. Not surprisingly, the communists were severely disappointed by the mistrial of the fascists.<sup>660</sup>

In July 1948 it was the CPUSA's turn to feel the sting of the Smith Act. Three years had gone since the allied WWII victory and the beautiful comradeship between the United States and the Soviet Union was only a faded memory. The CPUSA no longer had a special position in U.S. politics and it could now be subjected to similar measures as other groups which had been seen as threats to American democracy.

The indictments of July 20, 1948 were directed to the twelve members of the CPUSA's national board. According to one of the indictments, the members had since April 1, 1945<sup>661</sup> conspired with one another and with unknown persons to

organize as the Communist Party of the United States a society, group and assembly of persons who teach and advocate the overthrow and destruction of the Government of the United States by force and violence, and knowingly and willfully to advocate and teach the duty and necessity of overthrowing and destroying the Government of the United States by force, which said acts are prohibited by [...] the Smith Act.<sup>662</sup>

After the indictments were filed, the FBI did not dither with arresting the communists. Little before 6:00 p.m. on July 20 a dozen FBI men charged into the national headquarters of the CPUSA on New York's East 12<sup>th</sup> Street, where they arrested William Z. Foster, Eugene Dennis, John Williamson, Henry Winston and Jack Stachel. The communist leaders had been alerted of forthcoming arrests and they had purposefully gathered to party headquarters to wait for the FBI together with their lawyer, a *Daily Worker* reporter and the party's public relations director. The party leaders had prepared a press release for the reporters accompanying the FBI agents, denouncing the arrests as Truman's political ploy to win the upcoming presidential election "by hook or by crook".<sup>663</sup>

Benjamin Davis was also arrested in New York on July 20 and so was Carl Winter in Detroit. John Gates and Irving Potash turned themselves in during the following few days. Robert Thompson surrendered in New York a week after the indictments and Gil Green gave himself up in Chicago on July 30.<sup>664</sup> The last of the twelve to turn up was Gus Hall, who walked into FBI's Cleveland office on August 4, tanned and relaxed and with no explanation as to where he had been for the previous two weeks.<sup>665</sup>

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660 Belknap 1977, 38-41.

661 The prosecutors considered 1945 as the beginning of the conspiracy because in June of that year the CPUSA was re-established after Browder had transformed it into a Communist Political Association in the summer of 1944. See Martelle 2011, 28.

662 Quoted in Belknap 1977, 51.

663 Belknap 1977, 52 and Martelle 2011, 35-37.

664 Gil Green, who lived in Chicago at the time, was vacationing at a Wisconsin lakeside cabin with his family when he heard about the indictments and arrests from the radio evening news. The Greens could listen how the zealous newsmen in Chicago had interviewed their neighbors. None of the neighbors knew, however, where the Greens had gone. See Green 1984, 1-5.

665 Belknap 1977, 52-53 and Martelle 2011, 39-40.



### 2.7.3. “Truman equals Hitler”

The public reaction to the CPUSA indictments was overwhelmingly favorable. Major newspapers from the conservative *Chicago Tribune* to the liberal *The New York Times* gave the idea of a communist trial their editorial endorsement.<sup>666</sup> Criticism was heard practically only from sources close to the party, such as the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) and the National Lawyers Guild. The CRC – which posted the bail for the defendants – considered the indictments as a government attempt to suppress the American Communist Party and found such political persecution to be “contrary and repugnant to American law and democratic tradition”:

We believe that this is a fight to maintain our democratic institutions. We believe that there has been no country in the history of the world which suppressed the Communist Party or any other political party and remained free and democratic. [...] We recognize that defense of the constitutional and civil rights of communists and other minorities is the first line in the battle for democracy.<sup>667</sup>

One of the loudest critics of indictments was Henry A. Wallace, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s former vice-president who would later in 1948 run for president as a Progressive Party candidate. Just like the CRC, he saw the indictments as a dangerous step towards political repression:

Defense of the civil rights of communists is the first line in the defense of the liberties of a democratic people. The history of Germany, Italy, Japan and Franco Spain should teach us that the suppression of the communists is but a first step in an assault on the democratic rights of labor, national, racial and political minorities and all those who oppose the policies of the government in power.<sup>668</sup>

Wallace pointed out that such a trial against the communist leaders was in conflict with the first amendment of the U.S. constitution which – among other things – guarantees the citizens freedom of speech or freedom of press. He therefore expected that the courts would rule the case unconstitutional as the allegations against the communist leaders involved no acts and did not constitute a “clear and present danger” to the government.<sup>669</sup>

The Communist Party and the CRC started massive campaigns in order to prevent the trial, collecting names for petitions and asking their members and supporters to bombard President Truman and attorney general Clark with letters and telegrams. The organizations demanded that Truman and Clark use their powers to dismiss the charges against CPUSA leaders.<sup>670</sup> While the party wanted to prevent the whole trial from taking place, some of its leaders – at least William Z. Foster and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn – were nevertheless assured that the process will end in the communists’ great victory. They believed that the party’s traditional labor defense strategy – which aimed at revealing the injustices and the rottenness of the whole capitalist system – would turn the tables in the courtroom, as Gurley Flynn wrote:

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666 Belknap 1977, 59.

667 Quoted in Martelle 2011, 39.

668 Quoted in Martelle 2011, 37-38.

669 Martelle 2011, 38-39.

670 Belknap 1977, 60-61.

Our comrades will make the trial court a mighty tribunal of the people so that the accused become the accusers and the enemies of the people find themselves on trial before the huge court of public opinion in America – and the world.<sup>671</sup>

Naturally Gus Hall also took part in the campaign against the trial. In the CPUSA archive file containing Hall's 1940s radio speeches one can find a speech he gave at WMAN radio station in Mansfield, Ohio on September 7, 1948. In his speech Hall equates the CPUSA indictments to the famous trial of socialist leader Eugene Debs in Cleveland in 1918. Debs, whose writings Hall had read in Minnesota as a young kid, was sentenced to prison for ten years for resisting the military draft during WWI. According to Hall, Truman wanted to "repeat the disgraceful performance" now, thirty years later. Just like Henry A. Wallace, Hall warned his listeners of the similarities between the policies of Truman and Adolf Hitler:

Hitler embarked on that same course. He started by jailing and killing communists. He did the same to the Jews. He did the same to the trade unions. He did the same eventually to all who voiced or whispered any opposition. His Himmler followed the same course that Hoover now proposes to follow.

Any thinking person knows that this road once set upon has but one ending – fascism and war of conquest – and finally, death and ruin.

The people of any nation who are induced to travel on that road eventually will wind up in the same horrible plight of the German people, for mankind will not permit fascism, either with a German or an American brand, to rule their destinies.<sup>672</sup>

According to Hall, the indictment of the communist leaders was just a Truman's trick to turn citizen attention away from the impossibility of capitalism:

Why these indictments against the communists? Why this terrific hullabaloo in Washington about the reds?

The answer is simple. The real traitors to America are filled with fear. They have adopted the slogan: "A spy a day leads the public astray."

They need a scapegoat for the crisis of today just as Hitler needed a scapegoat in his day. They have no confidence in their system of capitalism nor in their ability to persuade the people that for all eternity men and women must endure the hardships of a society of exploitation.<sup>673</sup>

#### **2.7.4. Grueling trial in a "kangaroo court"**

The trial was originally supposed to start in mid-October 1948, but the defense lawyers were eventually able to postpone it until mid-January 1949. As the lawyers were preparing for the trial, Truman surprisingly defeated his Republican opponent Thomas E. Dewey in

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671 Quoted in Belknap 1977, 60.

672 Gus Hall's radio speech on September 7, 1948. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 8.

673 Gus Hall's radio speech on September 7, 1948. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 8.

the presidential election in November. In November the lawyers also heard that the case would be tried by Judge Harold Medina.

Sixty-year old Medina was an experienced and highly respected lawyer who had graduated from Columbia Law School among the best in his class in 1912. The fact that Medina came from a wealthy Mexican-American family, gave the communist defendants a reason to complain about “class justice”. Medina indeed was not an ideal judge from the defendants’ perspective as he was known for his abrasive and flippant attitude and language that was often caustic and sometimes downright rude. Although he often lashed others with a biting tongue, he was very sensitive and reacted strongly against what he interpreted as insults from the attorneys.<sup>674</sup>

Medina was assigned to the communist trial partly because of his good health as his superiors were well aware of the death of Judge Edward C. Eicher during the 1944 fascist trial. As Medina studied the fascist trial, he started to fear that he too might collapse of exhaustion. This fear did not vanish as the communist trial dragged on for months and months. The memory of Eicher’s destiny partly explains Medina’s ill-tempered and impatient behavior during the trial.<sup>675</sup> Ellen Schrecker writes:

He [Medina] was haunted by the spectacle of the previous Smith Act trial, in which the judge died in the middle of the proceedings, seemingly sent to his early grave by the raucous behavior of the pro-Nazi defendants and their attorneys. Medina believed that the CP was preparing a similar fate for him and he viewed the communist leaders and their attorneys as potential assassins who were trying to provoke a mistrial by harassing him to death. Not surprisingly, he handled the party’s lawyers and their clients with overt hostility, treating their objections as delaying tactics and openly baiting both attorneys and witnesses.<sup>676</sup>

The twelve defendants sitting opposite to Judge Medina were indeed the top leaders of the Communist Party. In addition to general secretary Eugene Dennis and national secretary William Z. Foster, the group included also the party’s organizational secretary Henry Winston, trade union secretary John Williamson, educational director Jack Stachel and *Daily Worker’s* editor-in-chief John Gates. Ohio chairman Gus Hall was not the only state-level leader in the group as New York state chairman Robert Thompson, Illinois chairman Gil Green and Michigan chairman Carl Winter were also among the defendants. New York City councilman Benjamin Davis – one of the very few communists ever elected to any democratic organ in the U.S. – was also a member of the CPUSA’s national board as was Irving Potash, an official in the furriers’ union.<sup>677</sup>

Excluding the fact that all defendants were male, the group gave a relatively good cross-section of the Communist Party. Jews and African Americans were well represented as Gates, Green, Stachel and Winter came from Jewish families<sup>678</sup>, and Davis and Winston

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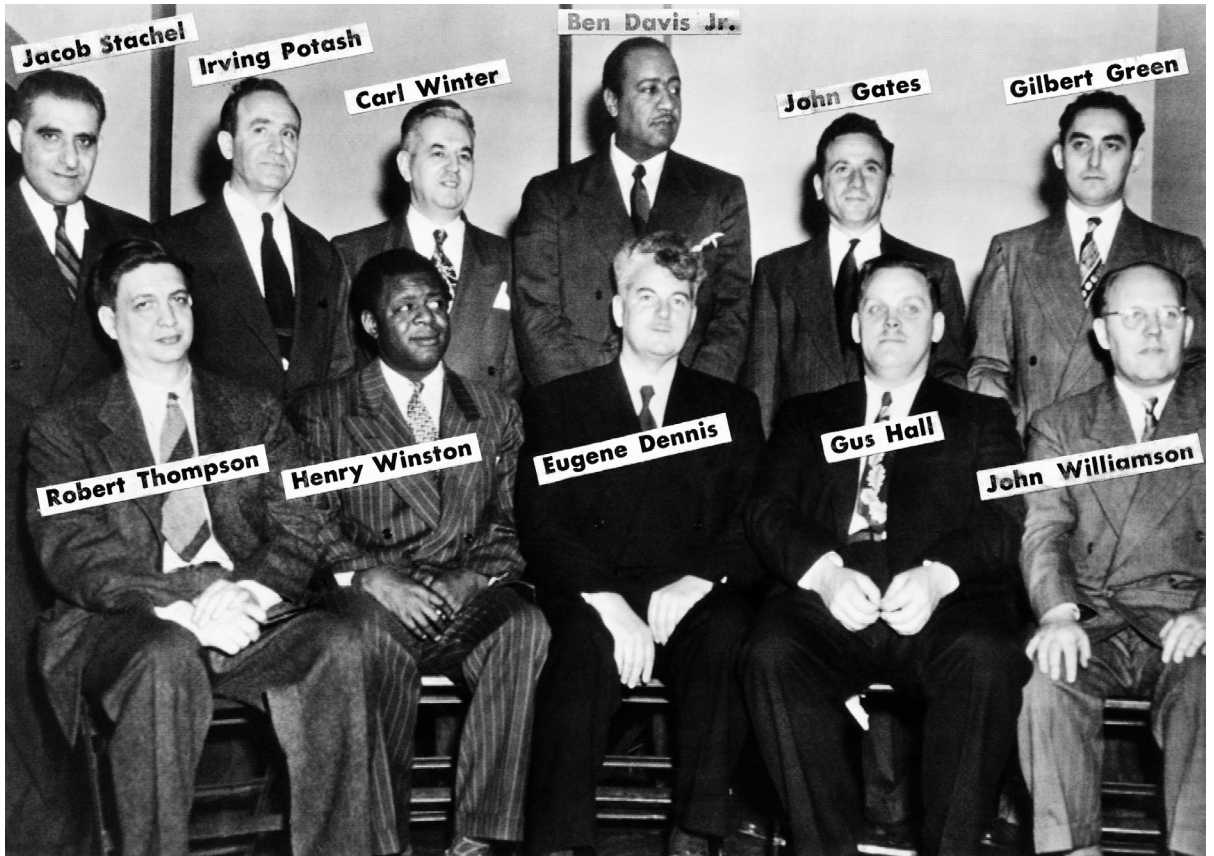
674 Belknap 1977, 67-68. For more on Medina’s background and personality, see Steinberg 1984, 150-151 and Martelle 2011, 59-63.

675 Belknap 1977, 68-69; Steinberg 1984, 159 and Martelle 2011, 71-73.

676 Schrecker 1998, 198.

677 Belknap 1977, 65-66.

678 As the CPUSA wanted to appeal to mainstream Americans, many of its Jewish members Americanized their names. Also John Gates (originally Solomon Regenstreif), Gil Green (originally



*The eleven defendants of the first Smith Act trial against the members of the CPUSA, photographed on the first day of the trial on January 17, 1949. Originally also the party's national secretary William Z. Foster was indicted, but because of his poor health he was not tried.*  
 Source: All Over Press

were African Americans. One fourth of the defendants were foreign-born as Potash was born in Russia, Stachel was born in Poland and Williamson in Scotland.<sup>679</sup> All defendants came from more or less poor families except Davis who was a son of a wealthy Atlanta publisher – according to Belknap, Davis's radicalism was a product of white racism rather than poverty.<sup>680</sup> Although the CPUSA claimed to speak for the American working class, only a few of the defendants – namely Foster, Potash and to some extent Hall – had held a significant position in the trade union movement. At least four of the defendants – Hall, Potash, Thompson and Winston – had, however, studied in Moscow's International Lenin School.<sup>681</sup>

Gilbert Greenberg) and Carl Winter (originally Phillip Carl Weisburg) did that. See Belknap 1977, 66.  
 679 Potash was deported to Poland and Williamson to Britain in 1955 after they had served their Smith Act prison sentences. Potash, however, managed to return to the United States few years later. See *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 317 & 418.

680 Belknap 1977, 66.

681 Harvey Klehr Papers, Federal Bureau of Investigation FOIA Files, box 47, folder 4 and *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 317 & 385. J. Edgar Hoover claims in his book *Masters*

Foster – born in 1881 – was by far the oldest in the group as all others were born in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Because of his poor health, he was soon – already in January 1949 – dropped from the group of defendants and the trial continued without him.<sup>682</sup> Thompson – born in 1915 – was the youngest in the group. Four members of the group – Gates, Hall, Thompson and Winston – had served in the armed forces during WWII, and Thompson had won the Army’s second highest decoration, the Distinguished Service Cross, for his heroism in Papua New Guinea.<sup>683</sup> Both Thompson and Gates had also fought in the Spanish civil war. All four had, as Michal Belknap points out, “joined the American armed forces less out of traditional patriotism than because of their commitment to the worldwide struggle against fascism”.<sup>684</sup>

When the trial finally started after a three-month postponement on January 17, 1949 at the Foley Square federal courthouse on Lower Manhattan, the New York City Police Department had stationed four hundred men in and around the courthouse, giving Foley Square the appearance of a military camp. Although there was a demonstration of about five hundred opponents of the trial at noon, there was no public disorder, which gave the communist and liberal press a reason to complain about grossly exaggerated security measures.<sup>685</sup>

As the communists were assured that they could not win in the courtroom but could gain victory through public protest, they decided to stall the trial as much as possible in order to have time to mobilize the masses. The defendants traveled around the country trying to agitate citizens to protest against the trial. Delegations coming from all over the country purporting to speak for trade unions, veterans, African Americans and other interest groups flocked to Foley Square in an effort to force Medina to rule as the CPUSA desired. Medina first met with some of the groups but soon grew tired and refused to meet with any of the delegations. The delegations stopped coming but instead of them a deluge of correspondence, some of it quite obscene, rained upon Medina. The correspondence did not impress Medina who – quite rightly – saw it as a “manufactured substitute for public opinion”, as Belknap puts it. The communists’ stalling tactics – which soon strongly frustrated Medina – alienated also many of their liberal allies.<sup>686</sup>

As the trial started the communists first attacked the selection of the grand jury that had indicted them in July 1948. The communists claimed that the grand jury was an organ of

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*of Deceit* that also Eugene Dennis and Carl Winter would have studied in the Lenin School, but other sources do not support this claim. See Hoover 1958, 60.

682 Barrett 1999, 236. According to Barrett, Foster suffered from arteriosclerosis, hypertension, high blood pressure, a rapid heart rate and an enlarged heart.

683 *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left* describes Thompson’s exploits as follows: “In January 1943 Thompson swam across the rain-swollen Konombi Creek under fire, towing a rope to which the rest of his troops clung when crossing. He then led a charge that wiped out two Japanese machine-gun positions, ensuring the American advance.” See *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 386.

684 Belknap 1977, 66.

685 Belknap 1977, 69. According to the *The New York Times*, the 400 policemen were “the largest detail in police history” assigned to a court case. See *The New York Times*, Jan 17, 1949 and Steinberg 1984, 157.

686 Belknap 1977, 69-70.

the well-to-do citizens, as the poor, slum dwellers, low-income workers, African Americans and other minorities had been systematically excluded from the organ. The grand jury selection was discussed in length during the first six weeks of the trial but in the end the communists could not prove their charges to be true and in early March the trial could proceed to select its own jury. The jury that was selected was markedly different from the aggregations of rich white capitalists the communists had pictured as typical of the juries of Foley Square courthouse. It included three African Americans –including its forewoman Thelma Dial, who was a housewife and a part-time dressmaker – and none of its members was truly wealthy. Seven of the twelve jurors were women. *The New York Times* called the jury “a representative cross-section of the New York melting pot”. Now the trial was ready to really get going.<sup>687</sup>

On March 21, 1949, U.S. attorney John F. X. McGohey could finally read out the government’s charges against the communists. According to McGohey, the defendants aimed – after they had dropped the Browderist Popular Front policies and reconstituted the CPUSA in 1945 – to establish socialism “by the violent overthrow and destruction of our constitutional form of government through the smashing of the State government and the setting up of the dictatorship of the proletariat by violent and forceful seizure of power under the leadership of the Communist Party”. The party clubs, McGohey claimed, were “in reality and in fact classes for the indoctrination of their members with the theory and practice of Marxist-Leninist principles of the overthrow and destruction of the government of the United States by force and violence”. The communists taught that “every vestige of the bourgeois state and class must be wiped out”, because “only when this has been accomplished can the program of Marxian Socialism be carried out”.<sup>688</sup>

The CPUSA’s general secretary Eugene Dennis – who acted as his own attorney – was the first to reply to McGohey. According to Dennis, there was no resemblance between the CPUSA and the “fantastic conspiracy” described in the indictment. He pointed out that the prosecution had accused the defendants of neither overt acts nor direct advocacy of violent revolution. The trial was, Dennis claimed, a prosecution for political beliefs, intended to destroy the Communist Party.<sup>689</sup>

Dennis denied that the party’s principles implied the duty or necessity of forcefully overthrowing the U.S. government. The constitution of the CPUSA called for the institution of socialism by free choice of the American people and the defendants, he insisted, had simply urged labor and the masses to work toward the peaceful establishment of a new economic and political order. Dennis’s reply was followed by the defense lawyers. They also claimed that the trial was one of political beliefs. One of them pointed out that the CPUSA could not be held responsible for outdated communist literature or for every word uttered by all its members and another stressed the defendants’ longstanding opposition to force and violence.<sup>690</sup>

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687 Belknap 1977, 70-73 & 77-78; Steinberg 1984, 157-160 and Martelle 2011, 82-87 & 90-101.

688 Belknap 1977, 79 and Martelle 2011, 115-117.

689 Belknap 1977, 79 and Martelle 2011, 118.

690 Belknap 1977, 80.

McGohey's prosecution rested largely on classics of communist literature, most notably Marx's and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*, Lenin's *State and Revolution*, Stalin's *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)* and *Foundations of Leninism* as well as *The Program of the Communist International*. The primary function of the prosecution's witnesses was to introduce this literature, interpret it and explain how these writings manifested themselves in the activities of the party. One of the main witnesses for the prosecution was Louis Budenz, a former long-time member of the CPUSA's national committee and managing editor of the CPUSA's *Daily Worker* newspaper. Through him, the prosecution introduced numerous Marxist classics to the jury, many of which contained expressions of violent revolutionary sentiments. As many of the documents introduced through Budenz had been published prior to years 1945-48 – i.e. the period covered by the indictment – the defense lawyers protested strenuously against their admission to the evidence material. Judge Medina, however, turned a deaf ear to the defense objections.<sup>691</sup>

Budenz also introduced the concept of “Aesopian language” to the court records. He referred the section in the CPUSA's constitution which stated that any communist who adhered to a group or faction guilty of conspiring or acting to subvert or overthrow the institutions of American democracy was liable to immediate expulsion. According to Budenz, this was merely Aesopian language, i.e. mere window dressing in order to protect the party from American courts.<sup>692</sup> The concept of Aesopian language indeed put the communist in a difficult position, as Peter L. Steinberg puts it:

Through this interpretation, any communist literature which supported the government's position on the use of force and violence by the CP was to be accepted literally, but anything in conflict with this thesis was to be rejected as “Aesopian language” deliberately inserted to provide a security cover and to be interpreted as the opposite of its literal meaning. If the communists claimed the capitalist state had to be smashed, they were to be believed. If they said they favored a peaceful transition to socialism, this was to be interpreted as meaning the opposite.<sup>693</sup>

Many of the government witnesses were former CPUSA members like Budenz. One of them was Herbert A. Philbrick, a mid-level CPUSA official from Massachusetts. His appearance was an unpleasant surprise to the defendants who were visibly angered when Philbrick told that he had been in regular contact with the FBI since 1940. Because of his role as the government's surprise witness, Philbrick had to sneak in to the court house through a cellar ramp.<sup>694</sup> Another government witness William Odell Nowell told the court about his studies in Moscow's International Lenin School and mentioned that he had studied there simultaneously with Gus Hall.<sup>695</sup> Yet another government witness Charles Nicodemus

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691 Belknap 1977, 82-84.

692 Belknap 1977, 85-86 and Martelle 2011, 125-126.

693 Steinberg 1984, 163.

694 Belknap 1977, 86-88; Steinberg 1984, 164-165 and Martelle 2011, 135-142. Prosecution later introduced also another surprise witness as photographer Angela Calomiris took the witness stand. She had been active in the party to the very moment of her appearance in the court. Just like with Philbrick, her appearance visibly angered the defendants. See Belknap 1977, 89-90 and Martelle 2011, 147-150.

695 Harvey Klehr Papers, Federal Bureau of Investigation FOIA Files, box 47, folder 4. Nowell was originally from rural Georgia but he had in the 1920s moved to Detroit where he worked in the auto industry. He joined the CPUSA in 1929. In addition Gus Hall, Nowell told the court that

told the court how he had heard national committee member Al Lannon say in a 1945 meeting that in order for the revolution to succeed in the United States, the Soviet Red Army might have to march to the United States from Siberia through Alaska and Canada. The defendants roared with laughter as they listened to Nicodemus's testimony but Medina did not find it amusing.<sup>696</sup>

The defense lawyers protested against the prosecution's habit of reading out selected revolutionary passages of communist literature. According to the defense lawyers, passages of text should not have been ripped out of context, but the trial should study complete books and also other works by the same authors in order to understand the passages properly. Complying with such request would have greatly prolonged the trial so it is not surprising that Medina rejected the defense demand.<sup>697</sup>

The hearing of prosecution's witnesses continued until mid-May. As most witnesses were low-level FBI informers, CPUSA's *Daily Worker* newspaper called the hearing a "dreary procession of petty [...] police informants". The *Daily Worker* was not the only media criticizing the prosecutors. As the hearing came to its end, several commentators criticized the prosecution's evidence as unimpressive. The critics would have liked to see more concrete evidence of a conspiracy. Some critics were disturbed by the fact that, under the terms of the Smith Act, the government did not have to prove that any overt acts of teaching and advocating violent overthrow of the government had taken place. Prosecutions heavy reliance on informers was also criticized as well as the fact that very little of the evidence seemed to have anything directly to do with the defendants. As the commentator of the liberal *New Republic* magazine put it, the government "failed to make out the overwhelming case that many people anticipated before the trial began".<sup>698</sup>

Although the evidence against the defendants was unimpressive, they did not concentrate on rebutting it. Instead, true to the traditions of labor defense, they launched a prosecution of their own, as they wanted to use the trial to expose the inherent rottenness of the capitalist system.

The first witness for the defense was one of the defendants, John Gates. Through using Gates's own summary of Karl Marx's *Capital*, the defense wanted to show the court its version of what communism and CPUSA's program was all about. Gates's lawyer sought to include his summary in the trial evidence, arguing that Marxism-Leninism was an integrated body of thought and Marx's *Capital* was its foundation. Gates's summary would help the jury to see the communist ideology in its entirety. Medina did not, however, admit the summary into the evidence. According to him, the defense could show only to a limited extent what the defendants had done and what they had taught, as a more

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he had met also two other defendants – Potash and Stachel – during his visits in Moscow. Nowell also informed the court of CPUSA's self-determination theory for the blacks living in the so-called Black Belt of the United States. According to Lisa E. Davis, Nowell's "sensational revelations" made him a "star witness" in the trial. See Steinberg 1984, 165-166 and Davis 2017, 128-129.

696 Belknap 1977, 88-89; Steinberg 1984, 166 and Martelle 2011, 146-147.

697 Belknap 1977, 89.

698 Belknap 1977, 90-92.



thorough approach would only be confusing.<sup>699</sup> Medina's ruling was considered absurd by the *People's World*, a communist newspaper published in California:

A man is accused of a crime. But as a matter of fact he was nowhere near the scene of the crime at the time it was committed. He was fishing. However, he is not allowed to introduce any evidence to prove that he was fishing as that is irrelevant because obviously fishing has no connection with the nature of the alleged crime. [...]

Judge Medina has ruled the defendants must be confined to introducing evidence that they did not conspire to advocate or teach forcible overthrow of the government, without at the same time being permitted to demonstrate what they actually did teach and advocate.

That's not a trial. That's a legal straight jacket.<sup>700</sup>

As a consequence of Medina's strict rulings, the atmosphere in the court grew increasingly hostile. In early June the tension led to a dramatic outburst as John Gates was being questioned by the prosecutor. The prosecutor demanded to know the identities of men who had prepared a 1947 pamphlet on veteran issues together with Gates. Gates refused to supply the names, saying that these individuals worked in the private industry and would lose their jobs if he named them. Medina directed Gates to respond, but again he refused, now invoking the first and fifth amendments of the U.S. constitution. Medina replied by stating that Gates did not have the rights he was asserting. Eugene Dennis protested against Medina's line but the judge stuck to his position and remanded Gates to jail for thirty days or until he chose to answer.<sup>701</sup>

Medina's ruling caused an immediate explosion in the courtroom. An angry roar went through the room and almost everyone present leaped to his or her feet. Henry Winston shouted something about lynching and loudly condemned the government for initiating such a monstrous case. The judge instantly remanded him for contempt of court for the remainder of the trial. Deputy marshals and bailiffs rushed into the chaotic courtroom. Gus Hall shouted at the judge that he had heard more law and constitutional rights in "kangaroo courts". Medina did not waste time but remanded also Hall for the remainder of the trial.<sup>702</sup>

Medina's rulings silenced the courtroom but not the defense lawyers. Dennis – who acted as his own attorney – attacked Medina for outrageous and unconstitutional conduct.

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699 Belknap 1977, 92. For more on Gates's testimony, see Martelle 2011, 169-176.

700 Quoted in Belknap 1977, 93.

701 Belknap 1977, 95-96; Steinberg 1984, 169 and Martelle 2011, 173-175.

702 Belknap 1977, 96; Steinberg 1984, 169 and Martelle 2011, 175-176. In his autobiographical writings Gus Hall tells how he became familiar with kangaroo courts during his imprisonment in Warren, Ohio in 1937. According to Hall, he was elected as the "judge" of the prison's kangaroo court because the actual judge in the local court had given Hall the highest bail in Warren's history. As a rule, the most prestigious prisoner was elected as the judge, Hall writes. According to him, the kangaroo courts among other things assigned prisoners to keep the prison clean. The fines imposed by the court were used to buy tobacco and razor blades especially for the prisoners who were broke, Hall claims. According to *Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins*, the name "probably originated at the time when Australia, land of the kangaroo, was the penal colony for the British Empire". See CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 193, folder 15 and *Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins*, 329-330.

Medina in turn warned Dennis that although his status as one of the attorneys protected him from a contempt sentence as long as the trial lasted, he might be eventually sentenced for such behavior.<sup>703</sup>

The jailing of the three defendants led to immediate protests in New York and elsewhere. On the very next day, five hundred protesters marched in front of the jail where Gates, Hall and Winston were kept. Left-leaning politicians like the recent presidential candidate Henry Wallace and congressman Vito Marcantonio condemned Medina's ruling as did the CRC and some leftist labor unions. The CPUSA launched a well-organized campaign to exploit the incident. The national committee issued a statement urging trade unions, churches, lawyers, African Americans and all democratic individuals to join in demanding the immediate release of Gates, Hall and Winston. The campaign only got more wind in its sails when Medina remanded fourth defendant Gil Green in mid-June.<sup>704</sup> At the end of the month the CRC – which was closely connected to the CPUSA – arranged a massive assembly in Madison Square Garden. The assembly dispatched a wire to Medina calling for the release of the four jailed defendants and sent to Truman a resolution demanding an immediate dismissal of the indictments against the communist leaders.<sup>705</sup>

The CPUSA's campaign could also be seen on the pages of the *Daily Worker* newspaper which did not hesitate featuring the defendants' children – like Gus Hall's daughter Barbara Hall – in its stories:

A little blond 11-year-old girl, wearing a blue cotton dress and white bobbysocks, rushed up to the rail in the Foley Square courtroom when the judge called a 10-minute recess. She hurried past the row of red-backed chairs that were lined up behind the defense table. She reached out and threw her arms around one of the four defendants being led by deputy marshals to the courthouse bullpen for prisoners.

The prisoner picked up the little girl and kissed her. "Daddy," she said, "oh, daddy." She fought back the tears by shutting her eyes. Then she opened her eyes and the tears streamed down her face.

Little Barbara Hall waved sadly to her father Gus Hall, the Communist leader, as he was led off to his cell. She walked out into the corridor with her arm around her mother. They both wept quietly.<sup>706</sup>

The extensive efforts of the communists did not, however, bear fruit. The men Medina had sent to jail stayed there and, which was far worse, the crusade for their freedom failed to mobilize the public against the trial. The Committee to Defend the Twelve was unable to

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703 Belknap 1977, 96.

704 On June 20, when Judge Medina refused to admit into evidence a 1938 article on democracy written by Green and Davis, Green burst out: "I thought we were going to be given a chance to prove our case. The article is germane to the very heart of the issue." The judge ordered Green to prison for the remainder of the trial. See Belknap 1977, 98 and Steinberg 1984, 170.

705 Belknap 1977, 96-97 and Martelle 2011, 176-178.

706 *Daily Worker*, June 30, 1949. On June 13 the newspaper had already written in a similar, somewhat sentimental style about Hall's children's fathers' day greetings in mid-June. Some of the children of the incarcerated men also took part in the demonstrations outside the detention center carrying signs that said "My daddy is no tattletale, let our daddies out of jail" and "My daddy isn't free, there is danger to democracy". See Martelle 2011, 178.

secure sorely needed contributions and it slid steadily deeper into debt. The situation did not look too good for the communists, especially as Medina – who was suffering severe back pains and was exhausted by New York’s hot and humid summer weather – had grown increasingly tired with the constant wrangling with the defense lawyers. As a consequence Medina strictly limited defense possibilities to present their views in the courtroom. He refused to allow – among other things – an expert testimony of communist historian Herbert Aptheker on the meaning of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>707</sup>

In late August the communists got, however, a new chance to attack the trial. It turned out that one of the jurors, writer and theater producer Russell Janney had discussed – against the jury rules – the trial at length with a young actress. In addition to that, he had delivered an anticommunist speech in Macon, Georgia only some months earlier. Defense lawyers demanded for a mistrial and were backed by the Communist Party, left-wing trade union leaders and demonstrators outside the courthouse. Judge Medina received hundreds of wires and letters demanding for a mistrial but he could not be moved: Janney remained in the jury and the trial continued.<sup>708</sup>

Two weeks later in early September the defense lawyers filed another motion for mistrial after one of the defendants, Irving Potash, had been injured in the massive fighting between anticommunists and communist sympathizers in Peekskill, New York where the left-leaning singer Paul Robeson had had an outdoor concert. Potash was hospitalized as he had been hit in the eyes with flying glass when the windshield of his car had been smashed by the anticommunist attackers. According to the defense, the Peekskill incident with its hundreds of anticommunist war veterans attacking the concert audience gave grounds for mistrial. Again, Medina disagreed and the trial continued.<sup>709</sup>

The hearing of defense witnesses – which lasted almost four months – continued until late September. Among the last witnesses the jury could hear the deposition of the CPUSA’s national secretary William Z. Foster, who had been dropped from the defendants group already in January because of his poor health. In his deposition, which was read by John Gates and other defendants, Foster summarized some of the main points of the defense. According to him, the CPUSA was not teaching and advocating a violent overthrow of the government but it sought to achieve communist objectives by educating the masses in the need to build a political organization and by persuading them, when the majority of the country was ready, to adopt socialism. The quotations presented by the government, Foster contented, failed to reflect properly the teachings of the party, for they had been torn out of context and related to remote times and to circumstances quite different from those existing in the United States in 1949. Furthermore, these quotations failed to take into account the fundamental changes in strategy and tactics which the CPUSA had gone

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707 Belknap 1977, 97-101.

708 Belknap 1977, 102-103; Cauter 1978, 189 and Martelle 2011, 142-143 & 189-193.

709 Belknap 1977, 104-105 and Martelle 2011, 202-206. Paul Robeson later served as witness for the defense. His knowledge concerning the case was, however, insufficient and after prosecution’s objections the defense had to withdraw its famous witness. Michal Belknap calls Robeson’s appearance “a publicity stunt”. Interestingly, according to Peter L. Steinberg, Robeson had been Medina’s student when he studied law at Columbia University in the early 1920s. See Belknap 1977, 106-107 and Steinberg 1984, 173.



*The wives of the Smith Act defendants protesting against the trial on the Foley Square. On the left, Gus Hall's wife Elizabeth Hall, waving a sign demanding the release of John Gates.*

Source: All Over Press

through after the Comintern's Seventh World Congress in 1935. According to Foster, the CPUSA had since 1935 favored the idea of popular fronts and peoples' governments which would move toward socialism peacefully. Books written prior to 1935 – including the ones quoted by the prosecution – were therefore now tactically obsolete.<sup>710</sup>

The defense lawyers began their final arguments in early October. Again, they severely criticized the indictment and the prosecution. They pointed out that the defendants were not charged with any single overt act and attacked the prosecution's numerous testimonies supplied by paid informers. Eugene Dennis, who was the last to deliver his final arguments, considered the trial to be a political and thought control trial. He emphasized the peaceful

<sup>710</sup> Belknap 1977, 106. It was not surprising that Foster declared books written prior to 1935 as tactically obsolete. His 1932 book *Toward Soviet America* had become a headache for the Party as Foster, for example, proclaimed in the book that "the working class cannot itself come into power without civil war". In the book, Foster painted a rosy picture of the life in the future Soviet America, which in many ways followed the example of Stalin's Soviet Union. See Foster 1961, 213-214; Zipser 1981, 112; Johanningsmeier 1994, 262-265 and Barrett 1999, 178-180.

nature of CPUSA and pointed out that the party's principles did not include the duty or necessity of overthrowing the U.S. government by force and violence. According to Dennis, the prosecution had dug into the archives of their movement to dredge up outdated ideas. In his opinion, the CPUSA leadership should be judged by the deeds which flowed from their Marxist-Leninist principles and criticized the trial for ignoring the actual actions of the communist leaders.<sup>711</sup>

After the defense, the prosecution presented its final arguments. As the defense had attacked the credibility of Budenz and other prosecution witnesses, McGohey questioned the credibility of the six defendants who had testified during the trial. They had lied under oath in their earlier trials and therefore McGohey considered these individuals to be unworthy of belief. "They ask you to believe they never taught or advocated for any such thing [violent overthrow of the U.S. government] at any time, but their utter lack of credibility make their denials valueless," McGohey said. According to him, the freedom of speech was not an unbridled liberty and it was not unconstitutional to punish those who abuse it.<sup>712</sup>

After the final arguments and Medina's instructions to the jury – which according to Cauter and Martelle were biased and cynical – the jury retired in the afternoon of October 13, 1949. During the next few hours the jurors studied more closely several exhibits including Stalin's *Problems with Leninism*, the program of the Third International and Jacques Duclos's letter criticizing Browderism. After 10:00 P.M. Thelma Dial, the forewoman of the jury, informed Medina that the jury was tired and wanted to adjourn and go to bed.<sup>713</sup>

The next morning, after a night spent in a hotel under the protection of U.S. marshals, the jury returned to work. Many people expected the jury to work for days, but at 11:00 A.M. on October 14 – after only about eight hours of deliberation – forewoman Dial informed Medina that the jury had reached a verdict. About twenty minutes later Dial announced in the courtroom that the jury found the defendants guilty. Although the defendants could expect to be convicted, still – as John Gates put it – "the words were a shock."<sup>714</sup>

After Medina had dismissed the jury and its members had left the courtroom, Medina turned to "some unfinished business", as he put it. He ordered Dennis and the lawyers to rise and, after citing relevant contempt provisions of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, he read a prepared statement in which he accused them of intentionally delaying and confusing the trial and thus trying to provoke an incident which would require declaration of mistrial or would impair his health. Although their conduct constituted a deliberate sabotage of the judicial system, Medina said, during the trial he could do nothing more than warn them, because going further would have produced exactly the results Dennis and the defense attorneys were seeking for. Now, however, he would adjudge them guilty of contempt. Medina gave Dennis and the lawyers sentences ranging from thirty days to six months, Dennis receiving a six-month sentence. The lawyers protested against their sentences and, again, Medina reproached the brazen manners of the lawyers.<sup>715</sup> Dennis did

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711 Belknap 1977, 108-109; Steinberg 1984, 174-175 and Martelle 2011, 212-214.

712 Belknap 1977, 109-110; Steinberg 1984, 175 and Martelle 2011, 214.

713 Belknap 1977, 110-111; Cauter 1978, 192-192 and Martelle 2011, 214-215.

714 Gates 1958, 131; Belknap 1977, 111-112; Steinberg 1984, 176 and Martelle 2011, 215-216.

715 Belknap 1977, 112; Steinberg 1984, 176 and Martelle 2011, 216-217. According to Ellen

not spare his words as he saw the contempt sentences as one more sign of rising fascism in the United States:

As in Nazi Germany, in Mussolini Italy, men also sat in high tribunals, also wore black robes and also handed down pro-fascist decisions. But I would remind the court that the people reversed those verdicts and decisions just as our people will reverse the decisions and verdict in this case, and the people's verdict will be for peace, for democracy and for social progress.<sup>716</sup>

### 2.7.5. Clear and present danger to the United States

Judge Medina announced the sentences on October 20, 1949. For the last time, an 800-strong crowd of demonstrators gathered on Foley Square to express their indignation. Inside the court house, Medina gave out the sentences: all of the defendants except Robert Thompson were ordered to prison for five years and were fined \$10 000. Thompson, the decorated war hero, received a three-year sentence and a \$10 000 fine. Medina could have given the defendants the maximum sentences of ten years – as the prosecutor McGohey would have wanted – but because of a recent revision of the United States Code concerning conspiracies Medina settled for five-year sentences.<sup>717</sup>

The sentences marked the end of the nine-month battle at Foley Square federal courthouse. It had been, as Newsweek reported, “the longest, dreariest and most controversial” proceeding in the history of American criminal law. The record which recorded its tortuous progress stretched to over 20 000 pages. American newspapers, which had been alienated by the disruptive stalling tactics of the defense, applauded the outcome of the trial. The newspapers were, of course, also affected by the tightening international situation and the Cold War in 1949, including the Soviet Union's successful atom bomb tests in August and the foundation of People's Republic of China in October. Many editors were convinced that the Truman administration was right in refusing, as *The Washington Post* put it, “to permit a tightly organized and conspiratorial agency, drawing its inspiration and a large measure of its strength from the Soviet Union, to operate freely within our ‘marketplace of ideas’”<sup>718</sup>.

According to Ellen Schrecker, the trial was far from being a fair one:

Whether through bugs or informers, the FBI got inside information about the defense strategy that it passed to the prosecutors in the courtroom. Medina cut off cross-examinations when they appeared to be damaging the government's witnesses

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Schrecker, Medina's decision to charge all defense attorneys with contempt was unprecedented. See Schrecker 1998, 199.

716 Quoted in Martelle 2011, 217.

717 Belknap 1977, 114-115; Steinberg 1984, 177 and Martelle 2011, 217-223.

718 Belknap 1977, 114-115. As most of American media reported about the trial in an extolling manner, Judge Medina became a celebrity and a national hero. During the trial a continuous flow of critical and even slanderous letters and telegrams from communist sympathizers had flooded Medina's office, but after the trial ended he received more than 50 000 congratulatory letters from all over the world. Supporters suggested that he should run for governor, senator or even for president. See Belknap 1977, 113 and Schrecker 1998, 199.

and he refused to let the CP present the same kind of evidence that the prosecution had.<sup>719</sup>

In Schrecker's opinion, the poorly chosen defense strategy contributed to the weak success of the CPUSA leaders in the court. Instead of focusing on fighting for free speech and the first amendment of the U.S. constitution, the communists decided to use the trial to present the party line, thus overriding their attorneys' strong objections. Because of this decision it was difficult for the American liberals to support them.

Unable to free themselves from the party's sectarian vocabulary, they came across as wooden doctrinaire ideologues instead of as the victims of government repression that they also were. Worse yet, the decision to use the courtroom as a bully pulpit for preaching Marxism to the American people played into the prosecution's hands.<sup>720</sup>

Although the battle of Foley Square was now over, the legal process continued. In early May 1950, the defendants appealed to the court of appeals, filing a massive 400-page brief which branded their prosecution a political act. By punishing speech and belief rather than conduct, the communists charged, the government had no less than endangered the American liberty. The Smith Act, they contended, was unconstitutional as it was in serious contradiction with the central purpose of the First Amendment: the protection of political expression. In addition to all this, Medina's bias and misconduct had deprived the communists of a fair trial as the judge had committed numerous grave errors, particularly in his rulings in the admission of evidence and in his instructions to the jury.<sup>721</sup>

A three-judge panel began hearing the oral arguments in late June. The timing was not ideal for the communists, as only few days later North Korean troops invaded South Korea. On June 27 President Truman ordered American air and naval forces to assist the South Koreans, thus leading the United States into armed combat against a communist foe.

The three judges unanimously upheld the district court decision in early August. They rejected all claims the communists had made in their massive brief. Judge Medina was innocent of bias and misconduct and the jury had been sufficiently impartial. The judges of course also discussed the question of freedom of speech. Their opinion on the matter was written by Judge Learned Hand. According to Hand, freedom of speech was not absolute but there could be limitations to it. The difficult question was, however, in what kind of cases could freedom of speech be then limited? Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. had in 1919 famously formulated a principle that limitations could be set if "words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger". When answering the question, Hand produced a new version of Holmes's rule: "In each case they [the courts] must ask whether the gravity of the 'evil,' discounted by its improbability, justifies such invasion of free speech as is necessary to avoid the danger."<sup>722</sup>

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719 Schrecker 1998, 199.

720 Schrecker 1998, 197.

721 Belknap 1977, 123-124 and Martelle 2011, 231-232.

722 Belknap 1977, 127-129; Steinberg 1984, 198 and Martelle 2011, 234.



*Convicted communists in a police van after their Smith Act sentences had been declared on October 20, 1949. Gus Hall on the right, next to him John Williamson, Gil Green, Eugene Dennis and Ben Davis. They all received a five-year prison sentence and a fine of \$10 000.*

Source: Getty Images

According to Hand, in this case there was no doubt that the gravity of the “evil” and its probability were great enough to justify invasion of free speech. The CPUSA was a developed, far-spread organization with thousands of rigidly disciplined adherents, many of them infused with passionate utopian faith. Marxist-Leninist philosophy as such was not the problem but rather the CPUSA’s tight links to the Soviet Union and the international communist movement. In case of war between the United States and the Soviet Union the CPUSA would act as a fifth column for the enemy, Hand believed. “We do not understand how one could ask for more probable danger, unless we must wait till the actual eve of the hostilities”, he concluded.<sup>723</sup>

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723 Belknap 1977, 130-131 and Steinberg 1984, 198. The editorial writers of *The New York Times*



As could be expected, the eleven communist leaders were not happy with the court of appeals ruling. They quickly declared that they will appeal to the Supreme Court. In late October, the Supreme Court announced that they will hear the appeal and in early December a hearing was arranged in Washington D.C. The hearing focused solely on the constitutionality of the conviction, probing whether the defendants posed a “clear and present danger” to the United States government which would justify limiting their freedom of speech. It was not, however, the best possible timing for a dispassionate evaluation of the constitutionality of the communist leaders’ conviction: the Korean War was raging as the Chinese troops had just joined the fighting and on the home front anticommunism was rampant, partly thanks to Senator Joseph McCarthy.<sup>724</sup>

On June 4, 1951, after six months of deliberation, the Supreme Court announced its ruling: by a 6-2 vote the Supreme Court upheld the convictions and the constitutionality of the Smith Act.<sup>725</sup> After such a ruling, the defendants seemed now destined to go to prison, as the Supreme Court was the highest court of law in the United States.

Chief Justice Fred M. Vinson wrote the official opinion of the Court, defending Congress’s right to enact laws to protect the government. According to Vinson, the defendants indeed presented a clear and present danger to the United States as they intended to overthrow the government “as speedily as the circumstances would permit”:

Whatever theoretical merit there may be to the argument that there is a ‘right’ to rebellion against dictatorial governments is without force where the existing structure of government provides for peaceful and orderly change. [...] We reject any principle of governmental helplessness in the face of preparation for revolution, which principle, carried to its logical conclusion, must lead to anarchy. No one could conceive that it is not within the power of Congress to prohibit acts intended to overthrow the Government by force and violence.<sup>726</sup>

The justices admitted openly that the international situation strongly affected their decision-making. Justice Stanley Reed, who endorsed Vinson’s opinion, motivated his thinking by writing in a letter that “a teaching of force and violence by such a group as this [...] is enough at this period of the world’s history to make the protection of the First Amendment inapplicable”.<sup>727</sup>

The two justices who voted against the decision, Hugo Black and William O. Douglas, were known for their emphasis on the rights of the individual, particularly when it came to

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agreed with the judges. The international situation especially in Korea was so threatening that such a decision regarding communists was justified: “The ‘clear and present danger’ which Judge Hand analyzed in his cogent and eloquent opinion has grown clearer and more grimly present these past weeks and months. The nation can no longer treat with good-humored tolerance groups or individuals whose admitted aim is to defeat the national purpose and aid the national enemies. [...] No one supposed that the American communists are strong enough to carry out open revolution. They are strong enough, however, to sabotage at critical points the effort necessary for national survival of democracy. They are strong enough to make more difficult and more painful the terrible task of the soldiers now fighting in Korea.” See Martelle 2011, 234-235.

724 Belknap 1977, 132-136 and Martelle 2011, 235-238.

725 Belknap 1977, 136; Steinberg 1984, 223 and Martelle 2011, 238.

726 Quoted in Martelle 2011, 238. See also Belknap 1977, 136-138.

727 Quoted in Belknap 1977, 138.

conflicts over the First Amendment. They both wrote dissenting opinions on the decision. Black's opinion was – as Martelle puts it – “scathing”:

These petitioners were not charged with an attempt to overthrow the Government. They were not charged with overt acts of any kind designed to overthrow the Government. They were not even charged with saying anything or writing anything designed to overthrow the Government. The charge was that they agreed to assemble and to talk and publish certain ideas at a later date: the indictment is that they conspired to organize the Communist Party and to use speech and advocate the forcible overthrow of the Government. No matter how it is worded, this is a virulent form of prior censorship of speech and press, which I believe the First Amendment forbids.<sup>728</sup>

Black hoped that a future court would recognize and rectify the error that the 1951 configuration was committing:

Public opinion being what it now is, few will protest the conviction of these communist petitioners. There is hope, however, that in calmer times, when present pressures, passions and fears subside, this or some later court will restore the First Amendment liberties to the high preferred place where they belong in a free society.<sup>729</sup>

Douglas wondered in his opinion how it can become a crime in a classroom to use books that can remain lawfully on library shelves:

The crime then depends not on what is taught, but on who the teacher is. That is to make freedom of speech turn not on what is said, but on the intent with which it is said. Once we start down that road, we enter territory dangerous to the civil liberties of every citizen.<sup>730</sup>

### **2.7.6. “Biggest step toward fascism”**

The so-called Foley Square trial was just the first in a long series of Smith Act trials that took place in the U.S. in the 1950s. The Supreme Court's decision on June 4, 1951 gave a green light to the FBI and the Department of Justice to begin a roundup of the Communist Party members, as it equated active membership in the party with advocating the violent overthrow of the U.S. government. In practice the ruling made, as Martelle puts it, membership of the Communist Party a crime. Eventually, 145 CPUSA members or supporters were charged, and 108 were convicted and sentenced to a total of 418 years in prison. However, only 28 defendants served post-conviction prison time – the eleven men convicted in Medina's court and 17 defendants convicted in related cases in New York City and Baltimore.<sup>731</sup> The proceedings lasted for several years and as the anti-communist atmosphere in the United States started to subside after the end of Korean War, the attitudes

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728 Quoted in Martelle 2011, 239. See also Belknap 1977, 140 and Steinberg 1984, 224.

729 Quoted in Steinberg 1984, 224. Martelle mistakenly claims that this quote was from Douglas's opinion. See Martelle 2011, 239.

730 Quoted in Steinberg 1984, 224 and Martelle 2011, 239.

731 Martelle 2011, 240.

towards the CPUSA also abated. Finally in 1957, the Supreme Court overturned a court of appeals ruling in a Smith Act case against fourteen CPUSA members from Southern California. The Supreme Court's decision in *Yates v. United States* ended the Smith Act prosecutions and ongoing trials were dismissed. According to Judge John Harlan, the advocacy of abstract doctrines could not be sufficient grounds for a conviction:

The legislative history of the Smith Act and related bills shows beyond all question that Congress was aware of the distinction between the advocacy or teaching of abstract doctrine and the advocacy or teaching of action and that it did not intend to disregard it. The statute was aimed at the advocacy and teaching of concrete action for the forcible overthrow of the Government and not of principles divorced from action.<sup>732</sup>

As Gus Hall was one of the youngest and least experienced of the defendants, he did not play a prominent role in the trial. Unlike Ben Davis, John Gates, Gil Green, Robert Thompson, Henry Winston and Carl Winter, Hall did not testify in the court. His kangaroo court -related outburst was one of the few occasions when Hall came to the front during the trial.<sup>733</sup>

Perhaps because Hall played such a minor role in the trial, he writes about the proceedings in his autobiographical writings only in passing. Nor does he analyze the trial elsewhere. Hall's probably most in-depth writing about the trial is his undated radio speech which he gave most likely at some Ohio radio station during the spring of 1949 as the court was in session. According to Hall, the trial proved the principles of Marxism-Leninism to be true:

These principles tell us that the capitalist class will scrap the processes of democracy when its world power and its control of the state are being challenged by these processes. Big business can permit democratic forms only when it feels it has things under control.

In the Germany of the 1920s, working people were threatening to take power away from the capitalists and to establish a socialist society. The big money crowd threw its resources, its support and all the organs of public opinion it controlled behind Hitler in order to destroy the working class movement.

So, today, in our country this crowd and its stooges are rapidly destroying the democratic processes with the hue and cry against communists.<sup>734</sup>

Hall equated the Smith Act to the Alien and Sedition Acts that were passed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in the United States when the aristocratic rulers were worried that the French revolution would spread across the Atlantic. Because of the revolution, the rulers were afraid of "French agents".

In order to suppress these "French agents" they passed the infamous Alien and Sedition Laws. Today, those of us in America, Communist or non-Communist,

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732 Quoted in Klingaman 1996, 406.

733 In addition to Hall, also Potash, Stachel and Williamson had a minor role in the court. Potash, Stachel and Williamson were not born in the United States. As the CPUSA wanted to represent itself as a truly American party, it may have preferred not to bring its immigrant members to the fore. Hall, Stachel and Williamson had the least formal education of the defendants which may also have explained why they did not take the witness stand in the court.

734 Gus Hall's undated radio speech, most likely from spring 1949. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 8.

who want peace with Russia are called “Russian agents” in the same manner. And in the courts, in Congress, in State Legislatures and by government decree they are subjecting us again to alien and sedition laws much like those of 1799.

American history has judged these laws of 1799 among the blackest ever passed in our country. It did not take long for the people then to elevate [Thomas] Jefferson to the presidency and to wipe them out.<sup>735</sup>

According to Hall, the trial was “the biggest step yet taken toward fascism in this country”. Behind it were the greedy capitalists of Wall Street, always hungry for new government armament programs which would bring them enormous profits.

Many things in America today are peculiarly similar to developments in Germany at about the time when Hitler came to power. There is the same riding rough-shod over constitutional guarantees, the same arrogant disregard for elementary fact, the same distortion of facts in the newspapers and radio and the suppression of the position taken by the Communists. You have the FBI playing the role of the Gestapo, the use of high-paid stool-pigeons, deliberately framed spy scares and anti-communist hoaxes. Behind all this is the steady drive toward the promotion of war against the Soviet Union and for world domination.<sup>736</sup>

### 2.7.7. Reaching the very top

While Gus Hall played a minor role in the Foley Square trial, he meanwhile continued his gradual rise in the party hierarchy. In 1949 he was elected a member of party’s national secretariat and made a national secretary.<sup>737</sup> During the following year he made it to one of the very top posts of the party as he was chosen to take Eugene Dennis’s place as acting general secretary when Dennis was imprisoned in May for defying the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).<sup>738</sup> According to Peggy Dennis, Hall was a compromise choice between the candidates of the party chairman and general secretary: Foster and Davis would have wanted to see Robert Thompson as the acting general secretary whereas Dennis supported Gil Green.<sup>739</sup>

The new position gave Hall new, challenging tasks. On June 28, 1950, Gus Hall made probably the biggest live performance of his life as he spoke before NBC radio microphones and 20 000 people at a Civil Rights Congress meeting in Madison Square Garden in New York. The timing of the Madison Square Garden meeting was indeed sensitive since North Korean troops had just three days earlier crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, invading South Korea and thus starting the Korean War. In his speech, Hall accused President Truman of launching “an undeclared shooting war against all the peoples of Asia and Pacific”. He

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735 Gus Hall’s undated radio speech, most likely from spring 1949. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 8.

736 Gus Hall’s undated radio speech, most likely from spring 1949. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 8.

737 North 1970, 20-21.

738 North 1970, 20 and Brandt 1981, 6.

739 Dennis 1977, 237.



*The CPUSA's acting general secretary Gus Hall speaking before NBC radio microphones and 20 000 people at a Civil Rights Congress meeting in Madison Square Garden in New York on June 28, 1950. The speech was probably the biggest live performance of Hall's life.*

Source: Getty Images

strongly demanded the United States to keep its hands off of Korea.<sup>740</sup> In December Hall delivered as an acting general secretary the main report to the 15<sup>th</sup> national convention of the party. In his massive 79-page report Hall among other things demanded a cease fire in Korea and withdrawing all American troops.<sup>741</sup>

Considering that in early 1944 Hall was a mere Cleveland CP chairman, his rise to the very top of the party organization was rapid. What explains such a speedy ascent? One possible and even likely explanation was Hall's close relationship to William Z. Foster. Although Foster was almost 30 years older than Hall, the two men seemed have got along very well from very early on. This is not surprising considering their backgrounds which were in many ways similar. Both men were from truly proletarian families and both men had very little formal education. Both men were second-generation immigrants whose parents had moved to the United States from poor and peripheral European countries. Both men had in their youth led vagrant lives and had held various jobs. Although Foster had been born in Massachusetts he, like Hall, had spent a large part of his life among the workers of the Midwest. Both men had joined trade union movement in their early youth and had had some kind of connections with IWW and syndicalism, Hall through his father and other Finnish American miners in Minnesota and Foster as a prominent IWW member. Both men had served in leading positions in the steel industry strikes, Foster as the top leader of the 1919 strike and Hall as a local leader in Warren, Ohio in 1937. Both men had spent long periods of time in the Soviet Union and had internalized the leading position of the first socialist country in the international communist movement.

Considering these similarities, it is not surprising that Hall seems to have been a sort of a protégé or an apprentice of Foster in the late 1940s. According to Gus Hall's Soviet biography, Foster supported Hall strongly – calling him “an outstanding member of the National Board” – as he was elected the acting general secretary in May 1950.<sup>742</sup> As the relationship between chairman Foster and general secretary Dennis was not without tensions – Dennis having been a staunch supporter of Earl Browder – Foster surely welcomed a younger and more malleable general secretary with less Comintern experience. An anecdote which Hall tells in his autobiographical writings would indeed suggest that Foster had taken Hall under his wings already in 1947:

Foster gave me some advice the very day I was elected to the Political Bureau [i.e. the CPUSA's national executive board]. He said with a twinkle in his eye: “This is a body of people with definite opinions and they express them very vigorously. Therefore you have to push yourself into the discussion. Don't wait until you have fully formulated your thoughts. Put your name right in from the start of the discussion. Otherwise you will be sidetracked in the work of this important body of the Party.”<sup>743</sup>

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740 Hall 1950, 3 & 16. Hall's speech was published as a short pamphlet *Hands Off Korea and Formosa*. It was the first of the dozens of pamphlets by Hall. *Gus Hall Bibliography*, which came out in 1981, listed 57 Hall pamphlets. He continued publishing them with a rapid pace also after 1981.

741 Hall 1951b, 76.

742 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 63.

743 Hall 1987, 357. For some reason, Hall uses the Soviet-style expression Political Bureau in his text. In the 1940s the leading organ of the party was called, however, the national executive board.

Hall indeed compensated Foster for his support in his speech which he gave as the acting general secretary in the CPUSA's 15<sup>th</sup> national convention in December 1950. The national committee had just re-elected Foster as the national chairman and it was Hall's duty to announce the decision. For a person reading the speech today, there is a strong feeling of a Stalinist cult of personality in the text, especially as the transcription tells us how Foster got a "tremendous standing ovation" and a "10 minute standing ovation and applause" from the convention audience. Hall did not mince his words as he praised Foster:

I was given the very great honor to bring to this Convention for ratification our unanimous and enthusiastic choice for the National Chairman of our Party. I feel very greatly honored, but it is also a difficult task to try to make a speech about the very much loved and highly respected and so well known to us all, Comrade Bill Foster (tremendous standing ovation). Difficult, because what is it that I can tell you about Comrade Foster you do not already know? Why should I tell you that Comrade Foster is the foremost Marxist leader and theoretician of our Party, because you all know that? It is an obvious fact to every member in our Party. It is not news to you if I say there is no other American, living or dead, who so embodies in his work, thinking, the experiences, the traditions of our working class as does Comrade Foster. It is very difficult to even begin to say how fortunate our Party, our class is in having the guidance, the leadership of William Z. Foster. And I would not even dare to begin to evaluate Comrade Foster's contributions to our Party, to our class and people because they are so tremendous in scope in breadth and depth.<sup>744</sup>

According to Hall, Foster was "a model Communist leader and worker", who had "set for himself a high standard of work, a well-organized, systematic, self-disciplined style of work" and who had shown "extreme boldness in tackling and solving new problems and especially theoretical questions". Not surprisingly, Foster had become an internationally respected Marxist leader and scholar:

Foster's books and writings are read and translated in almost every language and every country. Not only in Marxist circles but amongst intellectuals, philosophers, historians, Comrade Foster is accepted as the authoritative spokesman and interpreter of all developments in the U.S.A. Only last week, someone delivered to us in our office copies of Foster's books in Chinese.

People who have traveled throughout Asia and Europe during the last years have brought us stories how pictures of Foster and Dennis are carried by the people in all parades and how their photos are with those of other world leaders in all the workers clubs, union halls etc. We can all take great pride in this world recognition of Comrade Foster.<sup>745</sup>

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744 Hall's undated speech at the CPUSA's 15<sup>th</sup> national convention in New York in December 1950. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 194, folder 2.

745 Hall's undated speech at the CPUSA's 15<sup>th</sup> national convention in New York in December 1950. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 194, folder 2.

A similar cult-like approach towards Foster can be seen in the February 1951 issue of *Political Affairs* which was wholly dedicated for celebrating Foster's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. The thick, almost 100-page special issue was filled with passionate paeans to Foster, written by the top leaders of the party.<sup>746</sup> One of the most eager writers was Gus Hall, whose first paragraphs made it clear who was his leading political role model at the time:

William Z. Foster, the National Chairman of the Communist Party, U.S.A., proud son of American working class, leader of trade unions, strike leader, union organizer and the foremost Marxist leader and theoretician of our Party, has reached his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. It testifies and adds to the greatness of the American working class that it has given birth to and molded such a stalwart leader of the working class and people as Comrade Foster.

Foster has grown to his present height because he has not only absorbed the experiences of the working class of the United States, much of it at first hand as a leader of its struggles, but also because he has assimilated and mastered the generalized experience of the working class of the world in his studies of scientific Socialism, of the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.

There is no other American whose life so symbolizes and who so admirably embodies the experiences, the traditions and the history of our working class as does Comrade Foster.<sup>747</sup>

Hall not only praised Foster publicly but also followed his politics closely in the late 1940s and very early 1950s. A good example of this is Hall's reaction to the dispute concerning the political action within trade unions. Foster demanded that trade unions should – in addition to questions related to labor market – take a stand against U.S. foreign policy, especially the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, and support Soviet foreign policy. Eugene Dennis, however, did not subscribe to these demands. According to him, such a line would needlessly complicate co-operation with progressive non-communist allies within the labor movement and lead to self-isolation and sectarian separation from the masses of the working class.<sup>748</sup>

Hall's stand in this dispute can be seen in the lengthy report he gave to the 15<sup>th</sup> national convention of the CPUSA in December 1950. According to Hall, the labor movement should not only focus narrowly on labor market issues but actively take part in the struggle for peace, democracy and socialism. The trade unions should work in close co-operation with the peace movement which should have branches in shops and working-class neighborhoods. Meanwhile the CPUSA should “strengthen the fight against opportunism of all brands in the labor movement, against all manifestations of pure-and-simple, ‘economist’ trade unionism”.<sup>749</sup>

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746 In addition to Eugene Dennis and Gus Hall, the list of writers included also among others Ben Davis, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Al Lannon and John Williamson. Eugene Dennis sent his short contribution from behind bars. In addition to contributions by CPUSA leaders, the issue also contained a text by famous novelist Theodore Dreiser who had joined the Party shortly before his death in 1945.

747 Hall 1951d, 13.

748 Dennis 1978, 174-175. According to Eugene Dennis's widow Peggy Dennis, the dispute concerning political action in trade unions was sidetracked in 1948 as the party leaders were indicted with violating the Smith Act.

749 Hall 1951d, 34-36.



Hall followed Foster also when it came to the position of the Soviet Union and the ingenuity of Joseph Stalin. Just like Foster, Hall without hesitation acknowledged the Soviet Union as the unchallenged leader of the socialist world and Joseph Stalin as its unquestionable commander. This attitude is reflected in a commentary article which Hall wrote for the April 1951 issue of *Political Affairs*. The journal published a *Pravda* interview of Joseph Stalin in the same issue, and Hall contributed a commentary, strongly praising the Soviet leader. In the *Pravda* interview Stalin warned the United States and Britain of a defeat in Korea if they reject peace proposals by their adversaries. He feared that the “aggressive forces” in capitalist countries – “the billionaires and millionaires who regard war as a lucrative business yielding colossal profits” – were thirsting for a new world war.<sup>750</sup>

Just like Stalin, also Hall saw that “Wall Street and the United States government it dominates are hell-bent on launching a new world war”.<sup>751</sup> Meanwhile Joseph Stalin was indeed an angel of peace for the acting general secretary of the CPUSA:

Stalin’s answers have exerted a great influence on all who have read them. The overpowering logic and the great truth of his arguments, the simplicity and clarity of his style and his ringing call for world peace have penetrated through the wall of lying war propoganda and have definitely influenced the thinking of marked sections of American people. The power of his argument for peace is testified by the fact that there has been no serious attempt by the ideologists of the war camp to debate the questions Stalin raised. [...]

It is a great source of strength to all lovers of peace to read the calm words of Stalin in the midst of the cannibalistic warmongering.<sup>752</sup>

## 2.7.8. Conclusions

The late 1940s and the very early 1950s were not pleasant times for Gus Hall. The lengthy and heated Foley Square trial was surely a most unpleasant experience for Hall, who was remanded for more than four months after he equated the trial to a “kangaroo court” in early June 1949. The most unpleasant part of the trial was, of course, the five-year prison sentence which Hall received – just like most other party leaders – in October 1949. The unpleasantness continued in the following years as the court decision was upheld by the court of appeals in August 1950 and the Supreme Court in June 1951.

If one looks at Gus Hall’s life purely from a party career perspective, however, the late 1940s and the very early 1950s were good times for him. Hall continued his rapid rise in the party hierarchy. In 1947 he became the chairman of the Ohio CP and member of the party’s 12-member national executive board. In 1949 he was elected a member of the party’s national secretariat and made a national secretary. In 1950 he was chosen to take Eugene Dennis’s place as acting general secretary when Dennis was imprisoned for defying

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750 *Interview of J. V. Stalin*, 13.

751 Hall 1951c, 18.

752 Hall 1951c, 16.

the House Un-American Activities Committee. Hall was now one of the party's two very top leaders alongside William Z. Foster who was the chairman of the party.

Hall's rapid ascension to the top positions of is surprising considering the fact that in the early 1940s he had followed closely the political line of the former party leader Earl Browder, whose ideas of the so-called Teheran spirit and peaceful co-existence of capitalism and communism had become an abhorred heresy in the CPUSA after the leadership change in 1945. Hall's missteps could be forgiven and forgotten, however. In the early 1940s Hall had been, after all, only a local-level party leader in Ohio and, more importantly, during the most dramatic party disputes in the summer of 1945 he had been fighting against the Japanese imperialists in the Pacific.

Some qualities of Gus Hall may also explain why his Browderite missteps were so easily forgiven and forgotten. Firstly, in a party which wanted to represent itself as an all-American movement, white, non-Jewish and American-born members were sorely needed, especially if they happened to have such a truly proletarian background as Gus Hall had. In other words, Hall was an ideal character to become a leader in a party which wanted to represent itself as vanguard of American working class and thus the party could overlook his earlier blunders. Secondly, Hall was able to create a good and close relationship with the CPUSA's new leader William Z. Foster. He even seems to have become a sort of a protégé or an apprentice of Foster. This development was probably helped by the fact that the backgrounds and life stories of these two men are so very similar.

Hall's rapid rise to the top leadership of the CPUSA during the late 1940s and very early 1950s cannot be explained solely by external factors. Hall himself also seems to have had a good "eye for the game" as he could well adapt to new circumstances within the party after his return from the war. This skill – acquired during his 20-year membership in a turbulent party – may also explain Hall's success in climbing the party ladder in the coming years.

## 2.8. Gus Hall's prison years 1951-1957

### 2.8.1. Unsuccessful flight to Mexico

The Supreme Court's decision on June 4, 1951 meant that the eleven communist leaders would have to go to jail. Their lawyers did file petitions for rehearing in mid-June and the Supreme Court accepted the petitions, but the future of Gus Hall and his ten codefendants started to look dim on June 22 as the court rejected their request to remain free on bail. Six days later a New York judge ordered the men to report Foley Square's federal courthouse on Monday morning on July 2, almost three years after the legal process against the CPUSA leadership had begun.<sup>753</sup>

At the end of June Gus Hall was in his home city Cleveland. On June 27, he took part in a fund-raising banquet for the Smith Act victims at a workers' hall together with his wife and daughter Barbara. In his last public speech before impending imprisonment, Hall said that the Supreme Court's decision was not a surprise to him:

"I was born at a time when capitalism started the plunge on the downward path. I have served sentences in city, county and state jails and now am about to enter a federal prison. But I have the confidence, as all of us have here, that the end of this system of exploitation is near at hand," Hall declared.<sup>754</sup>

As the set time – 10:30 A.M. – on July 2 neared, communist leaders started arriving to the Foley Square courthouse. Some of them – like Eugene Dennis and John Gates – arrived together with their wives. Some of them greeted the pro-communist demonstrators who were once again protesting on Foley Square. As the clock stroke 10:30, however, four of the eleven men were missing. Gil Green, Gus Hall, Robert Thompson and Henry Winston had fled, forfeiting a total of \$80 000 in bail. Losing the bail money was a major setback for the Civil Rights Congress which had put up the money.<sup>755</sup>

Their flights were not momentary whims, for the party leadership had debated at length whether some or all of the eleven should go underground. Some – like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn – argued that the party had other leaders capable of replacing the eleven and that jumping bail would only hurt the party. Foster, Davis and Thompson in turn were convinced that the United States was entering a long fascist-like period. If the defendants entered

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753 Belknap 1977, 144.

754 *Daily Worker*, June 28, 1951. At the time Hall's family lived in Cleveland, but Hall himself had since spring lived in New York. He had an apartment in Bronx. After the fundraising banquet Hall seems to have travelled to New York, as the superintendent of Hall's apartment house had seen Hall leaving the house with two suitcases on 30 June. This seems to have been the last sighting of Hall before his three-month disappearance. See *The New York Times*, Nov 21, 1951.

755 Belknap 1977, 144 and Martelle 2011, 242-243. The forfeited bail led to another trial as the U.S. authorities wanted the CRC trustees to reveal information concerning the bail fund contributors. Through such disclosures the authorities hoped to obtain information which would lead to the capture of the four fugitives. The four trustees of the CRC – including famous crime novelist Dashiell Hammett and millionaire left-wing activist Frederick Vanderbilt Field – were sentenced to prison for several months for not revealing the information. See *New York Herald Tribune*, Oct 11, 1951.

prison, they would never again be free, so all of the eleven should flee. Foster thought that through going underground the CPUSA could rise victoriously after fascism's defeat, just like the German, Italian and Japanese communist parties had done in their countries. Some members like Dorothy Healey, however, saw Foster's thoughts as a gross exaggeration: the United States was still far from fascism as the communist party offices were open, party newspapers could be published and labor and civil rights movements could function.<sup>756</sup>

The majority of the party leadership believed that the United States would in the future be a reactionary but not a fascist state. Under such conditions the CPUSA would have to function both legally and illegally, so part of the leadership needed to go underground. Originally Eugene Dennis was selected to join Green, Hall, Thompson and Winston in the group going underground but the arrangements failed and Dennis ended up going to prison.<sup>757</sup>

The decision to go partially underground was in many ways harmful for the party and it raised a lot of criticism among its members. According to George Charney, a long-time party activist, the going underground only hastened the process of repression against the CPUSA:

If we had little public support during the trial, we had even less after these events. They caused consternation within the party and for the first time I heard harsh criticisms of these actions from some of our devoted supporters. They objected on various grounds: that it multiplied our problems, placed sympathetic organizations in peril, and disrupted the bail fund and sacrificed the savings of its contributors; that it was predicated on the arrogant assumption that only the members of the national committee could lead the party; that the little they could do as 'political refugees' would be more than offset by the damage their flight would cause.<sup>758</sup>

Also Dorothy Healey opposed going underground:

From the beginning the underground was a disaster. It was like a bad spy movie, with all of these secret messages and meeting places. We were turning ourselves into a caricature of the conspiracy that the Hearst papers and the Tenney committee had always accused us of being. The courier system was clumsy and time-consuming, and the FBI swiftly penetrated much of the operation.<sup>759</sup>

CPUSA lawyer John Abt was also among the critics of the decision to go underground:

Early on, I considered the decision to avoid arrest a mistake. To my mind, it would only further stir up the anticommunist hysteria by confirming the stereotype of a conspiracy and, in effect, abdicate the struggle for the Party's legality. Furthermore,

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756 Healey & Isserman 1993, 137-138 and Barrett 1999, 239.

757 Belknap 1977, 144 and Barrett 1999, 238-239. Later, in 1959 as Hall wanted to replace Dennis as the general secretary, he claimed that Dennis's failure for not going underground was due to his cowardice. See Dennis 1977, 209 and Healey & Isserman 1993, 173.

758 Charney 1968, 208.

759 Healey & Isserman 1993, 125. The Tenney committee that Healey refers to was California's own version of House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). The official name of the committee was the California Senate Factfinding Subcommittee on Un-American Activities and it was led by anticommunist state senator Jack B. Tenney. See Schrecker 1998, 97 & 318.

it would make it nearly impossible to obtain bail in future Smith Act prosecutions, which we knew would be plentiful.<sup>760</sup>

After the four defendants had failed to show up at the Foley Square courthouse, the FBI wasted no time but within a few days published detailed warrants of the fugitives. The FBI could tell the public that the heavy-build, light-haired and blue-gray-eyed Hall weighed 220 pounds and was five feet and eleven inches tall.<sup>761</sup> The Minnesota-born, 40-year old fugitive was known to have a moustache occasionally and to have a small scar on the left thumb, two pockmarks on his left cheek and a mole on the right side of his neck. According to the FBI, Hall had also used aliases such as Arvo Kustaa Halberg, Gaspar Hall, Arvie Hallberg, Gus Hallberg, John Hollberg and John Howell.<sup>762</sup> The information spread by FBI was eagerly published by the American newspapers and magazines which wanted do their share in the nation-wide communist hunt. Some of the newspapers gave readers detailed information ranging from Hall's hobbies ("he hunts deer, he likes to fish, he's a golfer") to his voice ("at once husky and high-pitched") and habits ("he laughs easily and boisterously, walks in lumbering gait, bent forward at the shoulders"). Special attention was paid to Hall's coffee drinking habits ("an inveterate coffee drinker, who sits with his elbows on the table, holding the cup at lip level, talking when he holds the cup in this position and sipping the coffee from time to time").<sup>763</sup>

According to the newspapers, FBI was looking for Hall especially in the North – because "he is a northerner by heritage, by preference" – but eventually that was not the right direction. On October 10, 1951, the newspapers all across the nation reported that Gus Hall had been arrested in Mexico City two days earlier – on his 41<sup>st</sup> birthday – and had been already deported back to the United States. The capture of Hall was big news as he was the first of the four fugitives that was caught. When it comes to media attention, October 1951 was probably a culmination point in Hall's life, for never again would he gain such publicity.

Hall was arrested in a motel in the outskirts of Mexico City late in the evening on October 8, 1951.<sup>764</sup> By coincidence, the day happened to be his 41<sup>st</sup> birthday. He was awakened to find

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760 Abt & Myerson 1993, 218. Also Finnish American communist Carl Ross was very critical of the underground system. According to Ross, the underground party was formed following a Soviet example of a communist organization functioning in German-occupied areas. In his opinion such a way of thinking was romantic and completely unrealistic. See Carl Ross oral history interview transcript, part III, p. 12.

761 In metric measures Hall weighed 100 kilograms and was 180 centimeters tall.

762 *Collier's* magazine published a facsimile version of the FBI warrants in early October as a part of its extensive story on the four fugitives. For a Gus Hall researcher the long list of aliases is somewhat surprising – aliases like Gaspar Hall, John Hollberg or John Howell never come up in any Hall-related documents, newspaper stories or other source material. One cannot help wondering whether FBI published such a long list of aliases in order to create an impression of truly traitorous criminals. See *Collier's*, Oct 6, 1951.

763 See for example *New York Daily Mirror*, July 13, 1951 and *Minneapolis Star*, July 12, 1951.

764 Left-wing writers have presented several different versions of Gus Hall's arrest in Mexico. Eugene Dennis's wife Peggy Dennis claimed in her memoirs that Hall was caught "while drinking in a bar across the Mexican border". Left-wing activist John Ross, who lived in Mexico for decades, claims in his memoirs that the FBI "nailed" Hall in a motel room where he was "with a hooker named Guadalupe". Unfortunately neither one of these two writers reveal their sources of information concerning the arrest. Considering Hall's ordinary living habits, both of these versions seem improbable. See Dennis 1977, 209 and Ross 2004, 261.

the motel swarming with heavily armed uniformed police and plainclothesmen. Powerful floodlights bathed the outside area. After a few hours in a Mexico City immigration prison, Hall – handcuffed and shackled in leg irons – was thrown in the rear of a car, which began the 800-mile drive to the U.S. border in a five-car convoy. According to Hall, it was all the time clear that the FBI was controlling the operation. He could tell by the appearance and accent of some of the policemen that they came from the States.<sup>765</sup>

Hall was formally accused of entering Mexico without appropriate travel documents. The charge was not wholly false as Hall had apparently entered the country by swimming across Rio Grande. Hall was handed over to the U.S. authorities on the International Bridge of the border town of Laredo, Texas in the middle of the night on October 10. Hall's capture was such big news that reporters had gathered to witness his extradition in the small border town. From Laredo Hall was flown immediately on a DC-3 to the federal prison in Texarkana, Texas.<sup>766</sup>

Hall's capture evoked a storm of protest in Mexico. Within a few days the Mexican Communist Party issued a statement condemning Hall's deportation as a shameful and illegal action. According to Dionisio Encina, the general secretary of the CP, the scandalous deportation represented the "unconditional application in Mexico of the Yankee imperialist policy of war preparation, of smashing democratic and popular forces and of fascist persecution of the struggle for peace and democratic rights". He called for all workers, peasants and people's organizations in Mexico "to express their indignation and protest at this assault on the right of asylum and on our country's sovereignty". Also during the next few days the famous painter Diego Rivera led a group of liberals to the Interior Ministry to complain about the treatment of Hall. According to Rivera the expulsion of Hall was an example of the intervention of the United States in Mexico's internal affairs and was also a violation of the constitution.<sup>767</sup>

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765 Green 1984, 100. Newspapers reported that Hall was arrested in a company of four Americans, two men and two women. His companions were not arrested and there was no information on their identities. See *Daily News*, October 10, 1951; *New York Herald Tribune*, October 10, 1951 and *New York Times*, October 11, 1951.

766 Green 1984, 99-100; *New York World-Telegram and Sun*, Oct 10, 1951 and *New York Post*, Oct 10, 1951.

767 *People's World*, Oct 12, 1951; *People's World*, Oct 13, 1951 and *Daily Worker*, Nov 2, 1951. Gus Hall's deportation became a major issue in Mexican domestic politics as communists arranged large protests against government's actions. Almost 150 prominent politicians, trade union leaders, scientists and artists signed a petition demanding a probe on the government's actions. They claimed that deportation had been unconstitutional as Mexican constitution forbids the deportation of political prisoners. According to the protesters Hall's deportation was "a monstrous act, which once again proves that United States police operates on Mexican soil like it was their own country". Probably the most famous signatories of the petition were the communist artists Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo and David Alfaro Siqueiros. The deportation caused also a wave of international protests from all over the world. During the following months the Mexican government received protests, for example, from communists in Australia, Brazil, China, Cuba, France and Poland. See Green 1984, 100; Anhalt 2001, 123; *Daily Worker*, Oct 16, 1951; *Daily Worker*, Oct 26, 1951; *Daily Worker*, Oct 29, 1951; *New York Herald Tribune*, Nov 4, 1951; *Daily Worker*, Nov 7, 1951; *Daily Worker*, Nov 8, 1951; *Daily Worker*, Nov 14, 1951 and *Daily Worker*, Dec 18, 1951.

Meanwhile in the United States, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who was now one of the CPUSA's top leaders, wondered about the secrecy surrounding Gus Hall. According to Flynn, there was "something about the entire deportation of Gus Hall that smacks of Nazi Gestapo procedures". Flynn asked why the American authorities had not shown Hall to the reporters and speculated with the possibility that the "close questioning" by "American Gestapo" had left Hall in such a bad condition that he could not be shown to the press. According to Flynn, "the present Mexican puppet government obediently followed Wall Street-FBI orders in denying the right of political asylum".<sup>768</sup>

From Texarkana Hall was soon transferred to Leavenworth federal penitentiary in Kansas and from there to New York City in early November for a further trial. As he landed on La Guardia airport on November 3, the press could also now see him. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's misgivings about "Gestapo torture" proved not to be true, as a smiling Hall seemed to be in fine condition and in a good mood. According to *Daily Worker* newspaper, Hall had lost at least 30 pounds since June. His wife Elizabeth – who had not seen her husband since for more than four months – managed to rush through the FBI agents and hug her handcuffed husband on La Guardia tarmac before bursting into tears. She brought Hall a clean suit and extra shirts, but the authorities did not let him have them.<sup>769</sup>

The trial against Hall started on November 20 at the already familiar Foley Square courthouse. The newspapers paid close attention to Hall's appearance. Since June Hall had lost a lot of weight, and his moustache and a "tell-tale wart" that he had had on the right side of his neck were now gone. His brown hair had also changed color during his flight.<sup>770</sup>

In the trial Hall was accused of contempt of the court as he had wilfully violated the order of the court directing him to surrender on July 2. Hall's lawyer Harry Sacher criticized the charge by saying that he could not find a precedent for such a charge in the 900-year history of Anglo-Saxon law. As bail jumping as such was not a criminal act, the court had to come up with something in order to lengthen Hall's sentence, the lawyer argued.<sup>771</sup>

Surprisingly, the mole Gus Hall had had on the right side of his neck became a major topic of discussion at the trial. The prosecutor charged that Hall had had the mole removed after he disappeared before July 2 in order to get rid of an identifying mark. According to the prosecutor, such an operation along with other changes in Hall's appearance proved that he "wilfully and knowingly" disobeyed court's order to surrender on July 2. During the trial, Hall had to walk to the judge's bench so the judge could observe scars in his neck. Hall admitted the surgery, but said it had taken place already in February 1950, more than a year before his disappearance. Hall's defence lawyer ordered photocopies of medical records from a Cleveland hospital in order to prove the timing of the operation. They could not, however, bring the surgeon who had operated Hall from Cleveland to New York to testify in court due to financial restraints.<sup>772</sup>

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768 *Daily Worker*, Oct 14, 1951 and *Daily Worker*, Oct 16, 1951.

769 *Daily World*, Nov 4, 1951; *Daily Mirror*, Nov 4, 1951 and *Daily Worker*, Nov 4, 1951. Thirty pounds is around 14 kilograms.

770 *The New York Times*, Nov 3, 1951; *Daily News*, Nov 3, 1951 and *Daily Compass*, Nov 4, 1951.

771 *Daily Worker*, Nov 21, 1951.

772 *The New York Times*, Nov 21, 1951 and *The New York Times*, Nov 29, 1951. Interestingly,

Judge Sylvester J. Ryan announced his decision on December 19, 1951. According to Ryan, Hall was guilty of contempt of court as he failed to surrender and go to jail on July 2. According to one newspaper, the decision was historical. Before Ryan's decision defendants jumping bail had been punished only by having their bonds forfeited, but now the line had changed. Ryan seemed to be aware of exceptional nature of his decision as he had written a 20-page opinion to accompany his decision. According to Ryan, evidence made it clear that Hall had "wilfully and contumaciously" disobeyed terms of known court orders. In his opinion, Hall's behavior showed that bail forfeiture alone does not always bring obedience to court orders. On December 27, Ryan gave Hall an additional three-year contempt sentence on top of his five-year Smith Act sentence. He ordered the contempt sentence to begin after Hall had served his conspiracy sentence.<sup>773</sup>

William Z. Foster and other CPUSA leaders denounced the sentence in a strongly-worded statement:

Federal Judge Ryan's sentence of three years upon Gus Hall, the National Secretary of the Communist Party, on top of Judge Medina's five-year sentence against Hall for his conviction under the Smith Act, is one outrage piled on top of another. It should bring an indignant protest from every liberty-loving person in the country. Judge Ryan, in inflicting this savage sentence upon this splendid fighter, Comrade Hall, had to create his own 'law'. Never before in the history of this country has a prisoner on bail had been sentenced for contempt of court for failing to register for imprisonment upon a judge's order. But Ryan, ignoring this long precedent, conjures up his own law, singles out Comrade Hall for special persecution and levies this brutal sentence against him.

This action is in line with the previous lawless way with which Comrade Hall and the other Communist leaders have been dealt with in the courts. The Smith Act, under which they were originally framed up and jailed, is a blow in the face to the Bill of Rights and to the whole American democratic tradition. The trial in Judge Medina's court was a shameful farce. The kidnaping of Hall from Mexico to the United States by the FBI was an outrageous violation of the universally recognized law of political asylum as well as a blow at Mexico's national sovereignty. And now comes Judge Ryan's arbitrary and unwarranted conviction and sentencing of Gus Hall for contempt of court.

The warmongers are indeed in a desperate frame of mind when they have to resort to such legalized redbaiting and persecution in their efforts to still the peace voice of the Communists and other opponents of Wall Street's projected world war. But these special anti-Communist laws and practices will fail. Such fighters as Gus Hall will not be intimidated by them, nor can the Communist Party be silenced or crushed by them. And the mass peace movement cannot be demoralized in this manner. In fighting against the Truman-Wall Street war preparations Dennis, Hall,

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the mole was removed by a famous Cleveland surgeon Jerome Gross, who was known for his exceptional musical talents. The Stradivarius-playing surgeon performed as a soloist with Cleveland's orchestras and gathered laudatory reviews. In addition to Cleveland, he also played in New York City. See *The New York Times*, February 28, 1942.

773 *Daily News*, Dec 20, 1951; *Daily Worker*, Dec 28, 1951 and *The New York Times*, Dec 28, 1951. Gus Hall's lawyer filed an appeal after Ryan's decision but the district court of appeals as well as the Supreme Court upheld the sentence. See Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 67.



Davis and other leaders of the peace forces are speaking and acting in the true spirit of the peace-loving masses of the American people.<sup>774</sup>

### 2.8.2. On his way to Moscow?

How did Gus Hall end up escaping to Mexico? It seems to have been an idea by the CPUSA national headquarters and thus perhaps by William Z. Foster. The party leadership had already made some preparations in order to establish a security structure in Mexico. According to Peter L. Steinberg, the party had sent the head of its underground apparatus George Watt to Mexico with three unnamed party members who were supposed to stay in Mexico, help Hall get settled in the new country and function as a reserve leadership in case the CPUSA was wiped out through a massive legal assault. They were trained in use of secret communications system, including the use of invisible ink and coded messages.<sup>775</sup> The Mexican CP was going to help with the arrangements.<sup>776</sup>

Gil Green – who was a fugitive just like Gus Hall – tells in his memoirs that in September 1951 he received a note from the headquarters suggesting that he made arrangements to move to Mexico City as rapidly as possible. According to Green, such a proposal came as a complete surprise:

Without delay I sent off a reply, which a comrade took next morning to New York, stating that I was in total disagreement with the proposal and citing my reasons. I said I did not believe that the repression in the country had reached a stage warranting refuge in a foreign country. I believed such a move was unnecessary and inadvisable. I was certain that I, at least, could function more effectively with less risk in the United States rather than in Mexico or elsewhere.<sup>777</sup>

Green never received an answer to his reply and so he dropped the idea of escaping to Mexico. He later asked Hall why he had gone across the border. According to Hall, he had also objected to leaving the United States, but the pressure was too great as the comrades in the national office were insistent. They thought that Hall's hiding in the United States was unsafe, so he finally went along with the idea.<sup>778</sup>

Dorothy Healey also tells in her memoirs that the national office wanted to send the fugitives to Mexico. Sometime in 1951 the national office wanted the Southern California CP to send someone down to Mexico to study the possibilities for the fugitives to move there. After sending an emissary across the border, the Californians however came to the conclusion that a “gringo” would “stick out like a sore thumb in Mexico”. Instead they recommended sending the fugitives across the northern border to Canada.<sup>779</sup>

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774 *Daily Worker*, Dec 28, 1951.

775 Steinberg 1984, 193.

776 Murrell 2015, 100.

777 Green 1984, 99.

778 Green 1984, 99.

779 Healey & Isserman 1993, 123. The CPUSA did prepare an escape route to Canada, but it was never used. Minnesota-born Finnish American communist Carl Ross visited Canada and discussed the issue with local party leaders Tim Buck and Sam Carr. The U.S. fugitives would have crossed

The Communist Party later tried to find out what went wrong with Hall's escape to Mexico. According to Gil Green, the evidence pointed to "misplaced confidence in the person who had helped in the border crossing".<sup>780</sup> According to Gary Murrell, "the man the Mexican party assigned to assist the American comrades was a police agent".<sup>781</sup> Also Gus Hall later thought that he had been betrayed by "someone in the Communist Party of Mexico".<sup>782</sup>

Hall's arrest was not the first of its kind in Mexico. A year earlier Morton Sobell, an American engineer who was accused of espionage for the Soviet Union during WWII as a part of the spy ring which included also Julius Rosenberg, was similarly seized in Mexico City and was quickly driven to the U.S. border together with his family. The arrests and deportations of Sobell and Hall caused fears for the significant number of American dissident communists living in Mexico and some of them left the country following these incidents. The arrests could be seen as reflections of the warmly pro-U.S. and anti-communist political line of President Miguel Aleman who ruled Mexico between 1946 and 1952.<sup>783</sup>

Looking at the Operation Solo documents, it seems that the CPUSA had originally planned to send Gus Hall and Gil Green to Moscow via Mexico, but this plan was apparently discarded after Hall's arrest. In Moscow they would have set up a party leadership in exile.<sup>784</sup> According to one Operation Solo document, CPUSA member Moe Miller was in Moscow in 1951 to take care of technical arrangements as the Soviets expected Hall and Green to arrive in the Soviet capital.<sup>785</sup> Hall's failed escape to the Soviet Union was repeatedly discussed with the Soviets in the late 1950s and early 1960s. According to the Soviets, the both the CPUSA and the Cuban CP had indicated that there was something wrong with the Mexican CP and that the Mexican communists could not be trusted.<sup>786</sup>

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the border to Manitoba which lies across the border from Minnesota and North Dakota. See Carl Ross oral history interview transcript, part III, p. 12-15.

780 Green 1984, 100.

781 Murrell 2015, 100. According to Bettina Aptheker, her father Herbert Aptheker travelled to Mexico after the arrest to find the betrayer who apparently was a member of the Mexican CP. "My father found the informer, but I never learned what happened to him", Bettina Aptheker writes. See Aptheker 2006, 23.

782 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on January 9, 1962; OSD, part 40, page 2. The topic was discussed by Morris Childs and Boris Ponomarev, the head of the international department of the central committee of the CPSU, in Moscow in November 1961. Ponomarev asked Childs what was Hall's opinion of his arrest in Mexico in 1951. According to Childs, both Hall and Eugene Dennis thought that Hall had been betrayed by someone in the Mexican CP.

783 Anhalt 2001, 113-117 and Schreiber 2008, 15-16. Aleman's newly created intelligence agency *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (DFS) co-operated closely with the American authorities which may also explain the destinies of Sobell and Hall.

784 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on August 29, 1958; OSD, part 5, page 15. Gil Green – who had opposed an escape to Mexico – was also against fleeing to a socialist country. According to him, such a move would have cut him off completely from the ongoing struggle in the United States. See Green 1984, 99.

785 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on July 23, 1958; OSD, part 2, page 52.

786 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on August 11, 1958; OSD, part 3, pages 23-24 and report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on January 9, 1962; OSD, part 40, page 2. Gus Hall's unsuccessful escape to the Soviet Union was also discussed by his wife Elizabeth and Nikita Khrushchev's wife Nina as they met in Moscow in the summer of 1961. During the discussion Elizabeth Hall said that in 1951 when Gus Hall was arrested in Mexico he was on his

### 2.8.3. Five years in “The Hot House”

After the contempt trial had ended in New York in late December 1951, Gus Hall was transported back to Leavenworth federal penitentiary in Kansas. The notorious prison would be his home for the next five years and three months.

Leavenworth, located 25 miles north of Kansas City, was the first federal penitentiary as it was inaugurated in 1895. The construction work to replace the old military prison started in the late 1890s and it took more than two decades. Standing on flat Kansas prairie, the massive main building of the prison is an impressive sight with its grand silvery dome rising to more than 150 feet above the ground. Below the dome is the rotunda that combines the four cellblocks of the prison. The nickname of the prison is “The Hot House” due to the insufficient ventilation during the scorching summer months of Kansas.<sup>787</sup>

Gus Hall was not the first communist prisoner in Leavenworth – both Big Bill Haywood and Earl Browder had done time in the Kansas prison.<sup>788</sup> During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the penitentiary had held numerous famous prisoners including murderer Robert Stroud who reared and studied birds in his cell and in 1933 published a book on bird diseases.<sup>789</sup> During Gus Hall’s imprisonment the most famous inmate of Leavenworth was prohibition era gangster and kidnapper George “Machine Gun” Kelly. Hall claimed to have lived next door to Kelly in Leavenworth and that he became friends with him.<sup>790</sup>

Hall arrived to Leavenworth together with his co-defendant Irving Potash. In addition to them, also Carl Winter served his time Leavenworth as well as Hall’s co-fugitive Gil Green who surrendered to the authorities only in February 1956. By the time Green arrived to Leavenworth, Potash and Winter had already been released.<sup>791</sup>

After spending their first month in Leavenworth in an isolation block away from other prisoners, Hall and Green were introduced to the daily routines of prison life:

Life in Leavenworth was completely regimented. We were up at 6:15 a.m. and were ready for the head count soon after. Breakfast, like all meals, took place in two shifts,

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way to the Soviet Union. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on July 20, 1961; OSD, part 32, page 104.

787 Earley 1993, 28-36.

788 LaMaster 2008, 38 and Ryan 1997, 15-16.

789 Stroud served the first 30 years of his life imprisonment in Leavenworth but was in 1942 transferred to Alcatraz prison in California. Although he was not allowed to continue rearing birds in the new prison, he became widely known as the Birdman of Alcatraz, especially after a film with the same name was made of him in 1962. See LaMaster 2008, 34.

790 Bonosky 1987, 38; *The Plain Dealer*, Feb 27, 1996 and LaMaster 2008, 40. Kelly, who was a serving a life imprisonment, died in July 1954 in Leavenworth after he had had a heart attack. When Hall lived next door to Kelly, he was already a “mumbling old man”. In addition to former celebrity like Kelly, Leavenworth also housed a future “celebrity” in the mid-1950s as James Earl Ray, the future assassin of Martin Luther King, served a three-year sentence between 1955-1958 after passing forged postal money orders. Ray assassinated King in Memphis, Tennessee in 1968. See LaMaster 2008, 44.

791 Green 1984, 194 and Hall 1987, 366. Eugene Dennis, John Gates and Robert Thompson served their sentences in Atlanta, Georgia and Benjamin Davis and Henry Winston in Terre Haute, Indiana. John Williamson served his sentence in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania and Jack Stachel his in Danbury, Connecticut.

since the dining room was not large enough to accommodate all the men at one time. A separate, smaller shift of kitchen help ate much earlier. Except for this crew, all work began at 8:30 a.m. The day was broken up by four or five counts; one or more counts took place as we slept. When awake, it was a 'standup count', each man close to the bars. Sometimes the count had to be repeated a number of times before the correct total was reached and the 'all-accounted-for' signal could be given.<sup>792</sup>

The prison was cramped. Initially it had been built to hold a maximum of 1,640, but in the 1950s the prisoner population fluctuated around 2,500. This was made possible by using double-decker bunks, converting many single cells into double occupancy and four-man cells into eight-man cells. Most of the cells had been originally built for single occupancy and measured 5½ by 9 feet. The Spartan cells were piled on each other, forming a five-story stacks in which the two top floors were reserved for African American prisoners. They had to do more climbing – sometimes as often as six or seven times a day – and in the summer they suffered the most from the insufficient ventilation of the Hot House.<sup>793</sup>

According to Gil Green, the food in Leavenworth was “generally palatable but on the greasy and starchy side”. The meat was mainly pork, which came from the prison farm. Men suffering from ulcers had trouble digesting the greasy food. Gus Hall was one of them. Because of his stomach ulcers he lost considerable weight in Leavenworth.<sup>794</sup>

Hall worked at the prison's shoe factory as a piecework checker. It was considered an important job as the meagre earnings of the prisoners depended on the piecework checker. Later Gil Green worked in a similar job. According to Green, such a job was a sign of trust as the piecework checker needed to be “someone who would not finagle figures by giving credit to cronies for work done by others.”<sup>795</sup>

#### **2.8.4. Natural sciences behind prison bars**

After Hall got settled into the ordinary routines of the prison, life soon started to feel empty, monotonous and mind-numbing. The work at the prison shoe factory was repetitious and uninteresting and weightlifting at the prison yard was not very much more intriguing, so Hall was in serious need of mental and intellectual stimulus. He read a lot, but the selection in the prison library was limited. Letters to Hall and written by him were censored and the books sent to him were often confiscated as seditious. The prisoners were only allowed to write three letters a week and they could not discuss prison matters in their letters. Nor were they allowed to keep prison diaries. Even possessing an illicit fountain pen could lead to serious trouble as happened with Hall, who was sent to solitary confinement for a week. Visits were limited to lawyers<sup>796</sup> and family members, who lived in Cleveland, an

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792 Green 1984, 187.

793 Green 1984, 179.

794 Green 1984, 193 & 215.

795 North 1970, 26 and Green 1984, 193 & 230.

796 Hall's lawyer at the time was John J. Abt who worked for most of his career for the CPUSA. In his memoirs Abt tells us that he tried to visit Hall and other prisoners at least twice a year, often also conveying messages from their families. See Abt & Myerson 1993, 219.

800-mile drive from Leavenworth. A prisoner could have visitors only for two hours a month. The prisoner and the visitors were not allowed to embrace, to hold hands or to touch in any way.<sup>797</sup>

As Gus Hall's letters from prison were censored, he could write about politics only very vaguely as a letter published in the *Daily Worker* in April 1952 shows:

During social storms one must not sit in a shelter and wait for it to blow over. One must be an active participant in helping to direct its course. When world peace is secure the storm will subside. [...]

In fear the ruling class throws some into prison. If they think by this they are going to behead the working class they are making another big mistake. It can't be done. There is as much possibility of beheading the working class as there is in dipping a hole in the ocean. You can dip, but the body of water only replaces it.<sup>798</sup>

Luckily for Hall, he met in the prison a renowned mathematician who had been caught up in the McCarthy hysteria and was sentenced to prison for five years. According to Hall, the mathematician had forgotten to mention in a government job application that he had in his youth briefly been a member of the Young Communist League. Now this mishap cost him five years of his life and his career. While in prison, Hall wanted to "fill in the gaps in his formal education" and study especially chemistry and physics. The mathematician – a former employee of Albert Einstein – admired Hall for his politics and was happy to be a tutor for Hall in his studies of natural sciences. Hall later said that he owed "an invaluable debt" to the mathematician for the "deep insight into scientific questions" he gave Hall during the three years of their co-operation.<sup>799</sup>

Hall's description of the background of the mathematician may not be wholly accurate. In her newspaper column concerning Gus Hall's prison years, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn tells us that the last name of the mathematician was Reno.<sup>800</sup> She does not mention the mathematician's first name but with a great likelihood she is talking about Franklin Victor Reno. According to Whittaker Chambers, Reno was a member of a group of people who supplied confidential information to the Soviets in the late 1930s.<sup>801</sup> Chambers served as courier delivering confidential documents to the Soviets. Reno, "a very able mathematician", was working for the U.S. Army, developing a top secret bombsight at Aberdeen Proving

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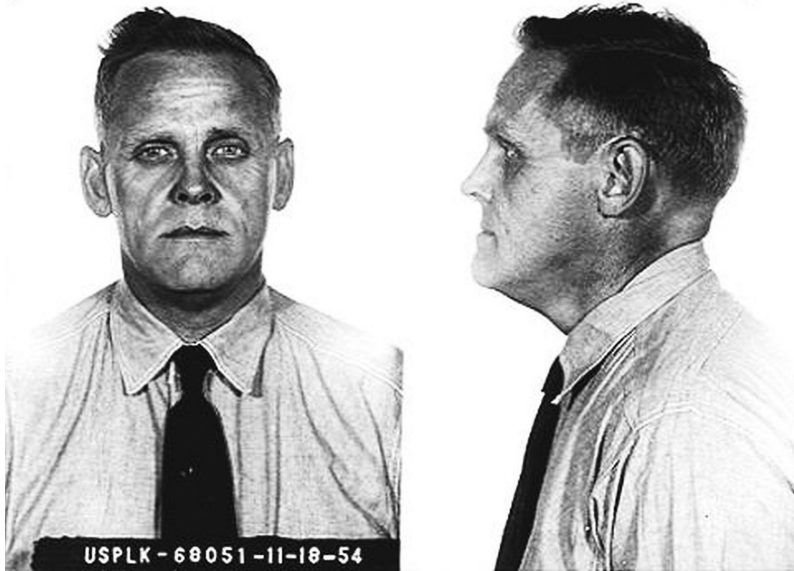
797 *Daily Worker*, Feb 10, 1954; North 1970, 26; Green 1984, 183 & 195; Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 67-69; Bonosky 1987, 38-39; Hall 1987, 366 and *The Plain Dealer*, Feb 27, 1996. According to Green, the visits of family members were joyful events but they left a bitter aftertaste as Leavenworth prisoners were afterwards ordered to strip and were subjected to humiliating cavity searches. Green remembers always feeling angry, frustrated and bitter after such procedures. See Green 1984, 195-196.

798 *Daily Worker*, Apr 27, 1952. Words like "communism" and "socialism" – not to mention "revolution" – seemed to be banned in Leavenworth as they do not appear in Hall's letter. Nor do the names of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin or the Soviet Union. "Working class", however, seemed to be an acceptable concept.

799 North 1970, 26 and Bonosky 1987, 39. Gus Hall's co-defendant and co-fugitive Gil Green had a somewhat more versatile study program in Leavenworth as he was learning Spanish and reading books on history, anthropology and economics. See Green 1984, 183 & 255.

800 *The Worker*, Apr 7, 1963.

801 Whittaker Chambers called Reno by the first name Vincent although his actual name was Franklin Victor Reno. See Chambers 1952, 432.



*Gus Hall in Leavenworth federal penitentiary in November 1954. Because of stomach ulcers, Hall had problems digesting the greasy prison food and as a result, he lost a considerable amount of weight. Source: Alamy*

Ground in Maryland, which was the principal testing site for the U.S. Army. According to Chambers, Reno joined the espionage apparatus in 1937, shortly before Chambers ended his cooperation with the Soviets after he had become disillusioned with communism due to the Stalin's purges.<sup>802</sup> Before Chambers's departure, he and Reno met several times and Reno supplied Chambers material related to the bombsight.<sup>803</sup> Later, after the spying ring had been revealed, Reno made a full confession and was prosecuted. He received a three-year sentence for perjury.<sup>804</sup>

Whatever the background of Hall's mathematician friend was, Hall saw his prison years as his "university days" and felt that his studies of science helped him achieve "a more basic understanding of many of the world's problems today, in this scientific age".<sup>805</sup> Such fondness for natural sciences is not surprising in Hall's case, as he very often emphasized the scientific nature of Marxism and also often used science-related metaphors when he was discussing ideological issues.<sup>806</sup>

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802 Chambers 1952, 29-30 & 432-433. The most famous member of this group was Harry Dexter White, a senior official at the U.S. Department of Treasury. According to Thomas Sakmyster, Reno was recruited by J. Peters, the shadowy "spymaster" of the CPUSA. See Sakmyster 2011, 65.

803 Tanenhaus 1997, 115-116 & 162.

804 Tanenhaus 1997, 318.

805 North 1970, 26.

806 When emphasizing the scientific nature of Marxism Hall was following closely the footsteps Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. They highlighted the scientific nature of their ideology to distinguish it from the so-called Utopian socialism and other predecessors. According to Marx and Engels, their ideology had a solid scientific foundation as it rested on dialectical materialism, historical materialism, labor theory of value and the postulates of class struggle, proletarian revolution, the dictatorship of proletariat and classless society. See Wilczynski 1981, 509.

Chemistry and physics were of course not the only things Hall was reading in prison. He followed domestic and international politics – including the Korean War – as closely as he could. On the domestic front he followed especially the atomic espionage trial of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, who were executed in June 1953. As Hall could not read left-wing newspapers or magazines in the prison, his wife Elizabeth had to read them carefully and give him summaries of the most important articles and discussions during her visits in Leavenworth. Elizabeth also served as a link between Hall and the party leadership, so Hall could – at least to some extent – take part in the party decision-making.<sup>807</sup>

Although Hall could only indirectly take part in party decision-making, he was not forgotten in the party leadership and in organizations close to the party during his lengthy absence. In October 1952, the Civil Rights Congress arranged a rally in New York celebrating Hall's 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday and demanding the release for all political prisoners, including Gus Hall.<sup>808</sup> During the same fall, Hall was made a so-called write-in candidate for U.S. senator from Ohio in the November 1952 election – the voter was supposed to write Hall's name in the voting ticket. The campaign material advertised Hall as a “peace candidate” and “an American prisoner of war... in an AMERICAN prison”, whose crime was to “fight for peace” and to “fight to bring the boys home from Korea”. Gus Hall was equated with Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Mark Twain, Henry David Thoreau and Eugene Debs who all had opposed imperialist wars waged by the United States in their lifetime. The campaign leaflet contained also a letter from an American prisoner of war in Korea. In the letter the air force pilot – from Youngstown, Ohio – admitted using biological weapons against North Koreans.<sup>809</sup>

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807 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 68-69.

808 *Daily Worker*, Sep 30, 1952. In the rally Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and CRC leader William Patterson gave speeches. Elizabeth Hall and her son were flown in from Cleveland in order to take part in the rally. A group of musicians performed *Ballad for Gus Hall* which had been penned by Irwin Silber, the editor of the folk music magazine *Sing Out!* Silber edited *Sing Out!* from 1951 until 1967 and published numerous books on folk music thus becoming a central character in American folk music scene. As a young man Silber was a member of the CPUSA but he left the Party in the mid-1950s. The lyrics of *Ballad for Gus Hall* can be found in CPUSA Records, box 194, folder 15. The lyrics show Hall in a highly positive light. Interestingly, Silber comments on Gus Hall in much less positive manner in his 1994 book *Socialism: What Went Wrong?* See Silber 1994, 6 & 52.

809 CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 196, folder 23. Western historians of Korean War have considered the communist claims of American biological warfare to be a propaganda operation. In the spring of 1952 the Chinese claimed that the United Nations forces had used bacteriological agents against North Koreans. The U.S. Air Force was accused of dropping containers filled with infected insects and vermin on North Korea and Manchuria in order to spread cholera, typhus and bubonic plague. Secretary of state Dean Acheson immediately called on the International Red Cross to conduct investigations behind United Nations as well as communist lines. The World Health Organization offered to provide treatment for the victims of alleged germ attacks but neither Chinese nor the North Koreans responded to these offers. Many people in the United Nations forces believed that these allegations were made to cover up huge epidemics in Manchuria and elsewhere in China caused by poor sanitation, malnutrition and the collapse of the health care. The Chinese photographic evidence of biological warfare and the so-called confessions of the American prisoners of war were soon exposed as fake material. See Hickey 1999, 268 and Sandler 1999, 207-210.

Meanwhile, the CPUSA's ideological journal *Political Affairs* published several of Hall's writings during his first prison years. The texts were not penned in Hall's cell in Leavenworth but they had all been written before his imprisonment and had been given as speeches in different CPUSA events. In one of the speeches Hall interestingly commented on the paradox prevailing in the vanguard party of the American working class: that "a large section of our cadre comes from a middle-class and professional background".<sup>810</sup> According to Hall, the large representation of middle-class in the leadership had led to a problematic situation:

Working-class comrades as yet do not feel at home in the core of leadership in our Party. They do not feel they can keep up the pace. They feel they are not "polished" enough. They do not feel their contributions are appreciated or understood. They feel that because they are not able to put their thoughts into exact words, exact forms that are demanded in our party, they cannot fully function in the leadership. What our Party needs to appreciate fully is that it is much more important for us to learn to speak the language of our working class than to try to mould everyone into the often scholarly pattern of our discussion.<sup>811</sup>

Hall naturally read also fiction during his prison years. As he was not allowed to write about prison matters to his family members, reading experiences became a central topic in his letters to his wife and daughter. *Masses & Mainstream*, a Marxist cultural magazine, published excerpts of Hall's letters in its autumn issue of 1952. In one his letters to his daughter Barbara, Hall strongly praised the fact in prison he had time to read books thoroughly. In the outside world, life tends to be too hectic for proper reading, he wrote:

Too often speed seems to be the important thing. It is how many books you read and not how you read – what you get out of a book. In prison one is not in a hurry. There is no place to go, so the aim is to pass time. The difference between prison reading and reading on the outside is like that between just every day dusting around the house and a complete spring house-cleaning. Here you have time to get at all the corners, all the hidden covered up spots in a book.<sup>812</sup>

According to Hall's letters, he seemed to have read during his first Leavenworth year at least Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Although Whitman was a "grass-roots poet" who "spoke for the man on the street and the man behind the plow handle" he did not win whole-hearted acceptance from Hall for some of his lines were "just trash, nothing more", "like the formless, meaningless paintings of the painters of the modernistic school". Hemingway's

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810 Although the CPUSA claimed to be the advocate of American working class and especially blue-collar workers, in 1946 the Party had to admit that only 29 percent of its members were industrial workers. See Cauter 1978, 185.

811 Hall 1952a, 41-42. In the same speech Hall criticized comrades who "spend most of their time in Sherlock Holmes fashion hunting for the 'wrong word'". Very often these comrades, Hall wrote, "jump with glee and uncontrolled enthusiasm because they have found an error or a weakness in someone else's work". According to Hall, in most cases these comrades "have very little constructive suggestions and in most cases completely ignore problems arising from leading masses in struggle". See Hall 1952a, 39.

812 Hall 1952b, 39. In addition to daughter Barbara, Hall wrote letters also to his son Arvo. In these letters Hall wrote about his childhood and youth experiences in the woods of Minnesota, about the bears and chipmunks and a horse which mistook Hall's blond hair for a hank of hay. See Bonosky 1987, 39-42.



brand new Pulitzer Prize winner – which had come out earlier in the same year – got even more unwelcoming reception from the Leavenworth literature critic:

After reading the raving reviews in the press of Hemingway's new novel *The Old Man and the Sea*, I was very much interested to read it. To me it was a big disappointment. It can almost be put in the class of a technical book on the art of fishing. It is not symbolic of anything, it does not mirror or reflect the life of any land, people, group or section.

In fact it has no positive social significance of any kind. [...]

*The Old Man and the Sea* is a slumber-on-feather-bed product. [...]

Some reviewers agree about its emptiness, but say it is beautifully written. I couldn't think of a sharper or more negative thing to say about a piece of literature.<sup>813</sup>

### 2.8.5. Making friends with bank robbers

After Irving Potash and Carl Winter were released from Leavenworth in March 1955, Gus Hall was the only Foley Square defendant remaining in the Kansas prison. In the spring of 1956 he, however, got company as Gil Green, who had been successfully hiding from the FBI ever since July 1951, surrendered to the authorities. Green, who had been hiding in his home city Chicago, had grown exceedingly tired of his stressful underground life as a fugitive, away from his family and friends. Finally at the end of 1955 the party leadership granted Green and Henry Winston, the other successful fugitive, permission to surrender. Green surrendered in late February in New York and Winston a week later. Just like Hall, they got a three-year contempt of court sentences because of their flight.<sup>814</sup>

In his memoirs, Green describes vividly how he met Gus Hall in the far end of the Leavenworth ball field on May 30, 1956. The two comrades and ex-fugitives had not met for five years and the reunion was cordial:

Gus and I exchanged hearty embraces, inquired about each other's health and family and swapped news. He looked well, although he had lost considerable weight, some of it because of stomach ulcers. The greasy prison food had not agreed with him, he reported. Yet he was in good humor. He had friends among the men, and was liked and respected. Gus told me he worked in the shoe factory as a piecework checker. This, I learned, was an important job that helped assure the men an honest count in calculating their meager piecework earnings.<sup>815</sup>

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813 Hall 1952b, 38-39.

814 Green 1984, 150-151. Robert Thompson, the fourth fugitive, had been caught August 1953 when he was hiding in a remote cabin in California's High Sierra. He got a four-year contempt of court sentence because of his flight. Several other communists were arrested together with him, among them Minnesota-born Finnish American communist Carl Ross. He got a two-year sentence for harboring Thompson. Ross served the sentence in McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary near Seattle, Washington. He thought that the FBI may have found Thompson because of Ross's contacts with the California Party organization. See Carl Ross oral history interview transcript, part III, p. 16.

815 Green 1984, 193.

Hall helped Green to adapt to the new environment by acquainting him with people and customs of the prison. The two – who after the Prague Spring of 1968 had somewhat cool relations – even played handball together as doubles team.<sup>816</sup>

I was fortunate for me that Gus was there when I arrived. He made it easier for me to learn whom to trust and whom to avoid. Gus was by now a ‘short timer’; had less than a year to do. We spent many hours in the yard (the only place where we could meet, since he bunked in cell house D) discussing the events outside prison walls – national and world developments, and problems facing the Party.<sup>817</sup>

According to Gil Green, he and Hall made friends especially with bank robbers who were serving their sentences in Leavenworth. Green explained this by the fact that “the bank robbers were less clannish, not as tied to cultural enclaves based on race and nationality.”<sup>818</sup> Also Hall mentions acquainting with several bank robbers in Leavenworth in his autobiographical writings. Hall writes in an admiring manner for example of an inmate coming from a Quaker family in Pennsylvania “who made a profession of robbing banks”. According to Hall, they stayed in touch also after both men had been released from prison.<sup>819</sup>

Hall also tells of another bank robber, whom Irving Potash managed to convert away from anticommunism:

He was generally anti-Communist because he was raised as a Catholic. So he had made up his mind to start a fight and beat us up – at least one of us. He even told us later how he planned to start the fight. He was going to ask one of us a provocative question: “What about individual initiatives under socialism?”

Here he was, his own initiatives were limited to the prison cell and he was worried about the individual initiatives permitted under socialism. Later he admitted that it was all quite ridiculous.

Whether through design by the warden’s office or by coincidence this anti-Communist was put into the cell next to Irving Potash. Of course Irving knew nothing about the plans of this anti-Communist. The 140-pound Irving would have been no match for six-foot two-inch, 250-pound young bank robber who, by the way, was the best weightlifter in the prison. But the young bank robber met a different kind of match and lost – or maybe one could day won, in the long run.

As the bank robber related the story months later, when the cell gates were opened he confronted Irving with his challenge: “What about the individual initiatives under socialism?” Irving, who was the most pleasant, kindest, considerate human being on this earth, smiled, put out his hand in friendship and said “Well, it’s an interesting subject. Let’s you and me talk about it.” Later the bank robber said “How can you hit someone who reacts like that?” But that’s not the end of the story.

Irving, in his quiet way, kept explaining about socialism. A few days later, I met the bank robber and we became good friends. About a year or so later someone made some nasty remarks about Communists and communism in the prison yard. The

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816 Green 1984, 193. Handball refers here to so-called American handball which is quite similar to racquetball or squash but is played without a racket.

817 Green 1984, 193-194. In a 1992 interview – made after Green had left the Party in 1991 – he described his and Hall’s relationship in Leavenworth in a somewhat cooler manner: “We were friendly, but we were never friends; there’s a distinction there. In prison he never became warm to anybody.” See Stephanson 1993, 313.

818 Green 1984, 210.

819 Hall 1987, 363-365.

young bank robber, who earlier was going to beat up Communists, beat up the anti-Communist to the point where he landed in the prison hospital.<sup>820</sup>

Hall and Potash were able to avoid the violent attack by this bank robber, but not all Smith Act defendants were so lucky.<sup>821</sup> Robert Thompson was attacked in New York City prison by an anticommunist Yugoslav seaman waiting for deportation. The seaman struck Thompson with an iron pipe, fracturing his skull. Thompson lay near death for days but was saved by brain surgery.<sup>822</sup> Henry Winston – who did his time in Terre Haute, Indiana – was not attacked by anyone but he lost his eyesight in prison as result of neglect and a too-long-delayed operation by prison doctors.<sup>823</sup> In comparison to these hardships, Hall's stomach ulcers were indeed a minor problem.

In general the attitude of other prisoners seems to have been somewhat negative towards their communist fellow inmates. To George Charney, who was also convicted of violating the Smith Act in one of the latter communist trials, this came as a surprise. This is how he described the attitudes of his fellow prisoners:

All were curious, many hostile. Again another illusion was shattered, that as a party of the working class we would be welcomed and surrounded by the poorest of the poor, by the wretched outcasts of capitalist society.<sup>824</sup>

### 2.8.6. Tough lives of the Smith Act families

If life was tough inside the prison, it was not much easier for the Smith Act convicts' families. The wives of the convicts had to struggle hard in order to support their families. Hall appreciated highly his wife Elizabeth who "had her feet on the ground". "She had her hands full. A job – clerical work – and two kids, and keeping them from being too upset after those visits to Leavenworth", Hall later said to *Daily Worker*.<sup>825</sup>

In addition to the absence of fathers and husbands, the families of the party leaders were stressed by the continuous FBI surveillance. Especially the families of the fugitive

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820 Hall 1987, 366-367. The young bank robber in question seems to be a man called Jim Leather who is also featured in Gil Green's memoirs. He became a good friend of Green's in Leavenworth and they stayed in touch for the rest of their lives. See Green 1984, 210-214 and Stephanson 1993, 313-314.

821 In a 1996 newspaper interview Hall said that generally he was left alone by other inmates in Leavenworth as he was considered as a "big shot". See *The Plain Dealer*, Feb 27, 1996.

822 Cauter 1978, 210 and *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 386.

823 *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 422.

824 Charney 1968, 212. Communist author Howard Fast said he never encountered hatred because of his political thinking except in prison where a man convicted for murdering his wife threatened to kill him and another communist writer Albert Maltz because they were communists. John Williamson's experience was slightly more positive in this respect: "Despite the constant barrage of anti-Communist propaganda that all Americans, prisoners included, were subjected to, we were treated with great respect by the great majority of inmates. The kind of violent and murderous attack of which Bob Thompson was the victim came from a handful of prisoners – in most cases incited by guards – and did not reflect the general attitude." See Williamson 1969, 190 and Fast 1990, 208.

825 *Daily Worker*, Apr 17, 1957.

party leaders were under massive surveillance measures. The agents followed the family members wherever they went and interviewed their friends and neighbors. The FBI even checked Gil Green's family dirty laundry sent to the cleaners. Sometimes agents spoke to fugitives' families in a threatening manner as the agent who told Green's wife in front of her children that "we don't use guns much, but sometimes a man were hunting gets shot". The agents visited fugitives' wives' and relatives' workplaces and interviewed their bosses and colleagues, which led to some wives losing their jobs.<sup>826</sup> Some of the children of the communist leaders were bullied in school and some were not allowed to take part in children's summer camps, as happened with Gil Green's and Robert Thompson's children.<sup>827</sup>

According to Sara Rzeszutek, the FBI waged a "war of nerves" against the families of the Smith Act defendants. The Bureau spent nearly \$1 million a year maintaining staff to tail the Smith Act families, Rzeszutek writes.<sup>828</sup>

Tactics included surveillance, harassment, subtle threats and actual interference in family members' abilities to sustain their incomes, homes, cars and any semblance of a normal life. [...] These tactics proved ineffective at information gathering and did not lead to the apprehension of any of the unavailables.<sup>829</sup>

According to Ellen Schrecker, the children of the Smith Act convicts – and other leftists – were especially anguished after Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in June 1953 following their espionage conviction two years earlier:

The execution of the Rosenbergs brought the danger home. The children of the left identified with the couple's orphaned sons. "If they could be framed", one woman explained, "the same thing could happen to our parents".

These children were lonely as well as scared. [...] Unless they grew up in one of the left's small enclaves, "Commie kids" were taunted, beaten up, ostracized – just like their parents.<sup>830</sup>

The wives of the convicted communist leaders did not remain passive but formed an organization for themselves, Families Committee of Smith Act Victims. With the party

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826 John Williamson writes in his memoirs: "Most of the wives, including my own, had to find work in order to live. This was not easy, since the FBI visited employers as soon as they got a job and, nine times out of ten, they were fired." See Williamson 1969, 199.

827 Gil Green closely describes his family's experiences and the FBI's often absurd search methods in his memoirs. Unfortunately Gus Hall did not write about his family's life during his flight to Mexico and his imprisonment, but most likely their experiences were quite similar to Green's family. Also Albert E. Kahn studies the experiences of the fugitive CPUSA leaders' children in his book *The Game of Death*. See Kahn 1953, 151-167 and Green 1984, 70-71, 76-82, 90-95, 107-110, 113-116, 127-130 & 146-150.

828 Rzeszutek 2015, 133.

829 Rzeszutek 2015, 131. According to Rzeszutek, Smith Act defendant James Jackson's daughter Kathy was affected so severely by the FBI's actions that she later wrote a doctoral dissertation on the topic. Her dissertation *Trauma Survivors: Adult Children of McCarthyism and the Smith Act* "analyzed the influence of political persecution on the mental health of children of McCarthy victims and explored the long-term consequences of that trauma on their lives". See Rzeszutek 2015, 276.

830 Schrecker 1998, 366-367. Also Bettina Aptheker – who was eight years old when the Rosenbergs were executed – remembers having Rosenberg-related nightmares – in which her parents were executed – in her childhood. See Aptheker 2006, 22-23.

partly underground in the 1950s, a lot of work fell on the committee. It organized a campaign demanding amnesty for the prisoners, arranged rallies and sent speakers to organizations. The money that was raised went for a multitude of uses: the \$10 monthly commissary allowance for each prisoner, fares for visits, sending the children away on summer holiday, printing literature demanding the release of the prisoners and paying for medicine for some of the wives who were ill.<sup>831</sup>

The distress of the so-called Smith Act children played a central role when the Families Committee prepared its campaign material. In 1955, for example, the organization published a leaflet filled with pictures of the children and heart-rending stories of the children's lives without their fathers. One of the children featured prominently in the leaflet was Gus Hall's son Arvo:

To 9 year old Arvo Hall this is the fifth Christmas without his Dad. For Gus Hall is in Leavenworth Penitentiary – a political prisoner sentenced to 8 years under the thought-control Smith Act for his Marxist political beliefs. And young Arvo, overwhelmed at the three years that stretch ahead, cries out to his mother: “But by then I’ll be too big for Gus and me to do all the things we used to do together.”<sup>832</sup>

### **2.8.7. Gus Hall and Nikita Khrushchev’s 1956 revelations**

Gus Hall was in Leavenworth in February 1956 when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev gave his historical secret speech at the CPSU’s 20<sup>th</sup> congress revealing the horrific crimes committed during Stalin’s reign. For American communists – like for most communists around the world – Khrushchev’s speech was a massive shock. Bourgeois newspapers had been writing about the alleged mass purges and other atrocities in the Soviet Union for years, but communists had ignored these claims as anticommunist propaganda. After the top leader of the Soviet Union suddenly admitted that such claims were true, many communists had to go through serious soul-searching. The situation was not made any better by the Soviet Union’s violent reaction to the Hungarian uprising later in 1956 or by the bitter factional fighting that took place within the CPUSA. As a consequence of all this, most of the CPUSA’s members left the party during the last years of the 1950s.<sup>833</sup>

Many American communists have described their shocked reactions to Khrushchev’s revelations in their autobiographies.<sup>834</sup> Unfortunately Gus Hall did not discuss this topic at all in his autobiographical writings. As Hall did have time and energy to read literature and study natural sciences behind the bars he most likely also had time and energy to reflect on the meaning and the consequences of these twists and turns within the international

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831 Williamson 1969, 200 and Rzeszutek 2015, 134-135.

832 CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 193, folder 15.

833 According to FBI documents gathered by Ernie Lazar, the CPUSA had about 20 000 members in the end of 1955, but only little more than 5 000 members in the summer of 1961. See Ernie Lazar’s collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 1).

834 See, for example, Gates 1958, 166-167; Charney 1968, 4 and Healey & Isserman 1993, 153-155.

communist movement. Not a word of such considerations has, however, remained for the later generations.

As we have seen earlier in this study, Gus Hall was by no means an anti-Stalinist. He had joined the Communist Party in 1927 when Joseph Stalin was gradually strengthening his position in the leadership of the Soviet Union and the international communist movement. The fact that Hall remained in the party when leading figures like John Pepper and Jay Lovestone left the organization in the late 1920s would seem to suggest that Hall was not a supporter of Leon Trotsky or Nikolai Bukharin but more a follower of Stalin.

In the early thirties Hall spent about one and half years in Stalin's Soviet Union while attending the Moscow's International Lenin School. While he largely remained silent about this phase in his life, the experience did not apparently shake his belief in the Soviet system. In a trial in Minneapolis in April 1934 – shortly after his return to the U.S. – Hall stated that he preferred a Soviet government to the American one and was ready to take up arms and overthrow the American government “when the time comes”<sup>835</sup>

Based on Hall's radio speeches during WWII, he seems to have been close to the “Americanized” political line of the CPUSA leader Earl Browder during the war, but his tone changed after the ousting of Browder in 1945. The leading role of the Soviet Union in the international communist movement was now more prominently featured in Hall's speeches and writings. So was his admiration of Joseph Stalin, which was most clearly expressed in a 1951 article in *Political Affairs*.<sup>836</sup>

The Operation Solo documents contain very little references to Stalin, but in one document – written in the spring of 1964 – Hall interestingly comments on the Soviet leader and his regime. According to Hall, “a popular wrong concept” concerning Stalin's era was growing within the CPUSA. According to this concept, “all of those arrested – tried and punished – were innocent victims of the Stalin cult”<sup>837</sup> In Hall's opinion, this was quite not the case:

It would be important to bring out that there were – agents of imperialism – Trotskyites who believed in disruption and even sabotage – factionalists – as well as innocent victims.

It would be important to bring out how factionalism and a factional struggle open the doors for enemy forces – how Trotskyism paves the way for enemy agents. The fact that there were any innocent victims of illegal actions does not mean that we must be silent about the elements that were not innocent.<sup>838</sup>

The statement is a part of Hall's memorandum which he wrote for the CCCPSU. The brief, two-page memorandum – in which Hall comments on various matters related to world communism – was delivered to the Soviets by Jack Childs who travelled to the Soviet

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835 The records of the Minneapolis trial are quoted in, for example, Swearingen 1971, 580-581.

836 See Hall 1951c.

837 Report from FBI's New York office office to the Director on April 17, 1964; OSD, part 62, page 15. Underlining in the original document.

838 Report from FBI's New York office office to the Director on April 17, 1964; OSD, part 62, pages 15-16. Hall continues: “Lately I have read some of the material put out during the trials and the thought occurred to me that there is this great misconception. I did some checking and was surprised to find out how many even within the Party had the notion that all the people involved were innocent victims.” Underlining in the original document.

Union in April 1964.<sup>839</sup> The tone of statement is slightly surprising considering that Hall had in the early 1960s followed somewhat closely the political line of Nikita Khrushchev who was still in power in Moscow. With such a statement, Hall seemed to take a step into a pro-Stalin direction, away from Khrushchevite de-Stalinization. Unfortunately Operation Solo documents do not contain any further material which could explain Hall's outburst.

While Hall did not publish any articles or other texts concerning his relationship to Khrushchev's 1956 revelations, he was asked about the matter in several newspaper and magazine interviews. While Hall did not deny the atrocities committed by Stalin, he downplayed Stalin's importance for American communism. "Stalin didn't recruit me into the Communist Party and whatever he did is not gonna drive me out. The roots of my thought were not in foreign countries: they were here", Hall said in a *Newsweek* interview in 1984.<sup>840</sup>

In a *Wall Street Journal* interview in November 1989 – published just two days before the fall of the Berlin Wall – Hall pointed out that Soviet historians were exaggerating the atrocities of Stalin. "I thought Stalin was a good leader. I've also always thought that there was such a thing as human error, even under socialism. I didn't join the party because of Stalin, and I won't leave because of him", Hall said.<sup>841</sup> In a 1994 interview by *Park Hill Reporter* – a local publication in Yonkers where Hall lived – Hall acknowledged the excesses of the Stalinist era as criminal, but said that the positive accomplishments of Stalin were ignored in the United States.

The basic thing that Stalin did that nobody wants to recognize, is that he won the war for us. And he could only do it by building a steel industry in order to have a war industry. And to build a steel industry you had to cut corners. You couldn't be democratic. You literally had to just push things through.<sup>842</sup>

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839 Report from FBI's New York office office to the Director on April 17, 1964; OSD, part 62, page 12.

840 *Newsweek*, February 20, 1984. Baltimore party leader and the CPUSA's long-time labor commission chairman George Meyers thought of Stalin's crimes in much the same way as Hall. "I joined the communist party because of the class struggle in the United States. [...] That's why I never had any problems about all these foreign ups and downs", Meyers said. See Pecinovsky 2019, 8.

841 *Wall Street Journal*, November 7, 1989.

842 *Park Hill Reporter*, August 1994. Hall's answers largely follow the basic line of communist answers to questions concerning Stalin's atrocities as outlined by Aileen Kraditor: "A true believer might have answered in either of the two ways: 'Despite Stalin's crimes, he did put the Soviet people on a forced march toward communism. It would have been better to go more slowly, but the Soviet Union is farther along than it would be if it had had a less severe regime.' Or: 'Socialism is inherently so democratic, progressive and dynamic that even Stalin's crimes and errors could not push it off the track of history.'" Hall's thinking was also close to the thoughts of CPUSA's lawyer John Abt. He writes in his autobiography that Khrushchev's disclosures "did nothing to undermine my belief in the superiority of socialism or to question the character of the Soviet state". "I regarded Stalin's acts as distortions or perversions of socialism but they did not negate what I considered the enormous successes the Soviet peoples had achieved under socialism", Abt writes. See Kraditor 1988, 231 and Abt & Myerson 1993, 213.

### 2.8.8. Conclusions

As Gus Hall spent most of the 1950s either in prison or under a conditional release, he could not take part in any party or other political activities. One can thus say that the 1950s was probably the least political decade of his adult life. Paradoxically, this turned out to be a highly positive factor in 1959 when the CPUSA leadership was renewed. During Nikita Khrushchev's dramatic secret speech in February 1956 and during the Hungarian uprising in the fall of the same year, Hall was locked up in a federal penitentiary in northeastern Kansas. Similarly he was away from the CPUSA headquarters and all party activities during the tumultuous years that followed 1956. He could thus in 1959 enter the leadership race as a fresh face, unstained by the sectarian struggles that had taken place in the party after the earth-shaking events of 1956.

When one looks at the way how Gus Hall later remembered his prison years, one easily gets the impression that Hall's five and half year prison sentence was not a traumatic experience for him. In press interviews he repeatedly cracked jokes about the bank robbers and counterfeiter he befriended in Leavenworth and remembered always to mention that he had lived next door to the notorious prohibition era gangster George "Machine Gun" Kelly. He also remembered affectionately his studies of natural sciences while he was behind the bars. Such studies were of course befitting for a future party leader who often emphasized the scientific nature of Marxism-Leninism.

If Hall's prison years were not traumatic for him, the situation may have been somewhat different for his family. Hall's son Arvo was only a small kid when his father was imprisoned and his daughter Barbara was a teenager. As mentioned above, the life of families of the Smith Act convicts was not easy as the wives of convicts often had problems with finding – and keeping – a job. The children were often bullied and ostracized in school. The children's situation was not eased when in the summer of 1953 two American communists, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, were executed following their espionage sentences. The possibility that the same thing might happen to their parents haunted many children of American communists in the 1950s.

According to Morris Childs – who followed Gus Hall's life from a close distance for a couple of decades – the tough experiences of the 1950s affected the rest of his life. According to Childs, Hall was "by nature exploitive and avaricious, and the deprivations of prison intensified his greed", because "during his incarceration, neither the party nor anyone in it gave any help whatsoever to his wife and children, and he was determined that they would never again be impoverished".<sup>843</sup> While Childs's view of Hall may be exaggeratedly negative, there may be a bit of truth in his account. After Hall became the general secretary of the CPUSA, he did live a relatively comfortable life in a Yonkers town house with a chauffeur driving him to work to Manhattan every morning. To what extent did he use the money coming from the Soviet Union to finance his lifestyle is unclear, but Operation Solo material contains examples of Hall using party money for private purposes.

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843 Barron 1995, 62.



## 2.9. Gus Hall becomes the general secretary

### 2.9.1. Party in turmoil

Gus Hall was released from Leavenworth on March 30, 1957, after he had served almost five and half years of his eight-year sentence behind bars. He could not, however, return to party activities before April 5, 1959, when his probationary period ended. Meanwhile, Hall ran a Sinclair gas station and a garage in Cleveland in order to support his family. For running the business Hall was likely to receive valuable help from his brothers, who had a general store and other businesses in Hall's birthplace in Cherry, Minnesota.<sup>844</sup> Although Hall was not allowed to take part in the CPUSA activities during his probationary period, Hall was not entirely isolated from the party. According to Tom Pecinovsky, "comrades would visit [Hall in Cleveland], seek political advice and attempt to win him over to various factional positions".<sup>845</sup>

The fact that the station was run by a former inmate who still had to report regularly at the local police station did not seem to undermine its success. According to Hall, the gas station, located on Lee Road in Maple Heights, was doing well as "the rumor got around that there was an honest mechanic in town". The place and its payroll grew, but Hall got no pleasure from running a business, rather the vice versa. He was itching to get back to politics and party activities.<sup>846</sup>

Returning back to his family after almost six years' absence was not wholly trouble-free for Hall. He had to get reacquainted with his ten-year old son Arvo, who was only four years old when his father had first escaped to Mexico and was then locked into a prison. "He could not remember me from when I left, and those visits in prison – well, he saw me behind a glass and we talked over the glass, and they don't have a good effect on kids", Hall said to *Daily Worker* two weeks after his release. With daughter Barbara, a 19-year old college student, things were easier.<sup>847</sup>

*Daily Worker* newspaper welcomed Hall with almost an ecstatic article:

Ours was the generation that weathered the depression, that fought in Madrid, that defended the Scottsboro boys, that built the unions, that defeated Hitler, that talked back to McCarthy. And out of our generation came Gus Hall. [...]

When we remember Gus, we even remember him as being bigger than life, although Gus is imposing enough in real life. We remember him for his leadership, his astuteness, his incorruptibility. We remember his warm, human qualities. We remember his laughter. [...]

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844 How Hall could obtain the money needed for starting a gas station business is not known. As a former leading member of the communist party and a recent prison inmate, Hall was not likely to get a loan from a bank. As Hall was questioned by a congress internal security subcommittee in February 1960, the examiners seemed to believe that the Communist Party had furnished Gus Hall the funds to buy the gas station. See *Communist Leadership*, 30.

845 Pecinovsky 2019, 132.

846 *Daily Worker*, March 29, 1957; *The New York Times*, March 31, 1957; *Communist Leadership*, 30 and *The Pittsburgh Press*, May 5, 1978.

847 *Daily Worker*, April 17, 1957.

We remember Gus and his children. Children naturally love Gus; they swarm all over his ample person. When we remember Gus, we see him surrounded by children. [...]

We have remembered Gus during the long years of his imprisonment. Now that the time of his release is at hand, our thoughts turn inevitably to the gates of Leavenworth prison. We know that prison takes toll of men's bodies; we know that these years will have left their mark. But because we know Gus, we know, absolutely, there is a part of him no law can suppress and no prison can warp; we know that from the dungeons of Leavenworth there will emerge Gus' unconquerable spirit.<sup>848</sup>

Despite the warm welcome returning to the party activities was not simple. The party had undergone a massive turmoil during the last years of Hall's imprisonment and his probation period. As the conflict between the reformers and the supporters of traditional party line has been studied closely by several authors since the late 1950s<sup>849</sup>, I will only have a brief look on the developments.

The reform movement got started in early 1956, soon after general secretary Eugene Dennis and other Foley Square defendants were released from prison. During their imprisonment the world around the CPUSA had changed fundamentally: Stalin had died, the Korean War had ended and McCarthyism had largely faded away. The Cold War had temporarily abated after the leaders of the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain and France had been able to discuss international issues at the Geneva Summit in July 1955.

Khrushchev delivered his earth-shattering speech in the 20<sup>th</sup> party congress of the CPSU in February 1956. Khrushchev's revelations concerning Stalin's atrocities only gave further impetus to the reformers, as did the Hungarian uprising later in 1956. Originally both general secretary Eugene Dennis and *Daily Worker's* chief editor John Gates were both calling for a new direction for the party, but later Dennis's line started to falter and he formed a separate grouping supporting only moderate changes. Gates published the full translation of Khrushchev's speech in *Daily Worker* and exceptionally opened the paper's pages for angry and outraged debate on the party's line. Most writers called for a drastic change in the party's policy, but some – like William Z. Foster – supported only minimal changes. Foster admitted that Stalin had made serious errors but indicated that these mistakes paled beside the achievements of the Stalin era in building socialism.

The demands of the reform-minded party members were answered in September 1956, when the national committee adopted a platform for an "American road to socialism". It supported the expansion of a welfare state and, although calling for eventual socialism, was somewhat similar to the policies of the New Deal liberals. The resolution supported also so-called national communism, i.e. communism based on "Marxist-Leninist principles as interpreted by the Communist Party of our country". At the same time the resolution rejected Leninist principles "which reflect exclusively certain unique features of the Russian revolution and of Soviet society".

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848 *Daily Worker*, April 7, 1957.

849 See, for example, Shannon 1959, 309-371; Howe & Coser 1962, 555-571; Starobin 1972, 224-230; Isserman 1987, 1-35; Scales & Nickson 1987, 301-321; Klehr & Haynes 1992, 141-147; Johanningsmeier 1994, 337-347; Camp 1995, 271-305; Barrett 1999, 252-272 and Harris 2010, passim.

As the CPUSA arranged its 16<sup>th</sup> national convention in February 1957, its members were divided roughly into three groupings: the reformers (with John Gates as their figurehead), the center group (grouped around Eugene Dennis) and the hardliners (led by William Z. Foster).<sup>850</sup> Gates, Dennis and Foster avoided open debate of their differences and convention hid the disagreements beneath vague language of compromise. The final resolution, however, was a victory for Foster and his hardliners despite its reformist tone.

The problem with the so-called reform group was its incoherence. Although the great majority of CPUSA members rejected the party's traditional stance, they never formed a cohesive reform faction behind John Gates. Instead, the members – most of whom had been thoroughly shocked by Khrushchev's revelations – began to drop out of the party by the dozens. The news from Moscow and later from Budapest were too much to bear and thousands of disillusioned members simply left the party without trying to transform it. Foster and his hardliners in turn stayed in the party and thus continuously strengthened their position.

In the fall of 1957 Foster's hardline group had become strong enough to reduce the party's financial support to Gates's *Daily Worker*. Finally Gates gave up and announced his resignation from the party in January 1958. Most remaining reformers soon followed Gates's example and the movement died out. At the same time the story of *Daily Worker* came to an end. The party no longer had a daily newspaper which was no wonder considering the dramatic drop in membership. According to some sources, the party had a mere 3 000 members in 1958 compared with 20 000 just a few years earlier and 60 000 to 80 000 in the mid 1940s.<sup>851</sup>

## 2.9.2. Returning to the party scene

Because of his imprisonment and probation period, Hall could not take part in the party battles between 1956 and 1958. He could only return to party activities in April 1959 when the most serious fighting had already subsided. As many writers have pointed out, this was beneficial for Hall, as he could now come out as a fresh face, a new alternative, not tainted by the in-party struggles.<sup>852</sup>

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850 Ben Davis, Robert Thompson and William Weinstone have been often seen as the most loyal Foster supporters during the Party in-fighting. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, James Jackson, Jack Stachel and Carl Winter were supporting Dennis, whereas George Charney, Fred Fine, Dorothy Healey, Claude Lightfoot, Steve Nelson, Joseph North, Al Richmond, Carl Ross and Sidney Stein, for example, were among the reformers. See Carl Ross oral history interview transcript, part III, pp. 42-44; Haywood 1978, 611-612 and Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 385.

851 As mentioned earlier, there is no exact and fully trustworthy information available on the CPUSA's membership figures. Several authors seem to agree, however, that the CPUSA had about 20 000 members in the mid-1950s – i.e. before Khrushchev's revelations concerning Stalin – and many agree that the party had about 3 000 members at the end of the decade. See, for example, Glazer 1961, 93; Cauter 1978, 185; Klehr 1978, 24; Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 393; Lewy 1990, 308; Healey & Isserman 1993, 164; Ryan 1997, 272; Barrett 1999, 251 and Lannon 1999, 148.

852 See, for example, Richmond 1972, 399; Dennis 1977, 237; Healey & Isserman 1993, 172 and Camp 1995, 293. According to Richmond, because Hall was in prison in 1956 and 1957 (and on a

Not surprisingly, Hall could not completely stay away from the party during his probation. According to Tony Pechinovsky, his comrades visited the Cleveland gas station, sought political advice and attempted “to win him over to various factional positions”.<sup>853</sup> Also the FBI noticed that Hall was not completely able to stay away from his party connections. According to one Operation Solo document, Hall’s parole officers threatened to lift his conditional release because he had been meeting “with all kinds of Party people”. Hall was apparently under FBI surveillance because the parole officers told Hall that the FBI had “prepared a dossier” concerning the matter. “This may knock Gus Hall out of circulation for some time”, Eugene Dennis said to Morris Childs. Hall apparently stopped meeting with CPUSA members as his conditional release was not lifted.<sup>854</sup>

There is also some written evidence on Hall’s forbidden party connections during his conditional release. The CPUSA archives contain an undated letter that Hall sent to the national board of the party soon after his release in late March, 1957. The letter is interesting as it is the only known comment concerning party issues that Hall made during the heated factional struggle within the CPUSA.

Hall formulated his thoughts carefully and avoided taking clear sides in the dispute. Beneath its smooth appearance the letter is, however, an open declaration that Hall was ready to challenge Eugene Dennis as the party’s top leader. According to Hall, the party was in “an advanced stage of complete disintegration”. “I do not hesitate to state that if things go on as they are today, the process will be completed”, Hall wrote and threw a challenge to Dennis:

One must ask the question is the present leadership the best our party has to offer? The answer is Yes. But if the factionalism and bickering now raging continues and the national leadership is paralyzed, then even the best is transformed into the absolute worst. If you cannot find the strength to unite into a working body to lead our party, then even the less experienced, a less mature but united body will be an improvement.<sup>855</sup>

Gus Hall did not think that the party’s crisis was caused by Khrushchev’s revelations or by the Hungarian uprising – he does not even mention Khrushchev, Stalin or Hungary in his letter. There was no inherent problems within communist ideology or in its implementation but rather the crisis was a consequence of the “endless and meaningless discussion” that was going on within the party. This useless chatter should be ended and the party leaders should show the membership a clear direction in which to proceed. Hall, who had studied natural sciences during his imprisonment in Leavenworth, saw an analogy between physics and the CPUSA:

The party has had a National Convention. The time has now come when the leadership is called upon to begin to execute in life the resolutions of that body. Like every atom our Party needs the specific particles that bind it together, that give it life and strength. For our Party these particles are the policies, the theories of Marxism and Leninism, the knowledge of where we are going and how we are going to reach

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conditional release after that), he “did not bear the wounds and scars of their internecine battles, which gave him a decided advantage in creating an atmosphere of stabilization”.

853 Pechinovsky 2019, 132.

854 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on April 11, 1958; OSD, part 1, page 136.

855 CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 195, folder 13.

our goals. This is the function of an elected leadership. This is what must be done and is not being done today.<sup>856</sup>

Hall's letter left no doubts about his aims after his probation once ended. The letter attacked directly Dennis's greatest weakness: his constant indetermination and vacillation. Numerous contemporaries saw these as the predominant features in Dennis's personality. According to Steve Nelson, Dennis "seemed to have an unlimited capacity of vacillation."<sup>857</sup> Dorothy Healey largely agreed with Nelson:

It is, in theory, possible to hold the middle ground decisively; one can play an honorable role as a compromiser and conciliator and avoid the onus of being a vacillator. Dennis, unfortunately for us, was unable to pull it off. Instead of genuinely representing the middle, the majority, and what I regarded the true interests of the Party, he vacillated, first leaning to the 'right' and to Gates, then leaning to the 'left' and to Foster.<sup>858</sup>

According to George Charney, Dennis's indecisiveness could be explained by his obedience to Soviet policies:

Originally he was motivated by the Twentieth Congress, but sooner and more astutely than the rest of us he sensed the change in policy in Moscow, the zigzag and the reverse, and rimmed his sails accordingly. He was a great man for moving 'resolutely' in one direction and then changing course.<sup>859</sup>

Hall's probation period ended in April 1959. Within a few weeks the Cleveland gas station entrepreneur was elected to the national executive committee of the party and was made one of party's national secretaries.<sup>860</sup> In late April he held a speech at a national committee meeting, presenting his thoughts concerning the situation of the party.<sup>861</sup> According to Hall, when he was reading the news about the party's turmoil behind the bars, he was not at all sure whether the party would still exist when he got out. The fact that the party had survived the turmoil, was, in Hall's opinion, "a great tribute to the indestructibility of

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856 CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 195, folder 13. Underlining by Gus Hall.

857 Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 385.

858 Healey & Isserman 1993, 158. John Gates described Dennis as being "hesitant and indecisive – and silent". According to CPUSA lawyer John Abt, Dennis was a compromiser by nature. "He would walk a block out of his way to avoid a confrontation", Abt writes in his memoirs. See Gates 1958, 167 and Abt & Myerson 1993, 94.

859 Charney 1968, 301. Eugene Dennis's widow Peggy Dennis defended his late husband in his memoirs: "He [Dennis] worked to isolate the extremes of both the revisionist Right and the doctrinaire Left. He sought to consolidate the best elements influenced by both extremes into a majority unity essential to Party activity. These goals, so clear to him, were not understood in the heat of battle. His refusal to get sucked into polarity was interpreted as a sign of vacillation and weakness. He became the target of all the opposition, each group claiming he was conciliating the other. He refused to join either faction. He refused to organize his own faction. He kept his channels wide open to everyone, even to those who maligned him the most." See Dennis 1977, 235-236.

860 According to one Operation Solo document, Hall had a reserved place in the national executive committee of the CPUSA waiting for him when his parole ends. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on August 7, 1958; OSD, part 4, page 108.

861 The speech was published in the June issue of *Political Affairs* under the title *Some Thoughts on Returning*.

the science of Marxism-Leninism”. According to him, the party was now – in spite of the massive outflow of the membership – “in the best possible shape”.<sup>862</sup>

In his speech Hall made it clear that he was not a supporter of John Gates, but otherwise he avoided taking clear stands on the dividing issues. He emphasized that Marxism-Leninism must be the guiding line in the party but – at the same time – stressed that Marxism-Leninism is not a petrified set of dogmas. To Hall, Marxism-Leninism was at the same time firm and flexible, just like a steel cable:

We have to foster in our Party a freshness, a boldness, a situation in which we are not afraid of probing new paths, new ideas, new angles and of freely discussing them. If you are wrong, you withdraw them and there is no harm done. If you make a mistake, what of it? [...]

Precisely because of the mistakes we have made, our Party must continue to prod, to look in all directions. Of course, we must do so under the guidance of Marxism-Leninism, but Marxism-Leninism isn't something narrow, it isn't something sectarian. It is a guide with which you can open up the world if you can keep that in mind, and if you hold on to it as one holds on to a guide rope in exploring a cave where there is no light.<sup>863</sup>

Hall did not only present his thoughts through writing but in June 1959 he went off on a lengthy car tour across the American continent in order to promote himself as a candidate for the post of general secretary.<sup>864</sup> The next national convention – which would decide whether Dennis would continue as the party's top leader – would be arranged in upcoming December. Hall traveled together with his wife and son and his two nieces, Kristin and Judy. Driving from Ohio to Minnesota and from there to Southern California was time-consuming as the American highway network was still incomplete. When crossing the Rocky Mountains the party was caught in a snowstorm in the middle of summer. In Arizona the travelers stopped to see the Grand Canyon before continuing onto Los Angeles.<sup>865</sup> In L.A. Hall met the local CP leader Dorothy Healey who remembers the visit well:

After his release from prison he [Hall] began to travel around the country, ostensibly on vacation, but in reality to line up support for a bid to replace Gene as a general secretary. Gus can be very charming man when he wants to be. He and his family stayed in our house for two weeks while he was politicking. At a meeting of our district board we told him bluntly that to us the decisive question facing the Party was establishing its independence from Soviet direction. We would never acquire the capacity to really understand our own country as long as we were under the tutelage of the Soviet Union. “Not only do I agree with you”, he said, “but as a matter of fact I am convinced that for the Soviet Union's own good we have to maintain our independent outlook.”<sup>866</sup>

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862 Hall 1959b, 20.

863 Hall 1959b, 23-24.

864 The senate internal security subcommittee that questioned Hall in February 1960 was also aware of Hall's extensive travels in 1959 in order to gather support for ousting Dennis from the top leading position in the party. See *Communist Leadership*, 31-32.

865 Interview with Kristin Koskela in Cherry, Minnesota, August 2008. According to Koskela, in Los Angeles Hall's son and his nieces could go swimming in the pool of the famous left-wing author and screenwriter Dalton Trumbo. From L.A. they drove to San Francisco where they visited the redwood forests. From San Francisco the party headed back east.

866 Healey & Isserman 1993, 172. Eugene Dennis's widow Peggy remembered Hall's tour in her

According to Healey, Hall also attacked Eugene Dennis severely during his L.A. visit. He accused Dennis of cowardice and violation of party discipline because Dennis had failed to go underground as ordered in 1951.<sup>867</sup> Dennis was supposed to join Hall, Green, Thompson and Winston in the underground, but something went wrong with the arrangements, so Dennis had to surrender to the authorities. Hall also accused Dennis of financial irregularities in handling funds for the underground, thus implicating that he had used party money for his own purposes. “I should have known better than to believe him, but it just didn’t occur to me that he would deliberately spread what proved to be false and scurrilous tales about Gene”, Healey wrote decades later.<sup>868</sup>

According to Healey, the Southern California district board was impressed by Hall and gave him “a sympathetic hearing” but not an endorsement. Hall seemed to have a different interpretation of what had happened. “Later on I learned that when Gus continued his national tour he went around telling people that the Los Angeles district board was in full support of his becoming the new general secretary”, Healey writes.<sup>869</sup>

There is no information available on how the discussions concerning the future leadership of the CPUSA proceeded, but in September Hall seems to have been assured that he will be one of the top leaders of the party. In a discussion with Morris Childs – who was just about to leave for his third Solo mission to Moscow and Peking – Hall said that the new national leadership will probably consist of a secretariat of five members, which will include himself

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memoirs in somewhat similar way: “In the weeks before the convention he [Hall] travelled about the country organizing support for his election to Gene’s post of general secretary. He played hard on the still-existing doubts and dissatisfactions of both Fosterites and former Gates people. He offered himself as being all things to all people; all he wanted was the top post.” See Dennis 1977, 237.

867 According to the senate subcommittee that questioned Hall in February 1960, during his travels in 1959 Hall frequently described Dennis as “completely incompetent, lacking in leadership qualities and a man who, at all costs, must be removed from any policy-making position in the Communist movement”. See *Communist Leadership*, 32.

868 Healey & Isserman 1993, 173. Eugene and Peggy Dennis heard also of Hall’s accusations: “Travelling about the country garnering support for himself in the Party’s top post, Hall spread the story that in 1951 Gene had deliberately violated the decision that he was to go underground, opting instead for what Gus called ‘the security and safety of prison.’” Peggy Dennis was furious because of Hall’s claims. See Dennis 1977, 209.

869 Healey & Isserman 1993, 173.

and Dennis.<sup>870</sup> The number of secretariat members had been a contentious issue as Foster had been supporting a three-member secretariat, consisting of Dennis, Hall and Davis.<sup>871</sup>

In addition to personal meetings, Hall continued his campaign on the pages of *Political Affairs*. In October he published an article in the journal honoring the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CPUSA. The article presents Hall as a thoroughly American communist who, however, sees Lenin as “the genius of our times” and who is a strong believer in the “science of Marxism-Leninism”. Again Hall “offered himself as being all things to all people”, as Peggy Dennis may have put it. Once again, Hall formulated his thoughts and put his words very carefully. Both the supporters of so-called national communism and Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy could agree with Hall’s article.

According to Hall, the CPUSA was strongly rooted in American society and culture. Declaring this, Hall came very close to Earl Browder – whom he strongly despised – who in the 1930s declared that “Communism is 20<sup>th</sup> century Americanism”:

The American Communist Party is a product of our American industrial and political system. Like mass production, the two-party system, the 50 states, Town Hall, the Bill of Rights – yes, like jazz and blues and baseball – the Communist Party is a product of our very fibre and being.<sup>872</sup>

Once again Hall, the avid student of natural sciences, discussed the scientific nature of Marxism-Leninism, emphasizing the inseparable unity of theory and practice:

A “science” that is not based on the realities of life is not a science. A “science” whose only claim for serious attention is a series of quotations, traditions, old, outmoded standards – in other words, only the beaten path – will definitely not make the grade. And so it is with the science of Marxism-Leninism. This is a creative method of thinking, a virile body of thought. Like all sciences, Marxism is nothing if it is isolated, if it is separated from life, from practical activity. Marxism gives direction and illuminates the path for a movement, for action. But at the same time it learns, develops and matures through such movement and action.

Like all sciences, Marxism can test its vitality, test the all-sided correctness of its conclusions only in life, only in activity. Marxism that tries to live in isolation from action becomes brittle, becomes a set of pet formulas and will tend to swing from side to side. No science is a science if it is only an observer on the side lines.

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870 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on September 25, 1959; OSD, part 13, page 109. Interestingly during the discussion Childs asked Hall whether there was anything Hall wished Childs to discuss with the representatives of the CPSU: “Hall said that Childs should talk about the concept of a democratic front. Hall said that the CPSU should be told that while the Communist Party, USA agrees that in international communism the right danger is the main danger, in the United States sectarianism is the big danger. Hall said that the Communist Party, USA has got to break away from its isolation. It would, therefore, be good if a leader or leaders of the CPSU should state that the Communist Party, USA has got to end its isolation.” Hall’s comments about a democratic front and ending the CPUSA’s isolation are interesting in the light of his subsequent career as the CPUSA’s general secretary. Hall did not actively try to construct a democratic front with other left-wing or progressive organizations – rather the opposite. The CPUSA’s isolation was one of the main grievances Hall’s critics complained about during his general secretaryship. See, for example, Dennis 1977, 266-267 & 277 and Healey & Isserman 1993, 185.

871 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 28, 1959; OSD, part 14, pages 116-117.

872 Hall 1959a, 1.



Science cannot develop solely by isolated contemplation. Marxism, like all scientific knowledge, can truly be understood in relation to activity and to the surroundings. Indeed, this concept of the inseparable unity of theory and practice is one on which Marx himself placed great emphasis and regarded as basic in his approach.<sup>873</sup>

Having said all this, Hall did, however, warn his readers of the terrible scourge of revisionism, which had tested also the CPUSA only a little earlier:

Creative Marxism does not give a license to ideas of revisionism. It is necessary to say this because all revisionism starts under the umbrella of fighting against dogmas. Revisionism sets aside what it considers to be the dogmas and the proceeds to substitute a new set of dogmas. In all cases the substitutions are dogmas picked from the ideological grab bag of the capitalist class.<sup>874</sup>

### 2.9.3. Dennis steps down

The CPUSA prepared for its 17<sup>th</sup> national convention in an exceptionally positive atmosphere, at least when it comes to the relations between the two superpowers. The 13-day visit to the United States by the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in September had temporarily relieved the tensions of the Cold War as the image of the communist superpower among ordinary Americans became friendlier and more humane. At least one newspaper columnist suspected that the CPUSA was going to use the positive atmosphere for luring new members to the party.<sup>875</sup>

Inside the party the situation was also unusual as the current party leader Eugene Dennis had exceptionally been challenged by a power-hungry contender. However, according to Peggy Dennis, her husband did not seem to be bothered by the challenge of Gus Hall. In the spring Eugene Dennis had personally convinced some reluctant comrades to accept Hall back in to the leadership as a “fresh face” with “no involvement in the old wounds”. Dennis’s supporters, however, warned him of the ambitious challenger and urged Dennis to stop Hall. “Gene, however, shrugged, saying if Gus was so avid for one title more than for another, something would be worked out”, Peggy Dennis remembers.<sup>876</sup>

At around the same time the Soviets expressed their views concerning the CPUSA leadership. According to Morris Childs – who returned from his third Solo mission in

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873 Hall 1959a, 9-10.

874 Hall 1959a, 10.

875 *The Sandusky Register*, November 6, 1959. According to columnist Ray Cromley, the communists were going to “identify the party with the new hopes of peace aroused by Khrushchev’s visit and laugh off opposition by saying that when Mr. K was here ‘he didn’t seem like a monster, did he?’”. According to Cromley, the new strategy was going to be confirmed in the CPUSA’s 17<sup>th</sup> national convention in December. It is possible – and even likely – that the source of Cromley’s information was the FBI as Cromley was one of the numerous columnists to whom the FBI regularly delivered column material. See Sullivan & Brown 1979, 93.

876 Dennis 1977, 237. As the roles and the powers of the general secretary and the chairman had not been rigorously defined in the CPUSA, Dennis may have thought that the titles were not so important.

mid-November – the Soviets did not want to see any shifts in the party leadership.<sup>877</sup> They were happy with the leadership of Eugene Dennis. They had expressed this already in the summer of 1958 when Morris Childs visited Moscow during his first Solo mission.<sup>878</sup>

The final battle for the top post started in late November 1959 as the committee on personnel and leadership went into session.<sup>879</sup> Hall had most likely been told about the Soviet opinion concerning the CPUSA leadership<sup>880</sup>, but he either did not care or did not consider himself as a major “shift” in the leadership. After all, Dennis and Hall were both CPUSA “centrists” – neither of them was a passionate reformist like John Gates or a staunch Marxist-Leninist orthodox like William Z. Foster. Dennis had to now face the facts – that the challenger from Cleveland was indeed aiming for the top position:

Gus Hall was adamant. He would take nothing less than Gene’s post. The comrades felt strongly the need for a new face in the national leadership group, but they were not prepared to remove Gene as general secretary. Gus remained firm, and finally Gene conceded the title to him, “in the interest of Party unity”.<sup>881</sup>

Dennis then proposed a slate which consisted of himself as national chairman, Hall as general secretary, Ben Davis as national secretary, Claude Lightfoot and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn as vice-chairpersons and Foster in an honorary post of chairman emeritus. This proposal was gratefully welcomed by most comrades who were relieved that Dennis had averted a crisis by gracefully stepping down before Hall’s demand.<sup>882</sup>

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877 Report from A.H. Belmont to J.A. Sizoo on November 17, 1959; OSD, part 13, page 157.

878 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on July 23, 1958; OSD, part 2, page 52. According to the Soviets, while William Z. Foster was “correct on most issues and an honored leader of the CPUSA”, Eugene Dennis was “the practical and accepted leader of the CPUSA”. Morris Childs got the impression that the Soviets were “backing Dennis”. See also unspecified document on August 5, 1958; OSD, part 3, pages 103-105.

879 Dennis 1977, 237. Hall’s position seems to have been strong already before the committee on personnel and leadership started its work. Syndicated columnist Ray Cromley published in mid-November a column on the CPUSA’s leadership race, in which he saw Hall as the “probable winner”. According to Cromley, Hall was a tougher and more aggressive leader than his predecessor, “a man able to whip the party into shape”. In Cromley’s opinion, Hall was ruthless and uncompromising, “a Khrushchev type” – “affable on the outside, tough as nails inside”. Eugene Dennis, Cromley wrote, was more conciliatory, “a man willing to compromise to get agreement”. Cromley does not reveal his sources of information in his column, but it is likely that the source was the FBI which supplied material for numerous well-disposed journalists in the 1950s. As mentioned earlier, Cromley was among the columnists who received behind-the-scenes information from the Bureau. See *The Sandusky Register*, November 13, 1959 and Sullivan & Brown 1979, 93.

880 According to Operation Solo documents, Eugene Dennis requested Morris Childs to come to New York to discuss “the Soviets’ feelings” with Dennis and Gus Hall, “the thought being that the desires of the Soviets will have to be considered in designating U.S. leadership”. Interestingly, Morris Childs seems to have been against Gus Hall’s leading position in the party. He suggested the FBI’s Chicago office that the FBI would carry out “a move against Hall’s bid for leadership”. The Chicago office felt that Childs’s suggestion “has merit”. See report from A.H. Belmont to J.A. Sizoo on November 17, 1959; OSD, part 13, page 157.

881 Dennis 1977, 237. According to Dorothy Healey, Gus Hall claimed at a “showdown meeting” before the national convention that Healey was supporting him. In Healey’s opinion, however, that was not the case. See Healey & Isserman 1993, 173.

882 Dennis 1977, 237-238.

As Morris Childs on November 25, 1959 met with his Soviet contact person Vladimir Barkovsky – who officially was a counselor at the Soviet delegation to the United Nations – in a Queens restaurant in New York City, Childs informed him about the proposed new leadership. According to Childs, the secretariat of the party would consist of Dennis, Hall, Davis, James Jackson – who was the editor of *The Worker* – and Hy Lumer – who was the party’s educational director. Vice chairmen Flynn and Lightfoot would thus not be members of the secretariat. According to Childs, the majority of the sub-committee on leadership and the majority of the national executive committee agreed with this proposal. The national convention most likely was going to endorse this proposal although Ben Davis – who wanted to become the party’s chairman – was not in agreement with it, Childs said.<sup>883</sup>

Ben Davis was not only person unhappy with the proposal. In addition to him, also Foster was against the proposal. He and Dennis had had divergent views on issues ever since the early 1940s when Dennis was an eager supporter of Earl Browder. Dennis’s reformist thoughts in 1956 had made the general secretary even more unacceptable in Foster’s eyes. Dennis’s subsequent change of course away from the reformists had not healed the wounds. According to Peggy Dennis, Foster wanted to oust her husband completely from the leadership. In order to achieve that aim, he had made an agreement with Hall: in exchange for Foster’s and Davis’s support to Hall’s bid for general secretary’s post, Hall would support Foster’s desire to oust Gene from any leading role and put Ben Davis – Foster’s close ally – as national chairman.<sup>884</sup>

What followed was a deadlock. Dennis refused to step down for a second time. At the same time, the committee could not directly turn down Foster’s proposal as it could have been accused of so-called white chauvinism for not supporting the chairmanship of an African American person. As the party wanted to get rid of even the tiniest manifestations of racism, it had actively campaigned against white chauvinism within its ranks. In light of such a campaign, denying Davis’s chairmanship was indeed very difficult.<sup>885</sup>

The deadlock continued for days, but Dennis remained firm. If his unity slate was not adopted, Dennis said, he would take the issue to the convention floor and let the membership decide whether they wanted him ousted from the leadership. Such a threat was, in the end, too much for Foster and his allies. They gave in and Dennis’s slate was adopted.<sup>886</sup>

The titles as such did not determine who was the actual leader of the party – in the late 1940s, for example, chairman Foster was more influential in the party than general

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883 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 27, 1959; OSD, part 14, page 96. This kind of secretariat line-up did not become as complete surprise, at least not to Morris Childs. He had already in September predicted in a document written for the CPSU that CPUSA’s top leadership would consist of Dennis, Hall, Davis, Jackson and Lumer.

884 Dennis 1977, 238.

885 Dennis 1977, 238. For more on the campaign against white chauvinism, see, for example, Klehr & Haynes 1992, 124-125 and Healey & Isserman 1993, 125-129.

886 Dennis 1977, 238. In addition to the nominations Hall, Davis, Dennis, Flynn, Lightfoot and Foster, also Hyman Lumer and James Jackson were elected to the top leadership. Lumer became the national educational secretary and Jackson “national secretary for the South”. Jackson also served as the editor of *The Worker* which was now published only once a week. Hall, Davis, Dennis, Lumer and Jackson formed the five-man secretariat which took care of the day-to-day operations of the Party. See *Statement by J. Edgar Hoover*, 3 and Healey & Isserman 1993, 173.

secretary Dennis. Therefore the new slate did not automatically mean that general secretary Hall would have been more powerful than chairman Dennis. The question of eventual leadership in the party remained thus unresolved.

At this point, however, something unexpected happened. All the tension caused by the power struggle had been too much for Dennis. Just two days before the convention, as he was working on his convention report, Dennis suffered a mild stroke. There was no question of him taking part in the convention or delivering the main report in the convention as the doctors ordered him to remain in bed for weeks.<sup>887</sup> According to *Associated Press* news report, Dennis's left leg was partially paralyzed following the stroke which the CP press officers used as an explanation for the leadership change.<sup>888</sup> It is unclear, however, whether such a paralysis really took place. In her memoirs Peggy Dennis does not mention such detail.<sup>889</sup>

Be that as it may, Dennis's stroke was the final seal for Hall's top leadership position, as he would now be delivering the convention's main report which traditionally was of special importance.

Gus Hall came the next day, affable and relaxed. He sat at Gene's bedside taking voluminous notes and when he left he had with him Gene's unfinished convention report. The following morning acceptance of Hall as the new general secretary was assured by his appearance as the chief convention reporter.<sup>890</sup>

#### **2.9.4. Convention in the heart of Harlem**

The CPUSA's 17<sup>th</sup> national convention started on Thursday, December 10 at Hotel Theresa, the famous center of African American social life in Harlem. Hotel Theresa was the leading hotel in Harlem and as such it was frequently used by the CPUSA for political occasions. As many New York hotels did not accommodate African American guests in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Hotel Theresa became popular among African American musicians, athletes and celebrities. Its impressive guest list ranges from Josephine Baker, Joe Louis and Duke Ellington to Billie Holiday, Muhammad Ali and Jimi Hendrix.<sup>891</sup> The location was not a coincidence as the party wanted – as it had done since the late 1920s – to gain new members

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887 Dennis 1977, 238.

888 *The Times Record*, December 14, 1959.

889 Dennis 1977, 238.

890 Dennis 1977, 239.

891 In September 1960 the hotel became scene of top international politics as Cuban leader Fidel Castro and his entourage stayed in the hotel during the United Nation's general assembly. Several top leaders like the Soviet Union's Nikita Khrushchev, India's Jawaharlal Nehru and Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser visited Castro at the hotel as well as American luminaries such as African American leader Malcolm X. According to anticommunist syndicated columnist Victor Riesel, Castro's stay in Hotel Theresa was a planned public relations stunt in order to gain positive publicity for Castro and communists. Interestingly, Hotel Theresa is prominently featured in Alfred Hitchcock's film *Topaz* (1969) in which the Cuban delegation stays in the hotel during the United Nation's general assembly. For more on Castro's stay in Hotel Theresa see *The Daily Reporter*, September 26, 1960 and Wilson 2004, 204-215.

from the African American population. In Harlem the party had gathered some support already in the 1940s when Ben Davis was elected to the New York City council.<sup>892</sup>

The 225 delegates of the national convention – who opened their meeting patriotically by singing the Star-Spangled Banner – received greetings from 50 fraternal parties from all parts of the globe, from Italy and East Germany to Finland and Mongolia.<sup>893</sup>

Gus Hall delivered his main report on the very first day of the four-day convention. He began his report by rejoicing over how the party had got over the “confusion and bewilderment” that had marked the previous national convention two years earlier. The confusion had been caused by “the revelations of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU concerning the weaknesses and mistakes of the Stalin era” and it had been further compounded by the “disorientation and questioning created by the Polish and Hungarian events”. According to Hall, the “painful reexamination and correction of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress contained within themselves the seeds of a new clarity and cleansing, and of a new upsurge of the world Marxist-Leninist movement”. The decline in the CPUSA’s ranks had been halted and the morale and fighting spirit of the party’s membership was on the upgrade:

How radically and unalterably different are the circumstances in which our 17<sup>th</sup> Convention meets! Our Party enters this convention victorious over the elements of liquidationism and revisionism, and having in the main eradicated their twin evils – “Left”-sectarianism and dogmatism.<sup>894</sup>

In Hall’s opinion, “both the objective and subjective conditions” were now “ripe for our Party to move into a position of becoming a serious factor in the life of our nation, in the work of the trade unions, the Negro people, the youth, the farmers and other sections of the population”. In order to do that, however, the party members should get rid of “a disease one could designate as ‘negativism’”:

The best antidote for this negativism is activity. It is very seldom that one meets in and around our Party a comrade who is both cynical and negative and also in contact with the masses. Activity and exchange of ideas and collective thinking is a thinking person’s absolute must. Without this, one decays and deteriorates. If you are one of those who sit and sulk in a mist of negative cynicism, you are so because you have been influenced by the ideology, by the propaganda of the capitalist class.<sup>895</sup>

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892 Ben Davis served as a New York City councilman from Harlem from 1943 to 1947. Being one of the leading political figures in Harlem he was connected with its cultural elite. In the elections he was supported by such African American celebrities Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Coleman Hawkins and Lena Horne. Charlie Parker reportedly performed benefits for his campaigns. See Wilson 2004, 87.

893 CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 171, folder 7 and *Statement by J. Edgar Hoover*, 3 & 9. The general secretary of the Communist Party of Finland Ville Pessi – who like Hall had in the early 1930s studied in Moscow’s International Lenin School – was perhaps worried about the revisionist tendencies and attempts to create an American interpretation of Marxism within the CPUSA when he wrote that “your unity, based on the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism and ideology of internationalism, is the guarantee for successes in your efforts”.

894 Hall 1960b, 2.

895 Hall 1960b, 16.

Hall also discussed the attempts to develop the CPUSA's ideology into a more "national" direction, so that Marxism would be "integrated with the specific characteristics of our country". Hall admitted that such thoughts were "correct and positive", but simultaneously – once again – denounced Browder for twisting and distorting "this correct base" into a theory of classless development and into theories that became apologies for American imperialism. Because of Browder's "right-opportunist distortion" the CPUSA "threw out some of the very correct ideas and thoughts" and became "timid about developing specific American forms to fit the American conditions". Thus, in Hall's opinion, "the very serious revisionist swing around the 16<sup>th</sup> Convention" was basically caused by Browder's policies in the mid-1940s:

We have now basically corrected this swing and these distortions. Our ship is on more or less even keel now, and one of the big lessons of our history is: *Let's keep it that way!*<sup>896</sup>

In his main report Hall only briefly referred to the most discussed ideological question of the convention: the question of self-determination of the African American population in the so-called Black Belt of the United States. The CPUSA had adopted the policy after 1928 when the Comintern had issued a resolution defining African Americans in the United States as a separate nation and calling for their self-determination. The resolution – which had been inspired by the Soviet nationality policy – was a difficult question for the CPUSA as claims for self-determination for a significant part of the country could easily be seen as unrealistic or even megalomaniacal.<sup>897</sup>

The self-determination question had been under critical discussion in the party already before the 16<sup>th</sup> party convention in 1957, but the CPUSA did not yet officially abandon the idea. The leading proponent for the self-determination claim in the party was African American Lenin School graduate Harry Haywood who persistently clung onto the policy. The CPUSA leadership accused Haywood and his associates – especially Armando Roman and Joe Dougher – of ultra-leftism, left-sectarianism and dogmatism. Haywood, Roman and Dougher in turn considered the CPUSA a revisionist party and saw very little difference between the groups behind Gates and Dennis. Even the policies of William Z. Foster were too liberal for Haywood although he sometimes co-operated with Foster and Ben Davis. In 1958 Haywood, Roman and Dougher founded their own organization Provisional Organizing Committee for a Communist Party (POC) – consisting mainly of African American and Puerto Rican communists – in order to create a competing party organization but very soon it became evident that nothing came out of this scheme. Because of his unrelenting position, Haywood was expelled from the party in 1959.<sup>898</sup>

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896 Hall 1960b, 19. Italics by Gus Hall.

897 The so-called Black Belt is an area in the southern United States with a high percentage of African American population stretching from Virginia to the most eastern parts of Texas. In the late 1950s around five million African Americans – around every third African American in the country – lived on the Black Belt. According to Harvey Klehr, the idea of self-determination "was never widely accepted by blacks", but it "terrified Southern whites". For more on the Comintern's and CPUSA's self-determination claim see, for example, Klehr 1978, 56-57; Klehr 1984, 324-327 or Klehr & Haynes 1992, 75-76.

898 Haywood 1978, 605-627. After CPUSA Haywood operated in numerous African American left-wing organizations. In 1970s he was one the leaders of the Communist Party (Marxist-

The main proponent for abandoning the self-determination policy was James Jackson, an African American CPUSA leader, who justified the move by referring to demographics: a large part of the African Americans who once had inhabited the countryside in the Black Belt had moved to the big cities during the last few decades.<sup>899</sup> According to James Jackson's biographer Sara Rzesutek, by abandoning the Black Belt thesis Jackson wanted to bring the CPUSA closer to African American civil rights activists:

The Black Belt thesis had become the source used by many of the Party's critics to suggest that Moscow was merely using American blacks to promote Soviet communism in the United States. [...] As a party centrist, he [Jackson] believed that the CPUSA would benefit from adapting itself to the changing U.S. political discourse and offering full support to civil rights organizations.<sup>900</sup>

At the 17<sup>th</sup> national convention the CPUSA finally made the historic turn and abandoned the claim they it had upheld for three decades. The issue was presented to the convention by the moderately reform-minded African American party veteran Claude Lightfoot who was now also elected as one of the party's vice chairmen along with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. The resolution concerning the issue underlined that abandoning the self-determination claim did not mean that the party would give up its fight for the rights of the African American population – rather vice versa. “There is no national task of greater moment for all the forces of social progress of our nation than that of joining in the struggle for securing the full economic, political and social rights of the Negro people”, the resolution declared.<sup>901</sup>

Abandoning the Black Belt thesis did not take place without opposition. The idea was opposed, for example, by Paul Robeson Jr., son of the famous singer-actor-activist. According to Morris Childs, also Ben Davis, the party's national secretary and a left-wing hardliner, quietly opposed the decision.<sup>902</sup>

Although Gus Hall had in the beginning of the 1950s published a pamphlet praising the idea of African American self-determination in the Black Belt<sup>903</sup>, accepting the resolution

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Leninist) which supported China. The party also called for self-determination for the African Americans in the Black Belt. See *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 190-191.

899 Haywood 1978, 609 & 613 and Zipser 1981, 184. Soviet communists – who earlier had strongly argued for Black Belt's self-determination policy – did not play a prominent role in the policy change. However, Jackson may have got a Soviet acceptance for the new policy earlier in 1959 as he represented the American Party in the CPSU's 21<sup>st</sup> Party Congress in Moscow in January and February. Jackson represented his party also in CPSU's 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress in 1961. See *The New York Times*, September 26, 1964.

900 Rzesutek 2015, 162-163.

901 *People's World*, December 19, 1959.

902 Childs gave a short report on the CPUSA's national convention to his Soviet contact person Vladimir Barkovsky in a Queens restaurant on January 12, 1960. According to Childs, other points of disagreement in the convention were “the interpretation of whether or not the cold war has ended” and “whether to adopt an entirely new constitution or to amend the old constitution and to what extent the concept of democratic centralism should be set out in the constitution”. Despite these disagreements Childs estimated that the CPUSA “emerged from the convention consolidated to a greater extent than it was prior to the convention”. See report from FBI's New York office to the Director, January 13, 1960; OSD, part 17, pages 17-19.

903 According to Hall, the “Negro nation” in the Black Belt had “all the characteristics of nationhood” but it was “kept in subjection by the Wall Street-Bourbon capitalists and landowners”. In his opinion, the Black Belt should have had similar self-determination as different nationalities

on Negro issues did not seem to be problematic for him. According to Hall, the new resolution was in much better accordance with the surrounding society than the self-determination policy:

I think the resolution in a much clearer and deeper way reflects the realities of the developing position and struggles of the Negro Americans. And because of this mature, realistic position our Party will be in a position to play a more decisive and influential role in this developing movement.<sup>904</sup>

In his main report on the first day of the convention Hall had painted a relatively peaceful picture of CPUSA's internal situation. The state of affairs was not, however, as serene as Gus Hall pictured. In his summary remarks at the end of the convention, Hall strongly regretted that the fight against factionalism did not seem to be over. Consequently he was ready to take drastic action in order to get rid of this continuing problem. "If I read this convention right, it gives the leadership a mandate to root out all elements of factionalism from our Party", Hall said and continued:

Today the Party has one policy, one direction, one line. There is no basis for factionalism. Today a continuation of factionalism can be purely on the basis of unprincipled careerism, of opportunism. This, I believe, the Party will not permit.<sup>905</sup>

Instead of careerism and "dog-eat-dog individualism" – characteristic to bourgeois politics – Hall called for "Marxist individualism" in the spirit of Leninist democratic centralism. Hall's comments were in line with Khrushchev's denunciation of cult of the individual in his speech at the CPSU's 20<sup>th</sup> party congress in 1956.

In earlier years, when Marxist movements and Marxist-Leninist parties were fighting for a place in the sun – for acceptance and full recognition – it was understandable that individual leaders played important and sometimes key roles. [...]

Today individuals can make their best political contributions *only* if they do so through the medium of the collective. [...] Make no mistake about it: an absolute necessity in the structure of democratic centralism is the need for the individual to be part of a collective in the development of thought and work. [...]

*Marxist* individualism is individual initiative, study, thought, work. This individualism *seeks* collective judgment and is ready to accept changes and additions

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in the Soviet Union have. Hall compared the Black Belt to a cotton-producing republic in the Soviet Union, namely Uzbekistan. This "happy, free, prospering republic" should have been an example for the Black Belt: "The Great October Revolution liberated the working people of Uzbekistan and set the nation on the road to its free development. With the active support and assistance of the working class of Russia (former oppressor nation), the Uzbek people, under the leadership of the small Uzbek working class and inspired by the Stalinist policies of the Communist Party, achieved a great blossoming of their national life. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of October, 1924, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic was formed and it entered the community of free and equal nations that is the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." See Hall 1951a, 7-10 & 18.

904 Hall 1960b, 21.

905 Hall 1960a, 92. Hall's speech was published in the February 1960 issue of *Political Affairs* under the title *One Party, One Policy, One Direction*. The title was repeated couple of times in the speech. Such a choice of a slogan is slightly surprising for a communist leader as it comes very close to Hitler's famous slogan *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*.



to one's own thought, fully accepting the scientific concept that no final thought is the product of any one mind.<sup>906</sup>

Although the fight against factionalism was not yet over and “ruinous negativism and cynicism” still persisted in some quarters of the party, Hall ended the summary remarks of his first convention as a general secretary on a good note. The 17<sup>th</sup> national convention had laid a good foundation for party's future work:

Life and the direction of history, all subjective and objective elements, point only to one direction – to victory!<sup>907</sup>

### 2.9.5. A turn to the right or to the left?

The decisions concerning the party leadership were published at the end of the convention, shortly after midnight on December 14, 1959. The nominations followed the pre-convention proposal by Eugene Dennis: Dennis himself as national chairman, Hall as general secretary, Ben Davis as national secretary, Claude Lightfoot and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn as vice-chairmen and Foster in an honorary post of chairman emeritus. The party spokesman told reporters that chairman Dennis and national secretary Davis would have a relationship of “equality” with general secretary Hall, but the reporters came to the conclusion that Hall was the top leader above the two others. “The evidence seemed to indicate that Mr. Dennis, the former party leader, has been kicked upstairs”, *The New York Times* reported.<sup>908</sup>

Considering the small size of the Communist Party its national convention attracted considerable media attention not only on the east coast but also in the Midwest. Also the main newspaper in Gus Hall's former home town Youngstown printed a lengthy story on the convention, finding noticeable similarities between Hall and the leader of the Soviet Union:

Often termed a bull in a china shop, Hall is uncompromising in gaining his ends though he appears to be an affable sort of person. He has been compared with Soviet Premier Khrushchev in that he can be most agreeable on occasion but a tough customer when he gets down to business.<sup>909</sup>

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906 Hall 1960a, 93. Italics by Gus Hall.

907 Hall 1960a, 97.

908 *The New York Times*, December 14, 1959. Also the UPI reporter came to the conclusion that Hall was now “the top communist” despite the spokesman's comments concerning equality between the three top leaders. See *The Sandusky Register*, December 15, 1959.

909 *Youngstown Vindicator*, December 13, 1959. A few days later, the *Vindicator* published an editorial concerning Gus Hall. The paper proudly stated the Mahoning Valley had given the nation innumerable amount of leaders in different fields of life, but it could not take particular pride in its latest former citizen who had risen to a position of national leadership: “The 1937 steel strike is not a pleasant memory, and one of the major factors in making it unpleasant was the noisy bully, Gus Hall. He insinuated himself and other Communist sympathizers into the Little Steel strike and by violent measures he advocated gave the infant C.I.O. some of its earliest black eyes.” Hall was apparently well remembered in Eastern Ohio as also another local newspaper, *The Evening Review* in East Liverpool, also published an editorial concerning him in mid-December. According to *Evening Review*, Gus Hall was now “the main man to watch” in the conspiratorial communist movement. See *The Evening Review*, December 17, 1959 and *Youngstown Vindicator*, December 16,

The convention and its decisions were received in confusingly different ways in different papers. UPI news agency considered Hall to be a “veteran left-winger” whose election “foreshadowed a more militant policy by the party”.<sup>910</sup> At the same time *The New York Times* saw the convention as “a sharp turn to the right, toward the policies that were once favored by its former leader Earl Browder”. According to *The New York Times*, there were several signs that indicated a rightist trend in the CPUSA’s policies. The paper paid attention to references to “the American road to socialism”, “a democratic road to socialism” and “peaceful Socialist revolution” in a CPUSA declaration. Also adopting united front tactics for the 1960 elections and changing the party’s “theoretical position regarding American Negroes” were signs of this rightist trend.<sup>911</sup>

The newspapers may have had divergent views about the convention, but the interpretation of J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI’s long-time director, was not the least bit ambiguous or unclear. For him the convention was a highly alarming occasion as the CPUSA, Hoover’s long-standing foe No. 1, seemed to get its act together and lines straightened after a three-year chaos and confusion. Hoover considered the CPUSA’s 17<sup>th</sup> national convention to be such an important turning point that he produced a ten-page statement about the meeting through which he wanted to warn Americans of the threatening danger.<sup>912</sup> According to Hoover, the CPUSA emerged from the convention “more powerful, more unified and even more of a menace to our Republic”:

Without question, the most signal achievement was the welding of the Communist Party, U.S.A., into a solidly unified, aggressive force behind the militant, devious and ruthless leadership of Gus Hall, ex-convict and avowed archenemy of the American way of life.

Hall was elected general secretary of the party at the convention, and there is virtual unanimous agreement among party powers and rank and file that he is the No. 1 man in the party. As such, he now spearheads as powerful a group of dissidents and fanatic democracy haters as America has seldom seen within its shores during peacetime.<sup>913</sup>

In his statement, Hoover draws a grim picture of Gus Hall, the “Moscow-trained, utterly ruthless Communist leader”. According to Hoover, Hall vaulted to the top post of the party

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1959.

910 UPI report was published for example in *The Sandusky Register*, December 15, 1959. UPI report was headlined “Commies vote out Dennis, elect Gus Hall”. The headline was erroneous as there was no voting concerning the party leadership in the national convention but the leadership was agreed upon already before the convention as described earlier in this chapter.

911 *The New York Times*, December 14, 1959. *The New York Times* comments concerning the sharp turn to the right towards the policies of Earl Browder are surprising considering that Hall explicitly denounced Browder’s ideas as a “right-opportunist distortion” in his keynote speech on the first day of the national convention. See Hall 1960b, 18.

912 Hoover was strongly supported by U.S. Senator James Eastland who was the chairman of the senate committee on the judiciary and the internal security subcommittee. The Democrat senator from Mississippi was known for his staunch anticommunism and his opposition to civil rights reforms like Civil Rights Act of 1964. Hoover’s statement concerning the CPUSA convention was published by the internal security subcommittee in January 1960. Two weeks later Gus Hall had to testify before the subcommittee. Not surprisingly, Hall declined to answer to almost all of the questions. See *Statement by J. Edgar Hoover* and *Communist Leadership*.

913 *Statement by J. Edgar Hoover*, 1.

through a combination of “fortuitous circumstances and artful plotting”. He had been for a long time disgruntled at Eugene Dennis’s “soft and ineffectual” leadership and had carried out a “Dump Dennis” campaign before the convention. After Dennis’s stroke “the scheming, opportunistic Hall rose to the occasion and delivered the [keynote] address” at the convention. “Today he is communism’s champion in the United States – a powerful, deceitful, dangerous foe of Americanism”, Hoover wrote.<sup>914</sup>

Hoover further describes Hall as “a fanatical practitioner of Karl Marx’s tenet ‘the end justifies the means’”, “a coldly calculating Communist conniver” and “unabashed emissary of evil and rabid advocate of a Soviet United States”. The convention’s leadership decisions proved that the CPUSA “will remain in the future – as it has been before – an obedient slave of Moscow”. Therefore it was “apparent that, more than ever before, each American must maintain vigilant watchfulness toward this Trojan horse in our midst”.<sup>915</sup>

If Hoover’s reading of Hall and the CPUSA’s situation was extreme, he was not the only one. Harry Haywood, the African American party veteran who had been kicked out of the party in 1959 because of his stubborn support for the self-determination of African Americans in the Black Belt, saw the 17<sup>th</sup> national convention as a great triumph for the right-wing forces within the party. According to Haywood, the CPUSA had been able to withstand the two earlier crises – the battles against Jay Lovestone in the late 1920s and against Earl Browder in the mid-1940s – but now “the right was ultimately victorious in the Party’s third major crisis”. “Under the guise of attacking an often elusive and ephemeral ‘left sectarianism’ and ‘dogmatism’, they destroyed the Party as a vanguard force, irrevocably shoving it down the road to revisionism and counter-revolution”, Haywood wrote in his memoirs.<sup>916</sup>

In Haywood’s opinion, the CPUSA’s “third and fatal” crisis in the late 1950s was caused by right opportunism and class collaborationism which expressed itself in the slogan of “peaceful, parliamentary and constitutional transition to socialism”. Haywood’s subsequent turn to Maoism is clearly reflected in his writing:

My experience in the Party confirmed what the history of the working class struggle has shown, that in order to develop as a revolutionary vanguard, the CP must constantly struggle against the powerful pressures of bourgeois ideology within its own ranks. The Party is not separated by a Chinese wall from the corruptive influences of the bourgeois world.<sup>917</sup>

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914 *Statement by J. Edgar Hoover*, 2.

915 *Statement by J. Edgar Hoover*, 2-4. Hoover’s view of Karl Marx as the source of the tenet “the end justifies the means” seems to be incorrect. According to Stuart and Doris Flexner, the same thought has been expressed by numerous writers over the centuries ever since the days of Sophocles and Ovid. Around 400 B.C. Sophocles wrote in his play *Electra* that “the end excuses any evil”. About 400 years later Ovid wrote “the result justifies the deed” in one of his works. Stuart and Doris Flexner do not, however, include Karl Marx in their long list of writers who have expressed the same idea in their works. See Flexner & Flexner 1993, 51.

916 Haywood 1978, 624.

917 Haywood 1978, 626.

According to Haywood, the party corrected its line only shallowly in 1945 after Earl Browder's misdeeds and continued to nurture illusions about an alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie and about a peaceful transition to socialism:

Without a thorough purge of Browderism, the Party preserved and built up a bureaucracy effectively insulated against the operation of the Marxist-Leninist practice of criticism and self-criticism. In this way, not only was the ideological level of our Party forced to remain at a low level, but at the same time unification, purification and corrective replacements of leadership were made almost impossible. The end result is a party which today acts as a mouthpiece for Soviet social-imperialism, the labor aristocracy and the pro-détente sections of the U.S. ruling class.<sup>918</sup>

### **2.9.6. Performing a balancing act**

Which one of these two extreme interpretations of the 1959 national convention is more accurate, Hoover's or Haywood's? If one only looks at the decision to abandon the self-determination policy of the African Americans in the Black Belt, then one can say that the CPUSA took a turn to the right in its 17<sup>th</sup> national convention. The decision was radical considering the fact that the party had for almost three decades at least nominally advocated the self-determination policy. As the policy was largely founded on Stalin's nationality policy and had been strongly promoted by the Comintern, the CPUSA's decision could be seen as a break with the traditional Moscow-led communism.

Excluding the leadership selections, the self-determination issue was probably the biggest and most discussed issue at the convention. To look at only one single issue gives, however, an unbalanced and inaccurate picture of the overall situation of the party. When one studies the writings and speeches of the new general secretary, one gets a more comprehensive and balanced view of the party's new direction.

As mentioned earlier, Gus Hall attacked in his writings and speeches before and during the convention both "right opportunism" and "left-sectarianism". Revisionism, Browderism and liquidationism were swearwords to him, but so was also ultra-leftist dogmatism. Hall pointed out that the party should develop "specific American forms to fit the American conditions", but at the same time he emphasized that Marxism-Leninism had to be the party's ultimate guiding line and its principles should never be discarded. Hall denounced with clear words John Gates and his associates, but remained far from ultra-leftists like Harry Haywood. Hall avoided taking a stand regarding the central question of the main danger to the party – whether it was right opportunism or left-sectarianism. Choosing his words carefully, Hall performed a balancing act between the different elements in the party. During his three decades in the party Hall had developed a good sense of the communist discourse and an understanding of how to wind his way between the different

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918 Haywood 1978, 626-627.

groupings. Hall knew how to – as Peggy Dennis wrote – “offer himself as being all things to all people”<sup>919</sup>

Looking at Hall’s comments before and during the 1959 national convention, he could be considered a “centrist” like his predecessor Eugene Dennis. The two men were similar in many ways, but there were also significant differences between them. They were roughly the same age, they both came from proletarian families and they both joined the party in the late 1920s. Both men were white and non-Jewish and their parents had their roots in Northern or Western Europe. The main differences were geographical and educational. Unlike Hall, Dennis had grown up in urban surroundings in Seattle, Washington. He had also graduated from high school and had even started studying at the University of Washington but soon dropped out.<sup>920</sup>

Another notable difference between the two men was their relationship to William Z. Foster, who still played a significant role in the party in the late 1950s. The relationship between Foster and Dennis had been cool ever since the late 1930s and early 1940s when Dennis supported Earl Browder’s policies.<sup>921</sup> In the late 1940s the two men served as the leading duo in the party, but the relationship between the chairman and the general secretary was strained.<sup>922</sup> In 1956 Foster and Dennis were in opposing camps as Dennis supported reformist policies together with John Gates. Although Dennis later changed his line and got closer to Foster, the latter could never forget their past disagreements. In fact, as Peggy Dennis tells us, Foster vigorously resisted Eugene Dennis’s post as the party chairman before the 1959 national convention.<sup>923</sup>

Hall got along with Foster much better. As mentioned earlier, Hall and Foster had good relations already in the late 1940s when Hall rapidly rose to the position of acting general secretary. A warm relationship seems to have continued through the 1950s although Hall spent years in prison. Gus Hall’s papers in the CPUSA archives contain several letters from Foster to Elizabeth Hall during her husband’s imprisonment and after his release also letters directly to Gus Hall. Foster also sent Hall a warm welcome home telegram when he was released in the end of March 1957. The tone of these messages is amiable, showing that the families indeed had a close connection.<sup>924</sup> The cordial relationship continued after Gus Hall’s probation ended in the spring of 1959 after which he spent more time in New York. During this time Hall frequently visited Foster who was bedridden because of his heart ailments. According to Hall, he was assigned to be a “live link between Foster and

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919 Dennis 1977, 237.

920 Born in 1905, Dennis was five years older than Hall. His father came from an Irish immigrant family whereas his mother’s family roots were in Norway. For more on Dennis’s background, see Dennis 1977, 26-31.

921 See Ryan 1997, 135 & 251.

922 See, for example, Charney 1968, 287.

923 Dennis 1977, 238.

924 CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 193, folder 15; CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 195, folder 11. Interestingly, one of William Z. Foster’s letters to Elizabeth Hall was written soon after Foster had heard of Stalin’s death in March 1953. Foster writes: “What terrible news today from Moscow! The loss of Stalin as the leader of the Soviet Union is simply tremendous. But we may be sure that the Russian party will come to the fore with some other brilliant leader. The fact that Lenin and Stalin were Marxists was no accident. Marxism inevitably produces great leaders.”

the rest of the leadership”. He thus spent hours with Foster every week and the two men became “very close friends”.<sup>925</sup>

So was there a change in the party line when Gus Hall became the general secretary? If there was, it was a rather mild one. Dennis and Hall were both moderate “centrists”, well aware of the different elements in the party. They both understood that compromises had to be made if the party wanted to keep all these elements within its ranks. They both understood that extreme positions in one way or another would have only meant further loss of membership which had already dwindled to embarrassingly low figures. Party unity had to be preserved, even if it meant some concessions to political adversaries.

While Hall and Dennis were both moderate centrists, there were notable differences between the two men. Gus Hall, a close friend to William Z. Foster, was more ready than Eugene Dennis to accept the Soviet Union’s leading position in the international communist movement. Hall could never have produced a pamphlet such as Dennis’s 1956 text *The Communists Take a New Look* in which he attacked the “deeply ingrained Left sectarianism” of the CPUSA and called for a creative interpretation of Marxism based upon “the experiences, circumstances and traditions of our country”.<sup>926</sup> For Hall the Soviet Union was – and had been since his childhood – the unchallenged head of international communism, the forerunner for the world’s proletariat and the guiding red star that every party in every country should obediently follow. The communist parties should, of course, adjust themselves to the conditions of their home country but they should never abandon the idea of communist internationalism – and the leading position of the Soviet Union.

How should one place Gus Hall on the three-pronged map of the CPUSA’s internal division? Hall surely did not belong to the reformists but nor was he a clear-cut Fosterite like Ben Davis or Robert Thompson. His right place would be somewhere between the center group of Eugene Dennis and the left-wing group of William Z. Foster. Gus Hall was by no means the ultra-left fanatic that J. Edgar Hoover claimed him to be. The 1959 national convention may have been a curve to the left but it was only a mild one.

### **2.9.7. The right man in the right place at the right time**

Gus Hall’s personal qualities – his *Wille zur Macht*, his ruthlessness, his “eye for the game”, his mastery of communist discourse, his social skills and his capability to please different kinds of people at different times – of course to a certain extent explain his rise to the top leading position in the party. But they were not the only explanatory factors. The historical situation and certain structures within the party were also very favorable for Gus Hall’s rise.

As numerous writers have pointed out, one explanation to Hall’s rise was the fact that he had not been stained in the party in-fighting during the restless years of 1956-1958.<sup>927</sup> Many

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925 Hall 1987, 356.

926 Dennis 1977, 222-223.

927 See, for example, Richmond 1972, 399; Dennis 1977, 236-237; Healey & Isserman 1993, 172 and Camp 1995, 293. As Camp, Dennis and Healey point out, also Hall’s navy service in 1945-1946

in the party were exhausted with the old confrontations and worn-out faces like Foster and Dennis who had led the party since the mid-1940s. Many were hoping for new faces and a new start, and at least for some Gus Hall seemed to offer such an alternative. Hall had been absent from the party from the summer of 1951 until the spring of 1959 so he indeed was a fresh face. While being a fresh face, he still had a lengthy party experience of more than 30 years and had already served as an acting general secretary in 1950-1951.<sup>928</sup>

Hall's immaculate proletarian background was another major asset for him as he climbed towards the ultimate leadership position. As the CPUSA claimed to be a vanguard party of the American working class, it sorely needed a leader with a true proletarian background – especially as the party had become increasingly middle class after the 1920s.<sup>929</sup> Even in the shortest presentation texts Hall always carefully brought out his past as a Minnesota lumberjack and as an Ohio steelworker. He never failed to mention how he had played a role in creating the Steelworkers Organizing Committee (SWOC) in the late 1930s and thus being one of the founders of United Steelworkers of America (USWA). Although Stalin – the “Man of Steel” – had died already in 1953, the steel industry and steelworkers still held a special position within the communist movement. Steel was, as Frank Dikötter puts it, “the sacred ingredient in the alchemy of socialism”. Hall was well aware of this and never concealed his past in Ohio's steel mills.<sup>930</sup>

Also geographically Hall was an excellent candidate for the top leadership position. As the party headquarters was in New York and as New York also was the biggest concentration of CPUSA members, it was essential for the party to have a leader that came from another part of the country – otherwise the party would have appeared too much as a New York party.<sup>931</sup> The fact that Hall had for years lived and worked in the steel industry areas of Ohio – in the very heart of industrial America – was also significant for a party that desperately tried to find supporters from among the exploited industrial workers of the country. A

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was beneficial for him, because therefore he had not been involved in the Browderism dispute of 1945 and, again, was considered a neutral character.

928 CPUSA lawyer John Abt – who was critical of Hall's leadership skills – considered Hall a “consensus choice” as Eugene Dennis and Ben Davis were having health problems, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was too old and Henry Winston and Gil Green were still in prison. See Abt & Myerson 1993, 237.

929 According to Harvey Klehr, the CPUSA became both more Americanized and more middle class in the 1930s and 1940s: “The CPUSA was thus seemingly faced with a paradox: the more it achieved one desirable goal – Americanization – the more unsatisfactory was its ‘social composition’ as a working-class party.” See Klehr 1978, 33.

930 As one looks at the paintings of socialist realism, it indeed seems that the steelworker was a cult figure within the communist movement in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Frank Dikötter has made similar observations concerning steel: “Here was material worthy to stand for socialism – hard, shiny, industrial, modern and working class. ‘Stalin’ stood for a man of steel willing to smash all the enemies of revolution to smithereens. Smoking factory stacks, whirring machine tools, the hooting of factory whistles, towering blast furnaces glowing a deep red with fire: these were the consecrated images of socialist modernity. Alexei Gastev, the worker poet, wrote ‘We grow out of iron’ as man coalesced with iron in a fusion announcing a world in which machine became man and man was a machine. [...] The amount of steel produced was a magic figure recited with religious fervor in socialist countries. Steel output magically distilled all the complex dimensions of human activity into a single, precise figure that indicated where a country stood on the scale of evolution.” See Dikötter 2010, 57.

931 Klehr 1978, 115.

party leader from the Midwest was also a good solution for a party that had its biggest supporter concentrations on the coastal areas of the country.<sup>932</sup> Moreover, a Midwestern leader was a good choice for a party which still had to prove its Americanness: a man who had his roots in the woods of Minnesota and in the steel mills of Ohio was more of a true American than someone coming from a depraved coastal metropolis.<sup>933</sup>

Hall was an excellent candidate also because of his ethnic background. As the CPUSA wanted to represent itself as an All-American political alternative, it could not choose an African American or a person with Jewish background to its top leading position – even though African Americans and Jews were indeed well represented in the party membership.<sup>934</sup> The general secretary had to be “a real American”, as Dorothy Healey’s son Richard Healey put it in an interview with the author.<sup>935</sup>

The party system was especially unfavorable for Jews whose party careers proceeded slowly when compared to non-Jews.<sup>936</sup> As Harvey Klehr points out, Jews were an important group in the party machinery as one third of the 212 people who sat in the party’s central committee between 1921 and 1961 had a Jewish background.<sup>937</sup> In the end of the 1920s the Comintern had reminded the CPUSA leadership of the party’s failure “to root itself within the native-born American working class, implying that the CPUSA contained too high a proportion of Jews”.<sup>938</sup> As a consequence, “non-Jews were speeded into leadership positions”, as Harvey Klehr puts it.<sup>939</sup>

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932 According to FBI figures, in 1951 almost one half of the CPUSA membership – almost 15 500 members – lived in the state of New York. California was the second biggest membership state with its 4 300 members. Illinois was third with 1 600 members. All together the party had 31 600 members in 1951. After that the figures had of course dropped dramatically. See *The Communist Party of the United States of America*, 34.

933 Interestingly, none of the CPUSA’s top leaders after the 1920s – Earl Browder, William Z. Foster and Eugene Dennis – had strong ties to New York or to California, but two of them could be seen as representatives of the Midwest. Browder was born in Kansas and lived his youth in the Midwest. Foster had been born in Massachusetts but travelled widely in his youth. He later settled to Chicago and could thus be seen also as a Midwestern character. Dennis – who was born in Seattle, Washington – had lived and worked in California for some years in the late 1920s, but was never distinctively Californian. For most of the 1930s Dennis lived in Moscow or travelled around the world as a Comintern agent. As a consequence, he was not seen as a representative of any particular state or area in the CPUSA.

934 Harvey Klehr writes: “The cadre of the American communist party was not a representative cross section of the American population. [...] Because the leadership was chosen, it offered opportunities to correct or balance some of the membership characteristics – to impart a racial and ethnic diversity that was not present among rank and file. This policy selection could produce a leadership that would reflect the party’s desired image of a Bolshevik cadre and would emphasize the party’s appeal to, and attraction for, all Americans.” See Klehr 1978, 101.

935 According to Richard Healey, Gil Green was very popular among the party members but he could not become the general secretary because of his Jewishness. “The party could not have a Jewish general secretary. The general secretary had to be ‘a real American’. Gus was Finnish. According to my mother, he was ‘a real American’”, Healey said. See interview with Richard Healey in New York City, October 2013.

936 Klehr 1978, 47-48.

937 Klehr 1978, 41.

938 Klehr 1978, 40.

939 Klehr 1978, 48. According to Klehr, Jewish members were problematic for the party also because of their relatively high level of education – many of them had college degrees – and



The ideal ethnic background for the party leader seems to have been Western or Northern European, which can also be seen if one looks at the past CPUSA leaders. All top leaders during the three decades before 1959 had been of Western or Northern European descent: Irish (William Z. Foster), Irish-Norwegian (Eugene Dennis) or Welsh-Scottish (Earl Browder).<sup>940</sup> Gus Hall's general secretaryship continued this pattern seamlessly.<sup>941</sup>

### 2.9.8. Conclusions

According to John Barron, the international department of the CCCPSU chose Gus Hall to succeed Eugene Dennis after he became terminally ill.<sup>942</sup> Unfortunately Barron offers no evidence to support his claim, which in light of Operation Solo documents and other sources would seem to be incorrect. During the Comintern decades and in the mid-1940s Moscow did intervene directly in choosing the leadership of some national parties – including the CPUSA – but in the late 1950s the Soviets no longer played such a strong role.

If one looks at Gus Hall's rise to the top position of the CPUSA, it seems he achieved the post of the general secretary without Soviet assistance. Operation Solo documents do not contain any material that would indicate that the Soviets were behind Hall's rise. Rather vice versa – as mentioned above, the Soviets stated to Morris Childs in September 1959 that they did not want to see any shifts in the CPUSA leadership.

Instead of Soviet influence, the factors explaining Hall's rise can rather be found from the American continent. Hall's personal qualities – his *Wille zur Macht*, his ruthlessness, his “eye for the game”, his mastery of communist discourse, his social skills and his capability to please different kinds of people at different times – are of course central when explaining his rise to power. In addition to these, the CPUSA's internal structures – which favored white American-born non-Jews – helped Hall's ascent. Becoming the party's general secretary would have been much more difficult for a Jewish or an African American CP member. And like always in politics, also chance played a role in Hall's rise. If Eugene Dennis had not suffered a stroke just before the 17<sup>th</sup> national convention, Hall's ascent to the top position in the party would not have been as easy as it was. Hall was the right man at the right place at the right time.

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middle-class social status. Such qualities were not considered solely positive in a party which was “trying to achieve a more proletarian image”.

940 Klehr 1978, 52. According to one of my interviewees, also the Soviets expected the general secretary to have a right kind of background. “There was a kind of an unspoken agreement with the Soviets that the general secretary always had to be a white, not a Jew and not a Black person. That was the tradition”, Michael Zagarell said. See interview with Michael Zagarell in New York City, October 2013.

941 Gus Hall's Finnish American Minnesota comrade Carl Ross felt that Hall's background as an American-born non-Jew speeded up his party career as he rose to leading positions in the Young Communist League in the 1930s. Ross felt that he was elevated to higher positions “straight out of the backwoods over the heads of large numbers of more experienced, if not more talented people”, many of whom were Jewish. See Klehr 1978, 119.

942 Barron 1995, 58.

Hall's rise to the top position of the CPUSA did not radically change the party's political line. Hall's general secretaryship was not a sharp turn to the right as *The New York Times* wrote, but nor was it a step into a more militant direction, as UPI news agency predicted. Hall and his predecessor Eugene Dennis were both centrists when one looks at the CPUSA's internal division. Both of them steered clear from supporting revisionists on the right or orthodox Marxist-Leninists on the left. Hall was, however, ideologically slightly closer to William Z. Foster, the most prominent left-winger in the party. The relationship between Foster and Dennis had been problematic ever since the early 1940s when Dennis was an ardent supporter of Earl Browder. Hall, on the other hand, had been in good terms with Foster ever since WWII, which was helped by the many similarities in the backgrounds of these two men. Hall was, however, careful not to emphasize the Fosterite elements in his thinking as he was campaigning for the top position before the 17<sup>th</sup> national convention. He "offered himself as being all things to all people", as Peggy Dennis put it. Doing that was of course not easy, and it could be seen as an illustration of Hall's considerable skills as a politician.

## **II An American communist leader in the 1960s**

### **3. Operation Solo – the FBI’s greatest intelligence success?**

#### **3.1. Infiltrators at the very top**

##### **3.1.1. The passionately anticommunist director of the FBI**

In comparison with the conservative 1950s, the early 1960s is often seen as a more modern, liberal and even progressive period of time, partly thanks to the youthful image of President John F. Kennedy.<sup>943</sup> Gus Hall’s first years as the CPUSA’s general secretary were, however, far from being carefree and easy-going. Looking from the CPUSA’s perspective there seemed to be very little difference between the 1950s and the early 1960s. Although McCarthyism was a thing of the past, staunch anticommunism was still alive and kicking among the Washington power elite. Just like the Smith Act trials had seriously hampered the CPUSA’s activities in the 1950s, the party had to now invest great amounts of time, energy and financial resources in the various trials based on the 1950 Internal Security Act.<sup>944</sup> The bill – also known as McCarran Act after senate’s judiciary committee chairman Patrick

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943 Dorothy Healey and Maurice Isserman write: “Because this judicial legacy of the early 1950s affected only the Communist Party and not the Left as a whole, many people in the 1960s and too many historians since have assumed that McCarthyism was dead and buried by the time John F. Kennedy took the oath of office. The dividing line between two political eras is not that neat.” According to Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, “in American popular memory, the 1960s are regarded as years of ascendant liberalism”. Referring to John F. Kennedy, they point out that “ironically, the man who became identified, for most Americans, with a new birth of liberalism was a thoroughly practical politician of the old school who tended to view idealists and moralists as sentimental fools”. In Isserman’s and Kazin’s opinion, “Kennedy style and Kennedy substance remained separate categories”. They write: “Whatever reputation Kennedy had for liberal sympathies in 1960 was more a matter of calculated style than of policies: the tousled hair, the fondness for touch football and windswept talks on the Hyannis beach, the Harvard affiliation, all seemed to imply a combination of youth and vigor and daring. His demurely beautiful wife, the former Jacqueline Bouvier, with her family ties to genuine European aristocracy, her fondness for French designers and her stylish bouffant hairdo, only enhanced the Kennedy image.” See Healey & Isserman 1993, 188-189 and Isserman & Kazin 2000, 47-61.

944 The Internal Security Act has been seen a product of the heightened cold war atmosphere as it was passed soon after the outbreak of the Korean War. A good overview of the Internal Security Act can be found in Klingaman 1996, 194-197.

McCarran<sup>945</sup> – required the CPUSA and its members to register with the authorities.<sup>946</sup> The trials related to the McCarran Act – all of which the CPUSA eventually won – lasted until 1967. These trials are a partial explanation as to why the CPUSA lived such a quiet life in the early and mid-1960s.<sup>947</sup>

The most central character in American anticommunism after Joseph McCarthy's death was FBI's passionately anticommunist director J. Edgar Hoover. According to Curt Gentry and Ellen Schrecker, Hoover had actually been a key figure already behind McCarthy. According to Gentry, "McCarthyism' was from start to finish, the creation of one man, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover". McCarthy was Hoover's tool who was used as long as he was useful and then dumped, Gentry writes.<sup>948</sup> In Schrecker's opinion, Hoover's FBI was "the bureaucratic heart of the McCarthy era". "Had observers known in the 1950s what they have learned since the 1970s, when the Freedom of Information Act opened the Bureau's files, 'McCarthyism' would probably be called 'Hooverism'", Schrecker writes.<sup>949</sup>

The roots of Hoover's anticommunism go back to the times of the October revolution in Russia and the so-called Palmer raids in the United States. According to Gentry, Hoover in the fall of 1919 allegedly wrote two legal briefs concerning American communism as the authorities prepared for the anticommunist raids which were carried out under the leadership of attorney general A. Mitchell Palmer in November 1919 and January 1920.<sup>950</sup>

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945 Patrick McCarran (1876-1954), a Democrat senator from Nevada, was known for his strong anticommunism. Although a Democrat, McCarran was a staunch opponent of President Roosevelt and liberal reforms. During WWII, McCarran opposed Roosevelt's interventionist policies toward Germany and Japan. After the war McCarran focused on anticommunism, much like his more well-known Republican colleague Joseph McCarthy. See *American National Biography* (Vol. 14), 840-842.

946 President Truman had originally vetoed the Internal Security Act in September 1950 as he did not want to "sacrifice the liberties of our citizens in a misguided attempt to achieve national security". According to Truman, the registration requirements were in contradiction with the freedoms of speech, press and assembly. However, the congressmen overrode Truman's veto in November 1950. See Klingaman 1997, 195-196.

947 For more on these trials, see Abt & Myerson 1993, 245-246, 253-254 & 259-263; Healey & Isserman 1993, 191-192 and Camp 1995, 297-299.

948 Gentry 1991, 378-380. According to Gentry, the FBI significantly helped McCarthy in his endeavours. "FBI agents spent hundreds of hours poring over Bureau security files and abstracting them for the senator and his staff", Gentry writes. Hoover personally told McCarthy not to use exact figures when "revealing" communists working for federal institutions. "Lou Nichols [the FBI's assistant director and "public relations man"] personally took McCarthy in hand and instructed him in how to release a story just before press deadlines, so that reporters wouldn't have time to ask for rebuttals. Even more important, he advised him to avoid the phrase 'card-carrying Communist', which usually could not be proven, substituting instead 'Communist sympathizer' or 'loyalty risk', which required only some affiliation, however slight – the signing of a petition or subscribing to a newspaper or magazine would do – with an organization on the attorney general's list."

949 Schrecker 1998, 203. According to Schrecker, the FBI "designed and ran much of the machinery of political repression, shaping the loyalty programs, criminal prosecutions and undercover operations that pushed the communist issue to the center of American politics during the early years of the Cold War".

950 Gentry 1991, 81. According to Gentry, the legal briefs "established Hoover's credentials as America's first and foremost expert on communism", but they were not, however, written by Hoover but by one George F. Ruch. This was a common mode of operation for Hoover, Gentry writes, as few of his speeches, articles or books were actually written by him.

According to FBI historian Don Whitehead, Hoover studied the works of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and other communist thinkers and discovered “a conspiracy so vast, so daring, that few people at first could even grasp the sweep of the communist vision”. Hoover came to the conclusion that communism was “the most evil, monstrous conspiracy against man since time began”.<sup>951</sup>

Ellen Schrecker also traces the roots of Hoover’s anticommunism to the times of the Palmer raids and to Hoover’s investigations concerning American communism. According to Schrecker, these investigations affected Hoover’s thinking for the decades to come:

The literature that he encountered was to remain at the core of FBI’s case against the CP for the next fifty years. It represented American communism at its most revolutionary moment, when in the afterglow of the Russian revolution the newly formed Communist parties were openly calling for “proletarian revolution, the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat”. Though the CP’s later activities certainly contributed to the future FBI director’s antagonism, the ideological nature of Hoover’s anticommunism – which was to have so much influence over the way in which the rest of the nation viewed Communism during the Cold War – was in many respects an artifact of that first exposure to the flaming rhetoric of America’s early Communists.<sup>952</sup>

According to Gentry, the communist threat was a handy tool for Hoover because it served as a “menace” with which he could justify his increasingly large budget requests.<sup>953</sup> The FBI’s assistant director William C. Sullivan saw Hoover in a similar light. “He [Hoover] knew the party [the CPUSA] didn’t amount to a damn. But he used the party as an instrument to get appropriations from Congress”, Sullivan said in an interview.<sup>954</sup> According to Gentry and Schrecker, the congress was exceptionally generous when it came to FBI appropriations. As Schrecker puts it, Hoover “had little to fear on Capitol Hill”:

“I have never cut his budget”, explained John J. Rooney, who chaired the House Appropriations subcommittee that dealt with the FBI from 1949 until after Hoover’s death, “and I never expect to”. Not only did nineteen of Hoover’s last twenty-one budget proposals go through without changes, but the only two times the lawmakers tampered with the Bureau’s annual requests, they gave the Director more money than he had asked for.<sup>955</sup>

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951 Whitehead 1956, 41-43.

952 Schrecker 1998, 57. *The FBI – A Comprehensive Reference Guide* sees the roots of Hoover’s anticommunism similarly as Gentry and Schrecker: “From his reading of radical literature, Hoover became convinced that radicals (both anarchists and communists) posed as great danger to United State security as they had posed to pre-revolutionary Russia in 1917. He never deviated from this view.” See *The FBI – A Comprehensive Reference Guide*, 332.

953 Gentry 1991, 197, 660, 665 & 704. Schrecker’s view of Hoover is somewhat similar with Gentry’s. According to Schrecker, Hoover exaggerated the threat of communism and made the FBI indispensable to eradicating that threat, thus increasing the power of his agency. See Schrecker 1998, 203.

954 Davis 1992, 31-32.

955 Schrecker 1998, 206. Gentry’s view of John J. Rooney is very similar with Schrecker’s. He writes: “Congressman John Rooney of Brooklyn had chaired the House Subcommittee on Appropriations since 1949. Not once, in all the years since, had the committee refused the Federal Bureau of Investigation a single cent of its requested appropriation, although other agencies, including the Justice Department itself, found the committee chairman ‘extremely parsimonious.’” See Gentry 1991, 714.

The FBI's appropriations grew with a breathtaking speed during the 1940s and 1950s. According to *The FBI – A Comprehensive Reference Guide*, the Bureau's appropriations were \$8.6 million in 1940 but in 1960 they were \$116.2 million.<sup>956</sup> "This enormous expansion of the Bureau's budget was accomplished by exploiting the postwar fears of communism", the writers claim. The FBI's director was especially active in this sense as "Hoover aggressively publicized the communist danger".<sup>957</sup>

It has been claimed that the FBI used sensitive information concerning the private lives of the congressmen to secure its appropriations. According to these claims, "the Bureau had dossiers on every senator and representative and would deploy them to keep recalcitrant congressmen in line". According to the FBI's deputy associate director Cartha DeLoach, these files were used to blackmail at least one senator to approve FBI's appropriations.<sup>958</sup>

According to Curt Gentry, Hoover reached the apex of his power during Ike Eisenhower's presidency in the 1950s.<sup>959</sup> In general, he got along with republicans much better than with democrats. He had an especially troubled relationship with Harry S. Truman.<sup>960</sup> Because of this, Gentry writes, Hoover unsuccessfully helped Thomas E. Dewey to win the presidential elections in 1948 instead of Truman.<sup>961</sup> Hoover was especially bitter because of Truman's 1946 decision to establish the Central Intelligence Group which was the precursor of the CIA. Hoover had suggested that the Central Intelligence Group should have been made an auxiliary of the FBI. Truman said no. In his opinion, one man should not operate both organizations as he would get "too big for his britches".<sup>962</sup>

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956 *The FBI – A Comprehensive Reference Guide*, 182. In 1950 the FBI's appropriations were \$53.5 million. In 1940 the FBI's share of the budget of Department of Justice was 21 percent whereas in 1960 it was almost 43 percent. Unfortunately *The FBI – A Comprehensive Reference Guide* does not contain information on the FBI's appropriations in the 1960s.

957 *The FBI – A Comprehensive Reference Guide*, 182. FBI's increasing appropriations meant also a rapid rise in the number of its agents. According to Schrecker, FBI's roster of agents almost doubled between 1946 and 1952 from 3 559 to 7 029. See Schrecker 1998, 211.

958 Gentry 1991, 376 and Schrecker 1998, 206.

959 Gentry 1991, 407. According to Gentry, Hoover "had the ear of both the president and the vice-president, as well as of their staffs". "Not only did the White House react to his complaints and approve his suggestions; he was allowed, even encouraged, to help shape policy, particularly in matters of law enforcement, internal security and civil rights", Gentry writes. In addition to Joseph McCarthy, one of the closest associates for Hoover among the republicans was Eisenhower's vice president Richard Nixon, who, according to one high-ranking FBI source, called Hoover twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. See Gentry 1991, 401 & 404.

960 Gentry 1991, 321. According to William Sullivan, "Hoover's hatred of Truman knew no bounds". According to Schrecker, the antipathy between the two men was reciprocal. She writes: "Of all the presidents Hoover served, Harry Truman may well have been the least sympathetic to the Director's operations. He did not share Hoover's fears about 'the Communist bugaboo'. [...] Nonetheless, the president was too experienced a politician to risk a confrontation and he kept his reservations from the public." See Schrecker 1998, 232.

961 Gentry 1991, 356-357.

962 Gentry 1991, 327. According to Gentry, Hoover and Truman had a heated discussion concerning the Central Intelligence Group. Hoover was "very provoked" by Truman's refusal and tried to argue with the president. Finally Truman said to Hoover that he was "getting out of bounds". The birth history of the CIA at least to some extent explains why the relationship between the FBI and the CIA has been so problematic. According to Schrecker. Hoover saw the CIA as the main rival of the Bureau. "When the CIA was established in 1947, Hoover treated the new agency as an enemy, feeding critical stories about it to the press and discouraging his subordinates from

Hoover had cool relations also with the Kennedy administration. Attorney general Robert Kennedy – Hoover’s superior – did not see the CPUSA as a major threat to the United States in the early 1960s but instead was more worried about organized crime in the country. In Kennedy’s opinion, the CPUSA “couldn’t be more feeble and less of a threat, and besides its membership consists largely of FBI agents”. Hoover told Kennedy that the CPUSA was “a greater menace to the internal security of our nation today than it ever was since it was first founded in this country in 1919”. According to Gentry, Kennedy was “horrified to discover that Hoover had assigned over one thousand agents to internal security and merely a dozen to organized crime”.<sup>963</sup> Kennedy urged the FBI to “go into it [organized crime] like they went into the Communist Party”.<sup>964</sup> Hoover did, however, continue the extensive surveillance of the CPUSA until the 1970s, which was in 1970 publicly criticized by William C. Sullivan, the director of FBI’s domestic intelligence operations. According to Sullivan, the CPUSA did not play – like Hoover claimed – a significant role in the civil unrest in the United States in the 1960s.<sup>965</sup>

Hoover remained a passionate anticommunist until the end of his life. In his last appearance before the House subcommittee on appropriations in March 1972 – just some weeks before his death – Hoover listed the CPUSA and its Trotskyist counterpart Socialist Workers’ Party as possible security risks for the United States. In addition to these, Hoover’s list included such organizations as Black Liberation Army and the Weathermen and such movements as women’s liberation movement and gay liberation movement.<sup>966</sup>

Hoover’s legacy is sharply divided, for he is a great hero for the conservatives and a villain for liberals. This was of course the situation already during Hoover’s lifetime. Many prominent citizens like Eleanor Roosevelt equated Hoover’s FBI with Hitler’s Gestapo, while some others saw similarities with FBI and Stalin’s NKVD.<sup>967</sup> Not surprisingly, Gus Hall also saw Hoover in a highly negative light. This could be well seen in Hall’s comments which were published in *The New York Times* after Hoover’s death. Hall called the late

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cooperating with it”, Schrecker writes. See Schrecker 1998, 204-205.

963 Gentry 1991, 503 and Davis 2017, 179-180.

964 Gentry 1991, 529. According to Curt Gentry, Hoover grossly underestimated the threat of organized crime in the United States. Gentry writes: “There was no such thing as ‘organized crime’, Hoover insisted, no such thing as a ‘Mafia’, while the claim that there existed a ‘national crime syndicate’ was itself ‘baloney’. There was only local crime, which was, of course, the fault of local police departments.” See Gentry 1991, 327 & 453.

965 Gentry 1991, 659-660. Sullivan’s criticism of Hoover will be examined more closely later in this study in the chapter focusing on the American New Left.

966 Gentry 1991, 714.

967 Eleanor Roosevelt protested strongly against the FBI investigations concerning her secretary Edith B. Helm in January 1941. She wrote to Hoover: “This type of investigation seems to me to smack too much of the Gestapo methods.” “For her candor, Eleanor Roosevelt paid a high price: with a single letter, she’d made an enemy for life”, Curt Gentry writes. According to Hoover, Eleanor Roosevelt was “the most dangerous enemy of the Bureau”. In addition to Eleanor Roosevelt, also congressmen Vito Marcantonio and Hale Boggs equated Hoover’s FBI with the Gestapo. Representative Cornelius E. Gallagher called Hoover “American Beria” in a congress speech in April 1972, just weeks before Hoover’s death. President Truman was highly critical of strengthening the powers of the FBI as he feared that it might become “another Gestapo”. “If I can prevent it, there’ll be no NKVD or Gestapo in this country”, Truman wrote in a letter to his wife in 1947. See Gentry 1991, 213, 299-302, 319, 326, 356, 588 & 667 and Schrecker 1998, 232.

FBI director “a servant of racism, reaction and repression” and a “political pervert whose masochistic passion drove him to savage assaults upon the principles of the Bill of Rights”.<sup>968</sup>

### 3.1.2. “Disrupting and neutralizing” the CPUSA

In addition to the McCarran Act trials, another factor which disrupted the life of the CPUSA in the 1960s was the the so-called counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) operations of the FBI. J. Edgar Hoover, the passionately anticommunist director of the FBI, had in August 1956 created the COINTELPRO to “disrupt and neutralize” the CPUSA.<sup>969</sup> Although the cold war had eased off in the mid-1950s after the Korean War had ended and Stalin had died in 1953, Hoover considered international communism still a major threat for the nation. And although the CPUSA had lost more about two thirds of its members since the WWII, there was no reason to relax the control of the CPUSA, the domestic arm of the international movement – quite to the contrary. According to Hoover, the communists played a central role in the rising civil rights movement and, for example, in the Montgomery bus boycott which was taking place in Alabama in 1956. The fact that Nikita Khrushchev’s dramatic denouncement of Stalin in the CPSU’s 20<sup>th</sup> Congress in February 1956 had plunged international communism – and the CPUSA along with it – into an unprecedented crisis did not turn Hoover’s head.

FBI’s assistant director William C. Sullivan described COINTELPRO as an “application of wartime counterintelligence methods to domestic groups”.<sup>970</sup> In COINTELPRO operations the FBI agents could use a wide variety of means to disrupt the party: they could leak derogatory information to the media and public officials to discredit individuals, spread rumors on – for example – some party member’s sexuality, send anonymous mailings to promote factionalism within the party and direct FBI informants to precipitate controversy.<sup>971</sup> As the party’s top leader Gus Hall was naturally also a target of such COINTELPRO operations. The FBI spread, for example, information on Hall’s purchase of a new automobile, allegedly with party funds.<sup>972</sup>

One of the most widely used techniques of the COINTELPROs was the informing of employers, neighbors and friends that a target was a suspected communist. If the targets had children, their teachers would be questioned by FBI agents, as would the parents of their children’s friends. Such operations often led to loss of employment and to social ostracism. One of the harshest methods used in COINTELPRO operations was falsely labeling party members as government informants, as happened with long-time CPUSA

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968 *The New York Times*, May 3, 1972. See also Gentry 1991, 34.

969 *The FBI – A Comprehensive Reference Guide*, 181.

970 Powers 1987, 339.

971 Davis 1992, 34 and *The FBI – A Comprehensive Reference Guide*, 181. Davis’s COINTELPRO study includes several descriptions of FBI operations to disrupt and neutralize the CPUSA. See Davis 1992, 36-50.

972 Gentry 1991, 443.



member William Albertson, who was expelled from the party in July 1964 as a result of an FBI operation.<sup>973</sup>

Originally COINTELPRO operations were only aimed at the CPUSA, but during the 1960s similar programs were aimed also at other groups which the FBI considered to be a risk to society: the Socialist Workers' Party (program started in 1961), white hate groups (1964), black nationalist groups (1967) and New Left groups (1968). More than half of all 2 340 approved COINTELPRO operations between 1956 and 1971 were, however, aimed at the CPUSA.<sup>974</sup>

According to Curt Gentry, the COINTELPROs were “a huge step across the line separating investigation from covert action”. “Like all counterintelligence, these programs had as their stated goal nothing less than the destruction of enemies, be they individuals or ideologies”, Gentry writes.<sup>975</sup>

Why did the FBI consider it necessary to launch COINTELPRO against the CPUSA at the time when the party was losing members at a fast pace after Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the CPSU? According to Gentry, launching COINTELPRO against the almost moribund CPUSA was an FBI reaction to the frustration caused by the fact that the Supreme Court overturned most of the Smith Act convictions of the CPUSA leaders. The FBI had grown rapidly during the first ten years of the Cold War and it now had a “superfluity of agents, many of them with nothing to do”. “The FBI director and his men found in the COINTELPROs a way to continue the battle against enemies they thought threatened the American way of life”, Gentry writes.<sup>976</sup> Not everyone in the FBI was happy with the counterintelligence program. Courtland J. Jones, who was in charge of counterintelligence in the FBI's Washington Field Office, later called COINTELPRO “wrong and childish”. According to him, by 1956 when Hoover initiated COINTELPRO, the CPUSA was nothing more than “bunch of discussion groups”.<sup>977</sup>

McCarran Act trials and COINTELPRO operations were of course not the only ways in which the U.S. authorities were dealing with the perceived threat of the CPUSA and international communism. Among other measures the FBI had infiltrated the CPUSA

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973 Gentry 1991, 444. The operation which led to Albertson's expulsion is perhaps the most well-known COINTELPRO operation against the CPUSA. As the Operation Solo documents reveal new information concerning the Albertson case, I will study it more closely in a separate appendix. See Appendix 2.

974 These counterintelligence programs were discontinued in 1971 after a break-in into an FBI office in Pennsylvania. The burglars – an activist group called Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI – sent classified FBI documents to newspapers which published a series of critical stories on the FBI. As a consequence, J. Edgar Hoover decided to terminate all COINTELPRO operations in April 1971. See Davis 1992, 1-21 and *The FBI – A Comprehensive Reference Guide*, 32-33 & 181-182.

975 Gentry 1991, 442.

976 Gentry 1991, 443. James Kirkpatrick Davis and Richard Gid Powers come to similar conclusions as Curt Gentry. Powers writes: “COINTELPRO-CPUSA was Hoover's pragmatic response to new circumstances in the mid-fifties that included the withdrawal of the Smith Act as a linchpin for the Bureau's anti-Communist activities and the outlaw status of the Party under the Communist Control Act.” See Powers 1987, 342 and Davis 1992, 31.

977 Kessler 2002, 97.

with hundreds of informants, many of whom supplied the Bureau vital information concerning the American party. In 1960 – Gus Hall’s first whole year as general secretary of the CPUSA – the FBI had 433 informants in the party. According to the FBI’s calculations, this was almost 8 percent of the party membership which the Bureau estimated to be 5 531 persons.<sup>978</sup>

### 3.1.3. The FBI recruits the Chilovsky brothers

Out of this army of informants two were above all others. During their decades-long career Morris and Jack Childs – the central actors in FBI’s Operation Solo – furnished the FBI with information not only from the very top of the CPUSA but also from the very top of the international communist movement. Some experts have questioned the claims concerning the significance of Operation Solo, but the operation is likely to be one of the most important and most successful intelligence projects of the FBI in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>979</sup>

Although the FBI’s Operation Solo documents begin from the year 1957, the operation had taken its first steps already in the very beginning of the 1950s. In 1951 the FBI had contacted former CPUSA member Jack Childs who was – after some harsh experiences in the party – ready to co-operate with the Bureau. Through Jack Childs the FBI got in touch with his older brother Morris, who eventually became the principal actor in the intelligence operation.

The brothers had been born into a Jewish Chilovsky family near the city of Kiev in what was then Russia. Morris – originally Moishe – was born in 1902 and his brother Jakob in 1907. Their shoemaker father – who had had difficulties with the czar’s anti-Semitic police – immigrated to the United States in 1910 and soon invited his wife and sons to follow him to Chicago.<sup>980</sup> Young Morris followed actively the revolution taking place in his birth country and became enthralled by socialism. He joined the predecessor organization of the CPUSA in 1921. Being actively involved in communist activities in Chicago, Morris – who then worked as a milkman – caught the attention of the party leaders.<sup>981</sup> He was

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978 Inspection Report of FBI’s Domestic Intelligence Division, November 30, 1960. Ernie Lazar’s website. The amount of informants decreased slowly during the 1960s. According to the documents published by Ernie Lazar, in 1962 the FBI had 401 informants within the party and in 1968 only 318 informants. Many of the informants were in influential positions in the party. For example, in the CPUSA’s 1966 National Convention 24 informants served as delegates, two as alternate delegates and 16 as observers. See Ernie Lazar’s collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 1).

979 FBI historian Tim Weiner holds Operation Solo in high regard in *Enemies – A History of the FBI*. According to Weiner, the Childs brothers were FBI’s “most valued secret agents of the Cold War”. Weiner writes: “Solo’s reporting gave Hoover an unquestioned authority in the White House. The United States never had had a spy inside the high councils of the Soviet Union or the People’s Republic of China. Morris Childs would penetrate them at the highest levels and provide the FBI with insights no president had ever possessed.” See Weiner 2012, 207 & 209.

980 For more on Childs’s family background and childhood, see Garrow 1981, 36 and Barron 1995, 17-18.

981 According to Barron, Childs became a personal favorite of Earl Browder who helped him to advance in his career. See Barron 1995, 19-21.

chosen to study in Moscow's international Lenin School from 1929 to 1932.<sup>982</sup> After his return to the United States, Childs gradually advanced in the party hierarchy becoming Illinois state secretary in 1935. In 1945 Childs moved to New York where he soon became the chief editor of the *Daily Worker* newspaper. In 1947, however, he was forced to step aside "as a sacrificial offering by Eugene Dennis's majority faction to assuage complaints from the hardline minority led by William Z. Foster".<sup>983</sup>

Childs was astounded and infuriated by his removal and, along with Jack, who had also been a party member for years, he left the party. Morris's situation was not helped by the fact that shortly before his wife had left him with their son. All these hardships were too much for Morris's health and he suffered a major heart attack that nearly killed him. As a consequence of all this, Morris was – some years before his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday – a human wreck without a family, a job or any other income and almost completely bedridden. According to Barron, the Justice Department almost added more challenges to Morris Childs's life as it considered bringing charges against him in the Foley Square trial of the CPUSA's 11 top leaders. However, because of his poor health and because he had left the party he was not put on trial. Instead, John Gates, Childs's successor as the chief editor of the *Daily Worker*, was sued.<sup>984</sup>

The defendants of the Foley Square trial were sentenced to prison in October 1949. In June 1951 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld their convictions. Four of these leaders – Gil Green, Gus Hall, Robert Thompson and Henry Winston – decided, however, not to go to prison. Instead they went into hiding from the authorities. The CPUSA had come to the conclusion that in order for the party to operate, part of its leadership would have to function underground.

Not surprisingly, the FBI took massive measures to find the fugitive CPUSA leaders. One of the measures was contacting former CPUSA members in order to obtain information concerning the missing leaders. In September 1951, a few months after the four fugitives had gone into hiding from the authorities, two FBI agents approached Jack Childs on the street near his home in Queens in New York. Jack Childs had not been active in the party since 1947, so he was considered a possible source of information. FBI's supposition proved to be true. Jack Childs, who had been deeply angered by his brother's treatment within the party, was indeed willing to co-operate with the Bureau.<sup>985</sup>

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982 Barron 1995, 21-25. Childs's Lenin School attendance is mentioned also in *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities*, 7015; *Communist Leadership*, 44; Haywood 1978, 200 and Garrow 1981, 36.

983 *Biographical Dictionary of American Left*, 69. See also Garrow 1981, 35 and Barron 1995, 41. There was indeed a tension between the CPUSA's chairman William Z. Foster, who was a militant supporter of Soviet-type communism, and general secretary Eugene Dennis, who was more inclined to compromise between different points of view. However, Harvey A. Levenstein – historian of the U.S. communist newspapers – suggests that Childs's journalistic incapability may have led to his dismissal. According to Levenstein, Childs had no journalistic talent or interest in journalism and his short term as a chief editor was a "minor disaster". See Levenstein 1974, 239.

984 Barron 1995, 42.

985 Garrow 1981, 37; Barron 1995, 42-43.

The FBI agents had lengthy discussions with Jack Childs who told them openly about his experiences in the party. After the agents mentioned their desire to infiltrate the party leadership, Jack Childs immediately recommended that the FBI would contact his brother. Morris had been a CPUSA member for a longer time and had been in the top leadership of the party. Morris knew practically everybody in the party and he was sociable and well-liked by most party members. According to Jack Childs, his brother would be a “ticket to the top”.<sup>986</sup>

The FBI approached Morris Childs who agreed to talk to a Bureau representative. He emphasized, however, that he had not been in the party for several years and he certainly did not know anything about the whereabouts of Green, Hall, Thompson and Winston. The FBI did not mind – they hoped that Childs could renew his contacts within the party and thus become a source of information for the Bureau. The FBI’s timing for contacting Childs was excellent: at the time he was bedridden and lonely, and therefore soon began to look forward to the meetings with the Bureau agent. At first Childs rejected the idea of renewing his contacts in the party, referring to his poor health. His attitude changed, however, after the Bureau offered to cover the expenses for putting him back into shape. Finally Childs was treated at Minnesota’s famous Mayo Clinic which helped him to recover almost completely.<sup>987</sup>

The Childs brothers gradually started renewing their contacts in the party. Finally, in early 1954, their work bore fruit. A meeting was arranged between Morris Childs and Phillip Bart who was the chief security officer of the party. He interrogated Childs, asking him, for example, whether he was bitter about being deposed as a chief editor. Childs said no, referring to his health problems which had existed already before his dismissal – he could not have continued working for the paper much longer, anyway. Finally, Bart asked Childs whether he could – as a person who had experience in dealing with the Russians – help the CPUSA to reestablish financial contacts with the Soviet Union. Childs promised to try but wanted to have his brother to help him. Bart thought that was an excellent idea. Operation Solo had been born.<sup>988</sup>

The operation proceeded very slowly in the beginning. It took years to rebuild the connections with Moscow, partly of course because of the internal confusion in the Soviet leadership following Stalin’s death in 1953 and Khrushchev’s secret speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU congress in 1956.<sup>989</sup> The Hungarian uprising in the fall of 1956 did not make things any simpler. In early March 1958 Eugene Dennis, the CPUSA’s general secretary,

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986 Barron 1995, 44-45.

987 Garrow 1981, 37; Barron 1995, 46-49.

988 Barron 1995, 50-51.

989 In the beginning the CPUSA communicated with the Soviets through the Canadian CP. Although there were no direct connections with the Soviets, the Childs brothers could gather valuable information from the other side of the Iron Curtain. According to Barron, in the spring of 1956 Jack Childs received a copy of Khrushchev’s secret speech from the Canadian CP general secretary Tim Buck. He had received a copy of the speech from the Polish leader Wladyslaw Gomulka. The CIA had received a copy of Khrushchev’s speech from their contacts in Israel in April 1956. The CIA has been considered the first U.S. organization to receive the historic speech, but the FBI agents working for Operation Solo claimed that they were the first ones to receive it. See Barron 1995, 53-55 and Weiner 2007, 123.

designated Morris Childs to operate as the courier between the CPUSA and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).<sup>990</sup> The Soviets had in mid-February invited CPUSA representative to Moscow to discuss issues.<sup>991</sup> In late April Childs departed for the first Solo mission which took him to Moscow and other cities in the Soviet Union and to China's capital Peking.<sup>992</sup>

In Moscow Childs met, for example, with Boris Ponomarev, the head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU, and Nikolai Mostovets, the head of the North and South American section of the International Department of the CCCPSU. He could not meet Mikhail Suslov who was 'very sick' but he did meet with Otto Kuusinen, another member of CPSU's presidium. Childs was scheduled to meet Nikita Khrushchev, the first secretary of the CCCPSU, after his visit in China in July, but bad weather delayed his return to Moscow for two days. Khrushchev was just on his way to visit the German Democratic Republic, so Childs's meeting with the Soviet top leader did not take place.<sup>993</sup> With his hosts Childs discussed issues ranging from U.S. imperialism and Latin America to Soviet foreign policy and Yugoslavia.<sup>994</sup>

After spending about two months in the Soviet Union – mainly in Moscow, but also in Leningrad, Kiev and Stalingrad – Childs travelled to China where he met, among others, Chairman Mao Tse-tung and Secretary Teng Hsiao-ping.<sup>995</sup> Mao and Childs spent almost five hours discussing, among other things U.S. foreign policy and international politics, including the situation in Indochina.<sup>996</sup>

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990 Memo from A.H. Belmont to L.V. Boardman on March 5, 1958; OSD, part 1, pages 1-2; Barron 1995, 56.

991 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to A.H. Belmont on February 15, 1958; OSD, part 1, pages 13-16.

992 A detailed report of the first Solo mission can be found in report form FBI's New York office to the Director on July 23, 1958; OSD, part 2, pages 42-57.

993 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on August 21, 1958; OSD, part 3, page 29.

994 Indefinable document, dated August 5, 1958; OSD, part 3, pages 90-119. Among other things, Childs discussed the internal situation of the CPUSA with his Soviet hosts. Kuusinen told Childs that "the CPSU was grateful that the CPUSA got rid of revisionists such as John Gates, Howard Fast and others". The Soviet leaders also expressed a great interest in "the formulation of a correct Marxist-Leninist program by the CPUSA". They pointed out that "no communist party in any capitalist country, particularly in the United States, can hope to go through a transition to socialism without a dictatorship of the proletariat". Therefore, "the dictatorship of the proletariat must be contained in the program of the CPUSA".

995 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on August 13, 1958; OSD, part 3, page 172-183. Among other things, Childs also discussed the situation of the CPUSA with Mao. He emphasized to Childs that the CPUSA must continue to fight against revisionism to the end. In Mao's opinion, the CPUSA should not worry about the size of its party. "Numbers mean nothing. The CP of China was small at one time too", Mao said. During this discussion, Mao revealed his eccentric philosophy. "Government oppression of the CPUSA is good. It will make the Party strong. Flowers that are raised in a hot house cannot weather a storm", Mao said. Apparently Mao had not understood how central the topics of antiracism and civil rights were on CPUSA's agenda as he suggested to Childs that CPUSA "should hold Negroes in the background in order to get wider support". Mao did not think it was a good thing to have Ben Davis leading the New York CP.

996 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on July 23, 1958; OSD, part 2, page 54. Barron claims that Mao criticized Khrushchev severely during the discussion with Childs, but Childs's original report does not support this claim. See Barron 1995, 57.

### 3.1.4. Talking to the Top Reds

This three-month journey of Morris Childs was the first of the 57 Solo missions that the Childs brothers carried out during the next 20 years. Most of the missions took the informants to Moscow and other Eastern European capitals but twice they also visited Peking and three times Havana.<sup>997</sup> Although Chicago-based Morris Childs carried out the vast majority of the Solo missions, his New York -based little brother also played a central role in the operation. Jack Childs took care of the radio communications between the CPSU and the CPUSA and handled the Soviet money deliveries to the CPUSA.<sup>998</sup>

In addition to occasional meetings with Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, Mao Tse-tung and Fidel Castro, the informants met with numerous other socialist leaders and functionaries. When visiting the Soviet Union, they almost always conferred with Mikhail Suslov and Boris Ponomarev.<sup>999</sup> During the two decades of Solo missions, the informants developed close personal contacts with such high-ranking Soviet officials as Timur Timofeyev and Nikolai Mostovets who were invaluable sources for inside information from the Kremlin.<sup>1000</sup>

Having informers on such a high position was indeed a jackpot for the FBI. Not only could they supply confidential information concerning the CPUSA, but he could also deliver the Bureau classified inside information from the very heart of international communist movement. In the early 1960s Operation Solo provided FBI valuable information not only on the Sino-Soviet split, but also on Soviet-Cuban relations, the Soviet Union's reaction to the assassination of President Kennedy and Khrushchev's removal from the Soviet leadership in 1964. Later the operation could supply behind-the-scenes information concerning, for example, the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968<sup>1001</sup>, the power struggles within the Kremlin<sup>1002</sup> and Leonid Brezhnev's health<sup>1003</sup>.

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997 The last Solo mission to Moscow and Prague was carried out by Morris Childs in October and November 1977. Barron lists all 57 Solo missions including their dates and destinations in his book. See Barron 1995, 335-337.

998 Jack Childs had gone through Soviet radio training in Moscow in the early 1930s and was thus able to take care of the radio communications. See Barron 1995, 25-26.

999 Mikhail Suslov was an especially valuable contact for the Solo informants as he was one of the most influential members of the CPSU leadership from the mid-1950s until his death in 1982. Suslov – who often is considered to be the chief ideologist of the CPSU – never aspired to the top post in the party, but being a member of both the CPSU's secretariat and the politburo, he was indeed an influential player within the party. See *A Dictionary of 20th Century Communism*, 786-787.

1000 Timofeyev was particularly willing to discuss with the Americans, partly because he was a son of former CPUSA general secretary Eugene Dennis. When returning to the United States after working for years in Moscow for Comintern, Dennis and his wife Peggy could not for security reasons bring their U.S.-born son with them as he spoke only Russian. In the Soviet Union Timmy Dennis became Timur Timofeyev under which name he created a fine career for himself within the communist bureaucracy. In 1966 he became the director of the Institute of International Workers' Movement. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 109, pages 10-12; Dennis 1977, 86-87 and Barron 1995, 63.

1001 See, for example, Barron 1995, 164-167.

1002 See, for example, Barron 1995, 258-259.

1003 See, for example, Barron 1995, 302.

As the Solo missions usually lasted for several weeks, they were indeed stressful experiences especially for Morris Childs whose health had never fully recovered from the hardships of the late 1940s. The FBI reports that thoroughly tracked the Solo missions without exception tell us that Morris Childs was always completely exhausted when he returned to the United States. Playing a demanding role for 24 hours a day, seven days a week for several weeks in a row took its toll. The stakes were high in this roleplay, because if the actor failed in his performance, it could have most serious consequences. The glamorous agent life of James Bond films was indeed far from the life of Morris Childs who suffered from severe back and chest pains and sleeping difficulties.<sup>1004</sup>

While Morris and Jack Childs were travelling behind the Iron Curtain, they were especially worried about the possibility that the U.S. media would reveal the existence of Operation Solo during their mission. Such fears were not wholly unfounded. Although the communist scare had subsided since the early 1950s, U.S. newspapers and television channels were still hungry for news related to U.S. intelligence activities. Many journalists had close ties with the FBI, and careless directors could spill the beans when proudly bragging about the achievements of the Bureau.

Jack Childs's worst fears almost came true in mid-May 1964 when *New York Journal-American* and numerous other U.S. papers published a column by a syndicated columnist Victor Riesel. He was an experienced specialist in labor union issues and issues related to the CPUSA.<sup>1005</sup> Like several other prominent journalists Riesel had close connections with the FBI from where occasionally interesting information was leaked to the media.<sup>1006</sup> In his May 1964 column Riesel wrote among other things that the FBI is well aware of the "routes, techniques and personalities who funnel Soviet cash into Communist Party coffers". According to Riesel, J. Edgar Hoover had said so in a recent off-the-record briefing to a group of congressmen.<sup>1007</sup>

When Riesel's column was published, Jack Childs was in Moscow. The story caught the attention of the Soviets who quickly drew conclusions. Since the FBI seemed to know all the details related to the Soviet money deliveries, the Soviets decided that all contacts

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1004 For example, in November 1965 the FBI's Chicago office wrote: "Since the return of CG 5824-S\* to Chicago, he has been in extremely poor physical condition. Since his arrival in Chicago on 11/14/65, CG 5824-S\* has not left his home and for the greater portion of this time has been confined to bed with a recurrence of his back condition and with extremely painful chest pains reminiscent of his difficulties in the past from his heart condition." CG 5824-S\* was Morris Childs's code name within the FBI. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on November 19, 1965; OSD, part 96, page 18.

1005 Victor Riesel (1913-1995) became a nationally known character after sulfuric acid was thrown on his face in New York in April 1956. He had been investigating and reporting crimes related to labor unions, and the attack was a revenge for his reporting. Riesel lost his eye-sight in the attack but continued his work as a prominent labor columnist until his retirement in 1990. For more on Riesel, see, for example, *The New York Times*, January 5, 1995.

1006 According to Athan G. Theoharis and John Stuart Cox, Hoover considered Riesel as one of the FBI's "good friends in the news media". According to Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, Riesel was among a group of journalists to whom Louis B. Nichols, head of FBI's crime records division, leaked information. Lisa E. Davis describes Riesel as "notorious labor columnist" and "a militant anticommunist". See Theoharis & Cox 1988, 427; Jeffreys-Jones 2007, 161 and Davis 2017, 149-150.

1007 *New York Journal-American*, May 14, 1964.

with Jack Childs and money deliveries to him had to be ceased. To Jack Childs such an announcement was naturally a massive shock. He thought that the publication of the Riesel column while he was in the Soviet Union “was not only going to destroy the entire Solo operation but was going to cost him his life”. The fact that Childs’s wife was travelling with him did not make the situation any easier. He felt nauseous with fear.<sup>1008</sup>

After the initial shock Childs reacted with anger to the announcement. He told the Soviets that Victor Riesel is a well-known “faker and a liar” and that he was not going to let a faker and a liar like Riesel harm the CPUSA. Childs said that he would not return to the United States before the Soviet decision to cease cooperation had been overturned. Boris Ponomarev, with whom Childs discussed the issue, said eventually that “he would see what could be done in order to resolve the tensions that had been created by this most unfortunate situation”.<sup>1009</sup> Although the Soviets had first said that their decision was final, in the end they, however, continued using Jack Childs as the channel for delivering funds to the CPUSA.

The Riesel incident seems to have been a traumatic experience for the Childs brothers. Several meetings were arranged to discuss measures to avoid such information leaks in the future. Morris Childs, before leaving for a Solo mission in February 1965, wanted the FBI to make sure that Victor Riesel will not write anything on the CPUSA’s recent national committee meeting which Childs had attended. According to Childs, it would have been disastrous for his security if Riesel – or any other columnist – would have published a story on the national committee meeting while he was behind the Iron Curtain.<sup>1010</sup>

Although the money deliveries to the CPUSA continued as before after the Riesel incident, the Soviets had their suspicions. This was the case especially after 1966 when Gus Hall finally could get a passport after the CPUSA had won its remaining court cases. Now Hall could also travel to the Soviet Union, which changed Childs’s role fundamentally. Until 1966 Morris Childs had been the most important CPUSA member visiting Moscow but now he lost this position. Childs’s behavior in this new situation caught the attention of the KGB. Its agents noticed that Childs was now excessively willing to accompany Gus Hall on all his trips to the Soviet Union and visibly nervous when the Soviets bypassed him

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1008 Memo from W.C. Sullivan to A.H. Belmont on June 12, 1964; OSD, part 66, page 23.

1009 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 9, 1964; OSD, part 63, pages 45-51. The incident is also featured in Barron 1995, 109-111 & 114-117. FBI representatives later discussed the incident with Riesel. He said that he had discussed the CPUSA financing with some “sources up on the Hill” (referring to the U.S. Congress). Riesel also stated that since he had written about the CPUSA for many years already “he can now speculate quite accurately”. He promised that from then on he would not reveal any information concerning CPUSA finances in his columns. See memo from C.D. DeLoach to Mr. Mohr on June 19, 1964; OSD, part 66, pages 30-31.

1010 Memo from W.C. Sullivan to A.H. Belmont on February 18, 1965; OSD, part 82, page 117. Victor Riesel was not the only columnist causing headaches for the Operation Solo team. Famous gossip columnist Walter Winchell – a personal friend of J. Edgar Hoover – also published sensitive information concerning the CPUSA in his columns, which worried the informants and their handlers. See Teletype message from FBI’s New York office to the Director on January 22, 1964; OSD, part 56, pages 44-45 and memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on July 6, 1964; OSD, part 66, pages 132-133.



and communicated directly to Hall.<sup>1011</sup> These suspicions were communicated to the very top of the KGB as Vladimir Kazakov, head of the agency's North American department, reported to KGB director Yuri Andropov and the CPSU's central committee in March 1974 as follows:

Although [Morris] Childs enjoys the trust of Comrade Gus Hall, his direct involvement in the financial affairs of the US Communist Party constitutes a real threat to this special channel [for the transmission of Soviet funds]. In addition, certain doubtful and suspicious elements in M. Childs's behaviour lead one to believe that he is possibly being used by US intelligence.<sup>1012</sup>

A few months later KGB officer Boris Ivanov discussed the position of the Childs brothers with Gus Hall. In Ivanov's opinion, the Childs brothers' long involvement in secret work placed them under increasing danger of FBI surveillance. Ivanov suggested to Hall that the brothers should retire. He brought forward a number of alternative methods for transferring Soviet funds to the CPUSA, among them opening a Swiss bank account or using a cover business in the United States. Hall told Ivanov he had found a reliable comrade to replace Jack Childs, whose health was failing. However, Hall never took action to rearrange the money transfers.<sup>1013</sup>

### 3.1.5. Closing down the operation

Due to Gus Hall's lack of attention, the Childs brothers could continue playing a central role in the CPUSA-CPSU relations until the beginning of the 1980s. Barron claims in his book that the FBI would have wanted to end the operation already in 1978, but President Jimmy Carter and Attorney General Griffin Bell wanted the operation to continue. The FBI decided, however, that Morris Childs would no longer travel to the Soviet Union. He would stay in touch with Gus Hall while Jack Childs would continue to take care of the radio communications and money deliveries with the Soviets.<sup>1014</sup>

Finally, in the spring of 1980 the FBI decided to conclude the operation as the Bureau considered that the brothers were in an imminent danger of being compromised. In the end of May, as a pretext for withdrawing from the money transfers, Morris Childs told Hall that unidentified men had been making enquiries about him in his neighborhood.

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<sup>1011</sup> Andrew & Mitrokhin 2000, 377.

<sup>1012</sup> Andrew & Mitrokhin 2000, 377. The KGB suspicions did not stop the Soviet leadership from rewarding the Childs brothers. In 1975 the brothers were awarded the Order of the Red Banner. Morris Childs received his decoration in person from Leonid Brezhnev during a Moscow banquet. See Barron 1995, 298-300 and Andrew & Mitrokhin 2000, 378.

<sup>1013</sup> Andrew & Mitrokhin 2000, 377-378. Hall and the Soviets had a similar discussion when Hall visited Moscow in November 1977. Kazakov and Ivanov again raised the question of replacing the Childs brothers. Hall again said he had candidates in mind to replace Jack Childs and promised that he would make his final choice in the near future. Jack Childs's successor would then be sent to Moscow for several weeks to receive an appropriate "special training". These plans, however, never materialized as Hall, once again, delayed taking action. See Andrew & Mitrokhin 2000, 380.

<sup>1014</sup> Barron 1995, 307-308. Unfortunately Barron does not document his claim in any way in his book.

Childs said he might have to go into hiding to avoid arrest. He handed Hall 225 000 dollars in cash, which, he claimed, was all the money from Moscow in his possession. Operation Solo had ended.<sup>1015</sup>

The FBI directors were not mistaken when they considered that the Childs brothers were in imminent danger of being compromised. Operation Solo was revealed in September 1981 by historian David J. Garrow. He had come across the operation as he was studying the FBI's Martin Luther King -related activities. The FBI had been interested in the civil rights leader partly because Jack Childs had told the Bureau that Stanley Levison – a progressive New York businessman who became a close friend and an advisor for Martin Luther King – had been a CPUSA member. Garrow's disclosure of Operation Solo in his book *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.* made big headlines and was front-page news, for example, in *The Washington Post*.<sup>1016</sup>

The disclosure seems to have come as a genuine surprise to the CPUSA. Gus Hall was not in the United States to comment on the issue. In its press release the party claimed that the whole case was one massive frame-up:

Press reports that "Moscow Gold" was funneled to the Communist Party, U.S.A. by two men allegedly serving as F.B.I. informers in its ranks for the past 25 years, were denounced "as totally false lying inventions" today by Henry Winston, National Chairman of the Party. Winston stated that "the American people are being confronted with a new and monstrous hoax by the Reagan Administration which has elevated the Big Lie to the level of national policy".

What is perpetrated is a sensational frame-up designed to smear the American working class Party, an attempt through character assassination of the Childs brothers and even the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Gus Hall. It is designed to sow confusion and mistrust in the growing ranks of the people's fight-back against Reagan's assault upon their living standards, constitutional rights and longing for world peace.

The hoary myth about Soviet funding of progressive movements in the United States, the "Moscow gold" charge is a perennial totally false lying invention.

This attempted frame-up signals a dangerous bid to revive the McCarthyite era of persecution in our country. It smacks of the fascist practices of the Hitler regime when the Reichstag Capital was burned by the Nazi accusers who attempted to frame up the heroic Communist, Georgi Dimitroff.

The public must be warned.<sup>1017</sup>

Operation Solo and the double role played by the Childs brothers became a touchy topic for the CPUSA leadership. Gus Hall's way of dealing with the issue was total silence. John Abt, the CPUSA's attorney, tried to discuss the issue with Gus Hall right after his return

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1015 Andrew & Mitrokhin 2000, 380-381.

1016 *The Washington Post*, September 17, 1981.

1017 CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 256, folder 42. In addition to the press release cited above, the same folder includes a ready-made "response to telephone press inquiries": "The press reports indicate the deliberate preparation of a monstrous frame-up based upon lying inventions and slanderous allegations, directed against our Party, the labor movement and the people's fight-back movements. It smacks of an intensified McCarthyite attack as part of the Reagan revival of the Cold War. As to the charges of alleged 'Moscow gold', it is an outrageous lie, a hoary myth long peddled by the FBI. It is a totally discredited falsehood."

from the Soviet Union. “Gus’s response was not to respond. He said nothing and let the moment pass”, Abt wrote later in his autobiography.<sup>1018</sup> Abt was highly critical of Hall’s way of dealing with Garrow’s revelation:

Back in New York, nothing further was said about Jack and Morris, the Party issued no more statements, no charges were lodged against the FBI, but neither was there an acknowledgement that the two brothers were government informers. But with the appearance of the Garrow book, Morris and Jack were never again seen around the Communist Party. They simply vanished and were not heard from again. Rather than using the moment to give the FBI a bloody nose for its methods of subverting a legitimate political organization, the Party let the matter die a quiet death. Gus, who held all the levers of power in the organization and who had a close personal relationship with Morris and Jack, could not admit to fallibility. [...] Gus Hall’s considerable vanity – and perhaps fear of closer scrutiny – prevented him from exercising a political judgment in the Childs matter.<sup>1019</sup>

The CPUSA members interviewed for this study also said that Hall’s reaction to Garrow’s revelation was uncertain and confused. Danny Rubin remembers discussing the Garrow book with Gus Hall:

When I saw the book about Martin Luther King and the FBI, I took it to Hall and asked if he had seen it. He had not seen it. I asked him what did he think about it, he said “I don’t know”. I asked him where’s Morris, he said that he had not seen for a long time. [...] He said he didn’t know whether Childs was an enemy agent or whether it was a set-up.<sup>1020</sup>

According to Jay Schaffner, Garrow’s revelations were not widely discussed in the party in the 1980s. The party claimed that the revelations were a smearing operation against the Childs brothers. Morris Childs was claimed to be very sick and in a hospital in the Soviet Union. Schaffner tried to get in touch with Childs on his visit to the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s but was not successful. According to Schaffner, Hall became furious when he heard about Schaffner’s attempt to get in touch with Childs. “Gus knew that Morris was not in the Soviet Union. He knew the truth about Childs”, Schaffner said.<sup>1021</sup>

According to Jarvis Tyner, Hall’s silence about the revelations could be explained by strong emotions they evoked:

He [Gus Hall] didn’t talk about it much but I think he was hurt by it and quite disappointed, perhaps in himself and certainly in Childs for being such a snake. [...] Childs was a very charming guy. A kind of person you trust easily. He was extremely accommodating and fun to be around with and so forth. He was an excellent manipulator. And he was a spy, that’s what he was. At some point he disappeared. I think it was very hurtful for Gus.<sup>1022</sup>

Jack Childs was no longer witnessing the disclosure of Operation Solo as he had died in New York in August 1980. Morris Childs and his wife Eva – who had also served as an

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1018 Abt & Myerson 1993, 216. Following his personal experiences with Jack Childs, Abt was not surprised to hear that he was an informer. See Abt & Myerson 1993, 213-215.

1019 Abt & Myerson 1993, 216.

1020 Interview with Danny Rubin in New York City, October 2013.

1021 Interview with Jay Schaffner in New York City, October 2013.

1022 Interview with Jarvis Tyner in New York City, August 2007.

FBI informer in Operation Solo – had in 1981 retired to a luxurious condominium near Miami with spectacular views over the Atlantic. Guards patrolling in the lobby twenty-four hours a day made sure that no one they did not recognize was able to approach the Childs residence without first consulting Morris or Eva. Morris Childs – who had had heart problems ever since the 1940s and whose life as a double agent had not been wholly stress-free – died in Miami in June 1991 at the age of 89.<sup>1023</sup>

## 3.2. Receiving “Moscow’s Gold”

### 3.2.1. From thousands to millions

As mentioned earlier, Morris and Jack Childs did not only provide the FBI with intelligence information from inside the walls of the Kremlin, but they also played a central part when the CPSU delivered financial assistance to the CPUSA. Morris Childs negotiated the annual subsidies with the Soviets in Moscow and Jack Childs took care of the actual money deliveries in New York City. All details concerning this money traffic were naturally reported to the FBI.

The Operation Solo documents show that the CPUSA had received financial assistance from the Soviet Union already before Operation Solo, but there is no information about the exact amounts of money.<sup>1024</sup> The person taking care of the money traffic was Alexander Trachtenberg, the head of the communist publishing house International Publishers.<sup>1025</sup>

When Morris Childs made his first Solo mission to the Soviet Union in the spring and summer of 1958, he discussed the CPUSA financing with Boris Ponomarev. He promised that the CPSU would deliver the CPUSA \$200 000 in 1958. The money would be delivered through the Canadian CP with which the CPSU had established connections. During their discussion Ponomarev and Childs agreed that Trachtenberg – who had been born in 1884 – was already getting quite old, but they did not discuss replacing him.<sup>1026</sup>

Trachtenberg was, however, replaced as the recipient of the Soviet funds. The first money delivery through the Childs brothers took place on September 8, 1958 when Elizabeth Mascolo – the common-law wife of Canadian party leader Tim Buck – brought \$12 000 to New York City from Canada and gave it to Jack Childs.<sup>1027</sup>

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1023 Barron 1995, 329 & 331-332 and Andrew & Mitrokhin 2000, 382.

1024 Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes and Kyrill M. Anderson study the history of the so-called Moscow Gold in their *The Soviet World of American Communism*. Most of their study focuses on the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Unfortunately they have not been able to gather any information on the CPUSA funding in the 1950s before 1958. See Klehr, Haynes & Anderson 1998, 107-164.

1025 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on August 8, 1958; OSD, part 4, page 46-50.

1026 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on August 8, 1958; OSD, part 4, page 46-50.

1027 Memo from J.A. Sizoo to A.H. Belmont in September 1958; OSD, part 4, page 14. See also Barron 1995, 58. Although the CPSU promised to deliver \$200 000 to the CPUSA during 1958, only \$75 000 was delivered, which did not satisfy general secretary Eugene Dennis. See memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 9.

This was the beginning of a steady flow of cash deliveries which continued until the beginning of the 1980s when the Operation Solo ended. The very first deliveries were first arranged through Canada, but in April 1959 the Soviets made their first direct delivery to Jack Childs in New York City. This soon became the standard procedure. A KGB officer stationed at the Soviet United Nations mission in New York City met with Jack Childs briefly in a quiet stairwell or a washroom of a Manhattan business building. Both men were carrying similar attaché cases which they quickly exchanged. Ironically, for a long time most of these meetings took place on Wall Street or in its immediate neighborhood.<sup>1028</sup> Later, in 1967 and 1968, the deliveries took place in quiet locations away from Manhattan, mainly in Westchester County, north of New York City. In these deliveries the sums were larger – at least \$500 000 – and therefore it was practical to have a car at one’s disposal.<sup>1029</sup>

These money deliveries meant always a lot of work for the FBI’s New York Office. In order to follow the circulation of subsidy money, the Bureau agents wrote down serial numbers of the banknotes. The serial numbers were recorded in the FBI’s “Automatic Data Processing Unit”. As a part of this process, the banknotes were also photocopied. Especially with the large money deliveries, such measures required a lot of labor. In July 1966, for example, photocopying the delivery sum of \$340 000 required taking 4 419 pages of photocopies.<sup>1030</sup>

How large were the sums the CPUSA received from the CPSU? In the late 1950s and early 1960s the delivered sums were still relatively modest, but in 1965 the Soviet financial assistance for the first time exceeded one million dollars.<sup>1031</sup> After a little dip in 1966, Soviet assistance returned to the one million dollar level in 1967 which is the last whole year covered by the Operation Solo material published by the FBI.<sup>1032</sup> John Barron’s *Operation Solo* book lists Soviet subsidy sums until 1980.<sup>1033</sup> According to Barron, the growth of

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1028 Information on these money deliveries can be found in following Operation Solo documents (for the sake of brevity, I will only mention here the location of the document): Part 59, page 4; part 60, page 229; part 68, page 96; part 91, page 79; part 92, page 229; part 93, page 115; part 96, page 1 and part 100, page 48.

1029 Information on these money deliveries can be found in following Operation Solo documents (again, for the sake of brevity, I will only mention here the location of the document): Part 114, page 209; part 118, page 121; part 122, page 259 and part 124, page 272. In the 1970s, the money was again delivered through “brush passes” in Lower Manhattan. This was again possible as the money was now delivered in \$50 and \$100 bills which made the money packages smaller. See Andrew & Mitrokhin 2000, 376.

1030 See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on July 18, 1966; OSD, part 107, page 153. These photocopying operations are also mentioned in following Operation Solo documents (again, for the sake of brevity, I will only mention here the location of the document): Part 93, page 90; part 94, page 67; part 94, page 137; part 100, page 69 and part 119, page 155.

1031 As the FBI’s Operation Solo documents do not directly reveal the annual subsidy sums, the sum has been calculated through comparing the cumulative figures of December 1964 and 1965. A table of cumulative and annual subsidy figures – based on Operation Solo documents – can be found in Appendix 1 of this study. For the 1965 subsidy sum, see memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on January 7, 1965; OSD, part 80, page 107 and memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on February 7, 1966; OSD, part 99, page 69.

1032 See memo from C.D. Brennan to W.C. Sullivan on January 11, 1967; OSD, part 111, page 81 and memo from C.D. Brennan to W.C. Sullivan on February 12, 1968; OSD, part 120, page 219.

1033 Barron 1995, 339-340. The trustworthiness of John Barron’s book has been often questioned, but the Soviet subsidy figures of his book for the years 1960-1967 are almost completely consistent with the figures of the FBI’s Operation Solo documents. For a more detailed comparison between

subsidies continued throughout the late 1960s and 1970s. The \$1.5 million limit was first exceeded in 1969 and the \$2.0 million limit in 1978. In the last whole year of Operation Solo in 1980 Soviet financial assistance to the CPUSA was almost \$2.8 million. The total sum of Soviet subsidies delivered during Operation Solo rose thus to \$28.3 million.<sup>1034</sup>

Soviet financial assistance did not, of course, end with Operation Solo. Annual subsidies continued at around 2 million dollar level in the 1980s. Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes and Kyrill M. Anderson show in their study that the CPUSA received at least 2 million dollars in 1987 and 3 million dollars in 1988. In 1989, however, Gus Hall's criticism of Gorbachev's reforms led to a cut-off of Soviet assistance. Not surprisingly, this caused a serious financial crisis in the CPUSA. The party's newspaper, for example, could no longer be published on a daily basis in 1990.<sup>1035</sup>

In international comparison, the CPUSA seems to have been one of the biggest beneficiaries of the Soviet assistance. In the mid-1960s the Italian and French parties received vastly larger subsidies than the CPUSA, but over the years the tables turned.<sup>1036</sup> According to Robert Service, in 1980 the CPUSA was the biggest beneficiary before the CPs of France and Finland.<sup>1037</sup> Looking at a longer time perspective, the CPUSA seems to have been the second biggest beneficiary after the French communist party.<sup>1038</sup> According to Vladimir Bukovsky – who studied Soviet subsidies from 1969 to 1991 – Moscow gave away about \$400 million during these years. The French CP received \$44 million out of this money whereas the CPUSA received \$35 million.<sup>1039</sup> As Andrew and Mitrokhin point out, the CPUSA was likely to be the biggest per capita beneficiary during the Cold War era as its membership was so much smaller than in the Western European parties.<sup>1040</sup>

When discussing Soviet assistance to foreign CPs, one has to remember that direct financial assistance was only one form of assistance. In addition to that, the Soviets – and also other

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the figures of Operation Solo documents and Barron's book, see Appendix 1 of this study.

1034 Barron 1995, 339-340.

1035 Klehr, Haynes & Anderson 1998, 148-159. According to Russian deputy prosecutor-general Yevgeny Lisov, the CPUSA received more than \$20 million during the last decade of the subsidies. If this information is correct, then the CPUSA would have received well over \$40 million from the Soviet Union in 1958-1988. See Haynes & Klehr 1992, 283.

1036 In 1966, for example, the CPUSA received \$0.7 million from Moscow whereas the Italian CP received \$5.7 million and the French CP \$2.0 million. See Bracke 2007, 78.

1037 Service 2007, 326. According to Service, the CPUSA received \$2.5 million in 1980, whereas the French CP received \$2.0 million and the Finnish CP received \$1.4 million. Service's figures are based on Russian RGASPI documents. According to Barron, CPUSA received \$2.8 million in 1980. See Barron 1995, 340.

1038 Haynes & Klehr 1992, 283. Haynes and Klehr refer to Lisov's Russian-language article which was published in *Ogonyok* in February 1992. Lisov's revelations were reported also in *The Washington Post*, February 8, 1992.

1039 Bukovsky 1996, 36. Bukovsky's overall figure is well in line with the figures presented by Barron and Lisov.

1040 Andrew & Mitrokhin 2000, 375. According to Andrew and Mitrokhin, the two biggest beneficiaries during the whole Cold War era were the French and the Italian CPs. The CPUSA was indeed a minuscule party when compared to the CPs of Italy and France. In the early 1960s, when The CPUSA had less than 5 000 members, Italian CP had more than 1.6 million members and French CP more than 400 000 members. Even the Finnish CP had around 50 000 members in a small country of 4.5 million people. See Hodgson 1979, 244.

Eastern European CPs – supported their comrade parties by, for example, making large subscriptions of CP newspapers and other publications and sponsoring holiday trips to the Eastern European countries.

These forms of support were familiar also to the CPUSA. The Soviet press subscriptions were in fact central to the survival of CPUSA's *The Worker* newspaper. In 1963 the Soviet Union, for example, ordered 5 000 copies of every issue of *The Worker*. Other communist countries ordered 1550 copies. These subscriptions accounted for about 40 percent of the total printing of 16 000 copies of the paper. In 1963 the Soviet Union paid \$40 000 and other communist countries paid \$6 000 for these subscriptions. In addition to that, they paid \$47 000 for freight charges. As the entire circulation income of *The Worker* in 1963 was about \$90 000, the income from the communist countries was little more than a half of the total circulation income. These funds were, as the FBI agents put it in September 1965, "a very important factor in the continued existence of the Party paper".<sup>1041</sup>

### 3.2.2. Money makes the party go around

Between the fall of 1958 and summer of 1968 – the time period covered by the available Operation Solo documents – the CPUSA received \$6 316 538 from the Soviet Union and China.<sup>1042</sup> What was done with all this money? As the financial practices of the CPUSA were somewhat lax and inexact, it is difficult to give a precise answer to the question. In September 1965, however, the FBI prepared a study on the usage of the Solo funds. The study looked at Solo funds usage between September 1958 and June 1965. The agents conducting the study considered the task to be demanding because "the Party's lack of consistent financial policies and its complete aversion to the use of accounting records (...) make it difficult to account fully for the Party's disbursements".<sup>1043</sup>

Between September 1958 and June 1965 the CPUSA received \$2 957 000 from the Soviet Union and China.<sup>1044</sup> According to the study, by far the largest share of the funds – approximately 35 percent (or \$1 million) – was used to cover the expenses of CPUSA's national office. About 14 percent – or \$408 000 – was used for the CPUSA's publications, mainly for *The Worker* newspaper.<sup>1045</sup> About 4 percent – or \$129 000 – was spent on travel expenses.<sup>1046</sup>

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1041 Memo from R. W. Smith to W. C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 25. *The Worker* was indeed heavily subsidized by the Soviets, because in addition to the subscriptions and freight charge payments, the paper also received \$81 000 from the Solo funds in 1963.

1042 All other funds had come from the Soviet Union except one shipment of \$50 000 which was received from the Chinese in Prague in February 1960. See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on March 18, 1960; OSD, part 18, pages 218-220.

1043 Memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 11.

1044 Memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 18.

1045 *The Worker* received more than half – \$236 000 – of the Solo money spent on publications. The second biggest recipient was the African American journal *Freedomways* which received \$46 000. See memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 21.

1046 Memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 18.

A large part of the funds, however, was not spent at all. In June 1965, Morris and Jack Childs were holding about \$876 000 – almost 30 percent of the total – in their secret depositories. In addition to that, \$177 000 – 6 percent of the total – had been transferred to the CPUSA’s so-called reserve fund.<sup>1047</sup> \$101 000 – 3 percent of the total – had been invested. The party had, for example, bought a New York City travel agency for \$22 000 and piece of land in Florida for \$26 000.<sup>1048</sup>

Although the Solo funds were only meant to finance party operations, some of the funds were used for the personal expenses of the party leaders. Eugene Dennis, who died January 1961, spent about \$20 000 of the Solo funds for his personal purposes. His successor Gus Hall continued on the same path. By June 1965, Hall had spent about \$53 000 – just under 2 percent of all Solo funds – for his personal purposes.<sup>1049</sup>

Looking from a today’s perspective, the sum of \$53 000 does not strike as a massive amount of money. In the early 1960s it was, however, a considerable sum. The median annual income of a U.S. family in 1965 was \$6 882.<sup>1050</sup> Considering that Hall returned to party activities in the spring of 1959, it can be said that during the first six years after his return, he per annum received from Solo funds an average income of \$8 833, which was 28 percent higher than the median income of a U.S. family in 1965.<sup>1051</sup>

Gus Hall did not, of course, withdraw \$8 833 annually from the Solo funds. A large part of these \$53 000 – \$22 000, to be exact – he withdrew in November and December 1964.<sup>1052</sup> The end of 1964 was a suitable timing for such withdrawals as Jack Childs had received a \$300 000 delivery from the Soviets in August and a \$100 000 delivery in November.<sup>1053</sup> The

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1047 The reserve fund monies were held by trusted party members, such as Jack Kling (\$102 000), Helen Winter (\$25 000), Isadore Needleman (\$20 000) and Max Weinstein (\$15 000). The rest of the reserve funds (\$15 000) were held by Gus Hall’s friends and relatives in Cleveland and Wisconsin. See memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 19.

1048 Memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 19.

1049 Memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 20. Most likely Hall was not the only person who took advantage of Solo funds. It is possible, that the Childs brothers also took their share of the funds. According to Andrew and Mitrokhin, the Childs brothers embezzled about five percent the Soviet funds sent to the CPUSA. Unfortunately, Andrew and Mitrokhin do not offer any documentation to prove their claim. Nor do they reveal how the brothers actually carried out their embezzlements. As the total sum of Soviet subsidies to the CPUSA during Operation Solo was little more than \$28 million, the Childs brothers would thus have embezzled about \$1.4 million. See Andrew & Mitrokhin 2000, 378.

1050 *Income in 1965 of Families and Persons in the United States*, 3.

1051 In addition to the Solo funds, Gus Hall seems to have received a salary from the CPUSA. According to the FBI, Hall’s salary from the CPUSA for the year 1961 was \$4 860. See FBI memo *Who’s Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.*, 6. *Who’s Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.* can be found in Ernie Lazar’s collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 2).

1052 Gus Hall withdrew \$12 000 for “personal use” on November 27, 1964 and \$10 000 for “personal expenses” on December 30, 1964. In addition to these withdrawals, on November 5, 1964 he received \$4 000 for an unknown purpose. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on December 2, 1964; OSD, part 73, page 51 and report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on January 4, 1965; OSD, part 74, page 184.

1053 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on August 7, 1964; OSD, part 68, page 29 and memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on November 23, 1964; OSD, part 72, page 173.



November delivery was an extra one which the Soviets sent after Gus Hall had repeatedly requested additional funds for presidential election campaign work.<sup>1054</sup> In Hall's opinion, the nomination of Barry Goldwater as the presidential candidate of the Republican Party was a step towards fascism and such development had to be stopped.<sup>1055</sup>

As the annual Soviet subsidies settled to the level of around \$1 million in 1965, Gus Hall took care that he got his personal share of the funds. In April 1966 he withdrew \$20 000 offering no explanation for such action.<sup>1056</sup> Two months later \$5 000 was used for the "expenses of Gus Hall".<sup>1057</sup> At the same time, he started using the Childs brothers as his personal shopping assistants. The brothers had to pay for clothes, shoes, cameras, typewriters and other expensive items which Hall wanted to acquire.<sup>1058</sup> Later they were naturally reimbursed from the Solo funds. Many of these items were for purchased for Hall's family members. Both Hall's daughter Barbara and his son Arvo frequently received expensive gifts bought with Solo money. For example, in the spring of 1967 Hall ordered Morris Childs to buy a used 1965 Ford Mustang convertible for his son Arvo for \$1 700.<sup>1059</sup> The Mustang turned out to be defective, however, so instead Arvo Hall got a brand new maroon-colored Ford Fairlane, worth \$2 700.<sup>1060</sup>

The well-being of his offspring was indeed important for Gus Hall. This was especially the case with the family of his daughter Barbara Conway, who in February 1966 gave birth to Gus Hall's second grandchild.<sup>1061</sup> Hall supported the New Haven, Connecticut family, not only by buying clothing and by paying for their vacations, but he also made more valuable purchases. In September 1965 \$8 665 of the Solo funds were used to buy company shares for Hall's son-in-law.<sup>1062</sup> But a bigger support operation was yet to come: in December

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1054 Gus Hall saw the 1964 presidential election as a historical turning point as he requested for the extra \$100 000 from the Soviets: "Presidential and congressional election results of 1964 will have most decisive effect on foreign and domestic policies of the United States and in turn will influence contemporary events on a world-wide scale. During remaining weeks of campaign we are going all out to mobilize and unite the labor movement and all progressive forces to defeat reaction." See memo from C.F. Downing to Mr. Conrad on September 29, 1964; OSD, part 69, page 2.

1055 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on October 22, 1964; OSD, part 70, page 209-212.

1056 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on May 4, 1966; OSD, part 102, page 207.

1057 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on July 1, 1966; OSD, part 107, page 201.

1058 This is also mentioned in Barron 1995, 86.

1059 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on April 7, 1967; OSD, part 113, page 100 and memo from C.D. Brennan to W.C. Sullivan on May 8, 1967; OSD, part 114, page 64.

1060 Elizabeth Hall drove the new car from Chicago to Boulder, Colorado where her son was studying at the University of Colorado in May 1967. She flew back from Denver to New York City in the first class. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 29, 1967; OSD, part 114, pages 236-237 and report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on June 1, 1967; OSD, part 114, page 271.

1061 *The Worker*, February 13, 1966.

1062 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on October 8, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 102. \$8 665 was a considerable sum in 1965, because, as mentioned above, the median income of a U.S. family in 1965 was \$6 882. About three years later, in May 1968, \$16 571 of the Solo funds were used to buy company shares to a person or persons somehow connected to Gus Hall. The names of the recipients of these shares are, however, covered in Operation Solo documents, so it remains unclear whether these shares were bought for Hall's family members. See report from

1966 \$16 500 of the Solo funds was used to finance a new home for Barbara Conway and her family.<sup>1063</sup> The sum was so large that even J. Edgar Hoover remarked in his letter to the FBI's Chicago office that Barbara Conway was indeed the apple of Gus Hall's eye.<sup>1064</sup>

The wealthy lifestyle of Barbara Conway and her family caught the attention of the FBI. In May 1968 the Bureau agents considered launching a COINTELPRO operation which would have exposed the relative prosperity of the daughter of the CPUSA's general secretary. Such an exposure would have severely tarnished the reputation of Gus Hall, the proponents argued. The operation was never launched, however, as it could have revealed the role of Morris Childs, who was closely involved in the financial arrangements related to the Conway family. The FBI did not want to jeopardize its top operation just in order to cause minor trouble to Gus Hall.<sup>1065</sup>

Also the FBI's honorable director J. Edgar Hoover took part in the discussion considering the possible COINTELPRO operation related to Barbara Conway. While doing so, Hoover summarized his view of Gus Hall by saying that "obviously his purpose is to provide financial security for his loved ones, regardless of the cost to the Communist Party, USA or to any individual members thereof".<sup>1066</sup>

Sometimes, of course, the Solo funds were used to improve Gus Hall's personal standard of living. In September 1960, for example, Gus Hall was bought a brand new Mercury car for \$2 400.<sup>1067</sup> In June 1961, \$2 000 was used to buy a lot adjacent to the Hall family house in Yonkers.<sup>1068</sup> Such a purchase was surely a great delight for Hall as gardening was one of

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FBI's Chicago office to the Director on June 5, 1968; OSD, part 124, page 156 and memo from C.D. Brennan to W.C. Sullivan on June 10, 1968; OSD, part 124, page 174.

1063 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on June 13, 1967; OSD, part 115, pages 140-142.

1064 Letter from the Director to FBI's Chicago office on June 21, 1967; OSD, part 115, pages 180-181. The word "daughter" has accidentally been left unredacted in the document, which ascertains Hall's daughter's role in the complex arrangement. The expression "apple of one's eye" had also been used in a Chicago office report to Hoover less than a month earlier when describing the relationship between Gus Hall and his daughter. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 19, 1967; OSD, part 114, pages 176-178.

1065 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 24, 1968; OSD, part 124, pages 90-92 and report from FBI's New York office to the Director on June 13, 1968; OSD, part 124, pages 181-182.

1066 Letter from the Director to FBI's Chicago office on May 27, 1968; OSD, part 124, pages 97-98. Another example of how Gus Hall took care of the well-being of his family members was the arrangement through which he acquired a pure-bred Arabian stallion from Poland to his brother's horse farm in Northern Minnesota. I will study this extraordinary arrangement – and FBI's planned countermeasures – in Appendix 3 of this study.

1067 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on October 4, 1960; OSD, part 25, page 39. Hall seems to have liked new cars, because according to an FBI memo, in the spring of 1963 he was already driving a new car, "a fawn-colored, four-door, 1962 Oldsmobile". See *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.*, 6. *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.* can be found in Ernie Lazar's collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 2).

1068 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on June 30, 1961; OSD, part 31, page 69. After Soviet subsidies to the CPUSA were disclosed, some party members assumed that Gus Hall bought the Yonkers house with Soviet money. This, however, does not seem to be the case. Hall bought the house in June 1960, but no Solo funds were used at that time to finance the purchase.

his favorite hobbies.<sup>1069</sup> A great amount of Solo funds were also used for Hall's first-class airline tickets as he and his wife never flew in economy class.<sup>1070</sup>

How was Gus Hall able to use the Solo funds like they were his own? The answer lies in the high level of secrecy regarding the money transfers from the Soviet Union. The whole arrangement was known only to three people in the CPUSA: Gus Hall and the Childs brothers. Many top functionaries and trusted insiders within the CPUSA surely knew that the party was receiving money from abroad, but all the details and actual subsidy sums were only known to three individuals.<sup>1071</sup>

The money transfers were shrouded in secrecy already before Gus Hall rose to the top position in the party in December 1959. Apparently only Hall's predecessor Eugene Dennis and Morris Childs knew about the transfers before March 1960, when the new general secretary was informed about the arrangements.<sup>1072</sup> After hearing a report on the arrangements, Hall told Dennis and Childs that he was thereafter willing to play an active role in matters related to the funds. Hall also said that he wanted to create an auditing committee in order to control the funds. An auditing committee was set up and Morris Childs became its chairman.<sup>1073</sup> However, in March 1962 Childs told that the auditing committee had not met within almost a year.<sup>1074</sup> It is likely that the existence of the committee was soon forgotten – at least its meetings are not mentioned in the Operation Solo documents.

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He did discuss using Solo funds for the down payment of the house with Jack Childs, but this never happened. According to an FBI memo, the purchase price of the house was \$22 000. It remains unclear, how Hall was able to finance the purchase. See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on June 10, 1960; OSD, part 20, page 182 and memo from F.J. Baumgardner to A.H. Belmont on July 7, 1960; OSD, part 20, pages 210-211 and *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.*, 6. *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.* can be found in Ernie Lazar's collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 2).

1069 Hall even wrote about his gardening hobby in the party newspaper. See *Daily World*, June 6, 1979.

1070 At the same time, other party leaders – with exception of Morris Childs – were required to fly in economy class. This was the case, for example, when Gus Hall, Elizabeth Hall, James Jackson and Danny Rubin flew from New York to Budapest in February 1968. The Halls flew in first class whereas Jackson and Rubin did not. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on April 1, 1968; OSD, part 122, page 147 and Barron 1995, 138.

1071 In March 1962 Morris Childs estimated that at least party insiders such as Isadore Wofsy, Phil Bart, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, James Jackson, Irving Potash and Jack Stachel knew that the party was receiving money from the Soviet Union. This knowledge was, however, on a very general level and no details were known. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 29, 1962; OSD, part 41, pages 186-189.

1072 In addition to Eugene Dennis and Morris Childs, surely also Jack Childs could to a large extent figure out what was taking place as he received large amounts of money first from the Canadians and later from the Soviets.

1073 The members of the auditing committee are not known, but most likely they were Childs, Hall and Dennis, because in their March 1960 meeting they also decided that no one else should know about the funds coming from the Soviet Union. Later, however, also Jack Childs was more thoroughly informed about the apparatus. After Eugene Dennis's death in January 1961, there were, again, only three people who had detailed knowledge about the money transfers. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 29, 1962; OSD, part 41, page 184.

1074 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 29, 1962; OSD, part 41, page 182.

Hall had to take extra measures to hide the flow of Soviet money from the ordinary party members. To explain where the money came from, he sometimes referred to generous U.S. benefactors. Sometimes he even staged fictitious donations. “On one occasion, Hall withdrew \$3 000 from the Solo funds, travelled to Minnesota on personal business and, upon his return to New York, turned in the same \$3 000, stating he had received it as a contribution from a Minnesota ‘friend’ of the Party”, an FBI report tells us.<sup>1075</sup>

Hall also constantly created an impression that the party was in a financial crisis although the Childs brothers were keeping hundreds of thousands of dollars in their secret depositories. By doing so he wanted to prevent the party members from becoming financially complacent – which of course could have been a considerable risk if the members would have known about the Soviet subsidies.<sup>1076</sup>

In addition to his CPUSA comrades, Hall also often told the Soviets that the party’s financial situation was critical and it severely needed extra, or at least expedited, funding though this was not the case. For example, in September 1964 Hall asked the Soviets for an extra \$100 000 in order to take part in the election campaigning. At the same time the Childs brothers had \$663 000 in their possession in New York City and Chicago.<sup>1077</sup> In a similar manner in January 1966 Gus Hall asked the central committee of the CPSU to expedite their money deliveries because “we finished 1965 totally without funds and with little reserve”. Meanwhile the Childs brothers had almost \$1.2 million.<sup>1078</sup>

As many party insiders had a hunch of the Soviet money flow, Gus Hall had to guard it carefully. When communicating with the Soviets, he repeatedly pointed out that the Soviets should discuss financial issues only with the Childs brothers. Not even Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who after Eugene Dennis’s death in 1961 became the chairwoman of the party, was included in the three-person group taking care of CPUSA’s main source of financing.<sup>1079</sup> Gurley Flynn did not see this as a problem<sup>1080</sup>, but some other leading members of the party would indeed have wanted to take part in the financial dealings with the Soviets.

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1075 Memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 24.

1076 Memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, pages 6 & 24.

1077 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on October 8, 1964; OSD, part 70, page 29.

On November 23, 1964 Gus Hall sent the Soviets an eloquent thank you message for the \$100 000 the CPUSA had received five days earlier. Four days later he withdrew \$12 000 from the Solo funds for his personal use. In the end of November 1964 the Childs brothers had \$671 000 in their depositories. See memo from C.F. Downing to Mr. Conrad on November 23, 1964; OSD, part 72, page 174 and memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on December 8, 1964; OSD part 73, page 54.

1078 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on January 10, 1966; OSD, part 98, page 65 and report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on January 24, 1967; OSD, part 98, page 104.

1079 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 9, 1962; OSD, part 40, page 35 and letter from the Director to FBI’s Chicago office on May 1, 1962; OSD, part 42, page 3. Looking at the Operation Solo documents, it seems that Gus Hall did not hold Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in very high regard and did not want to give her a significant role in the party. For Hall Flynn’s position as a chairwoman seems to have been a kind of an honorary position given to her as a sign of respect in the end of her long career. Hall said, for example, that Flynn “was not too astute politically speaking”. Hall’s and Flynn’s relationship will be examined more closely later in this study in a subchapter dealing with Hall’s relationship with female CPUSA members. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on September 23, 1960; OSD, part 25, page 57.

1080 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 9, 1962; OSD, part 40, page 35.

Especially James Jackson, the chief editor of *The Worker*, was eager to involve himself in the financial arrangements. In November 1961 he angered Gus Hall thoroughly by discussing the CPUSA's finances in Moscow and, while doing so, saying that Morris Childs was not the right man to take care of the financial matters. According to Hall, Jackson was trying to "feather his nest" by trying to obtain the control of the money transfers.<sup>1081</sup> Three years later, in September 1964, Jackson again baffled his comrades by walking into the Soviet United Nations mission in New York City and asking for Soviet financial support for *The Worker* newspaper. This angered the Soviets who wanted to carry out all money transfers and related communications through established channels.<sup>1082</sup>

While Hall actively kept others away from the financial dealings, his grip of the Soviet funds was not very tight. He did not, for example, keep any records of the incoming money or the CPUSA's internal transactions.<sup>1083</sup> On the contrary, Hall – who had learned the secretive customs of international communism already in Moscow's International Lenin School in the early 1930s – actively wanted to avoid having any written documentation of the clandestine money trafficking. Nor did he want to discuss the issue aloud, as he was afraid of the FBI's bugging devices. Hall's "conspiratorial manners" were described as follows in an FBI report:

When Hall is notified of the receipt of Solo funds by one of the Bureau informants, no words are spoken between them. The informant merely writes a figure on a scrap of paper, Hall glances at it and immediately destroys the slip.<sup>1084</sup>

Such conspiratorial manners, of course, made it difficult for Gus Hall to have a firm grasp of the party's overall financial situation. This was noticed by FBI agents who in their report in September 1965 wrote that "it is doubtful that he [Hall] is fully aware of the large amount of unused Party funds now being held in secret depositories by the two Bureau informants".<sup>1085</sup>

Hall's lax approach to the party finances could also be seen when the party applied for subsidies from the CPSU. In the fall of 1964, for example, Hall promised to supply Morris Childs with "specific facts and figures" which would help Childs to formulate a proper subsidy request to the CPSU. This, however, never took place. Morris Childs reported:

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After his discussion with Flynn, Hall "was convinced that she was not interested in any phase or in any of the details in regard to such fund matters".

1081 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on November 27, 1961; OSD, part 34, page 197.

1082 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on October 5, 1964; OSD, part 70, page 60 and report from FBI's New York office to the Director on December 3, 1964; OSD, part 73, page 8. For Soviet reactions, see also report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on January 12, 1965; OSD, part 80, page 81. As result of this kind of incidents, the relationship between Gus Hall and James Jackson was tense. Their relationship will be examined more closely later in a subchapter discussing the relationship between Hall and African American CPUSA members.

1083 According to Morris Childs, he was the only person who kept any records on the Soviet money deliveries and their usage. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 29, 1962; OSD, part 41, page 187.

1084 Memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 23. See also report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 29, 1962; OSD, part 41, page 187.

1085 Memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 5.

Just prior to CG 5824-S\*'s departure on the 17<sup>th</sup> Solo Mission, he again asked Hall for some specific assistance but Hall's response at this time was "Use your good judgment, I will rely upon you". As a result, when CG 5824-S\* arrived in Moscow in December 1964, the source was committed to make a request for one and one-half million dollars and was without a factual basis for supporting this request.<sup>1086</sup>

As a result, Childs thus wrote a "fictitious budget" using arbitrary figures which were not based on the actual party activities. After Childs had returned to the United States from his mission, he gave Hall the fictitious budget he had created. He told Hall that he should study the request budget closely in case he needed to discuss the topic with the Soviets. Hall agreed to this and apologized to Childs for the lack of his assistance in formulating the budget figures. He acknowledged that Childs had done "a hell of a job" when creating the fictitious budget.<sup>1087</sup>

The budgets were not the only fictitious pieces of information that Gus Hall provided to the Soviets. The CPUSA's membership figures were systematically embellished when they were discussed in Moscow. In July 1960, for example, when Morris Childs was preparing for his mission to Moscow, Hall told him to tell the Soviets that the CPUSA has 8 000 – 10 000 members. According to the FBI agents, Hall wanted to "impress the Russians" with such an inflated figure. The FBI's estimate of the CPUSA's membership in March 1960 was about 5 400. Also Phil Bart, the CPUSA's organizational secretary, had recently said that the party had about 5 000 members.<sup>1088</sup>

Similarly, in March 1966 when Gus Hall briefed his party comrades who were about to travel to the Soviet Union, he said that they should not "play down the current role of the CPUSA in the United States" and that they "should not be too technical in regard to membership figures".<sup>1089</sup> The main financier of the party was to be kept satisfied, even though it meant stretching the limits of truth.

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<sup>1086</sup> Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on February 25, 1965; OSD, part 82, page 195.

<sup>1087</sup> Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on February 25, 1965; OSD, part 82, page 196. The fall of 1964 was not an exception, but Morris Childs had to draw up fictitious budgets without Gus Hall's assistance more or less every year. In October 1965, for example, Hall told Childs that "the specific matter of presenting the financial request for the \$1,000,000, and specifically how it will be justified, was being left to the discretion of the CPUSA representative who would carry out the discussions with the Russians". See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 21, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 129.

<sup>1088</sup> Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on July 11, 1960; OSD, part 20, page 234 and memo from F.J. Baumgardner to A.H. Belmont on July 13, 1960; OSD, part 20, page 241. See also memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on October 9, 1961; OSD, part 34, page 16. According to FBI estimates, the CPUSA membership did not grow rapidly in the early 1960s – rather the opposite occurred. In the summer of 1963, the party had less than 4 500 members which was "about 5 percent of its strength in the years after World War II". See Weiner 2012, 236.

<sup>1089</sup> Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 22, 1966; OSD, part 101, page 8.

### 3.2.3. Re-launching the daily party paper

When Morris Childs discussed the financial issues with the Soviets, he usually requested for a sum which was about \$500 000 higher than what the CPUSA eventually received. In its subsidy requests the CPUSA usually promised to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars into youth work and work among African Americans, but little of these promises ever materialized, although the party received almost or over one million dollars from the Soviet Union from 1964 onwards.

Likewise the CPUSA was somewhat slow to proceed with one of its main projects of the 1960s, namely the re-launching its daily newspaper. The party had had a daily newspaper from 1924 until 1958 when – in the middle of an earth-shaking party crisis – *Daily Worker* was turned into *The Worker* which came out weekly. A daily newspaper had always been crucial feature of a true Leninist vanguard party.<sup>1090</sup> Before the launching of the *Daily Worker* in 1924, Grigory Zinoviev, as head of the Comintern, had urged the CPUSA to launch an English-language daily and in the 1960s Mikhail Suslov did the very same thing. In December 1964, as Suslov discussed CPUSA financing with Morris Childs, he emphasized that re-establishing a daily paper was a “most important and urgent” matter. “How can you function without one?” Suslov asked Childs.<sup>1091</sup>

Gus Hall had taken steps to re-launch a daily newspaper already years before Suslov’s comments. In September 1961 *The Worker* had become a twice-weekly publication.<sup>1092</sup> In October 1961, as the CPUSA was requesting for funds from the CPSU for the year 1962, re-establishing the daily paper was one of the main targets for the requested funds.<sup>1093</sup> Similarly, a daily newspaper was among the main targets for requested funds in December 1963 when the CPUSA requested funds for the year 1964.<sup>1094</sup> When the CPUSA requested for \$1.5 million for 1965, \$300 000 of this sum was aimed at re-launching the daily paper.<sup>1095</sup>

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1090 Lenin himself was very well aware of the significance of the media in advocating and implementing revolution. He emphasized the role of the party newspaper already in 1901 in one of his articles in the *Iskra* newspaper of the Russian socialist emigrants: “The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer. In this last respect it may be likened to the scaffolding round a building under construction, which marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, enabling them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organized labor.” See Lenin 1961, 22.

1091 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 12, 1965; OSD, part 80, page 81.

1092 Zipsper 1981, 192.

1093 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on October 9, 1961; OSD, part 34, page 15. The CPUSA requested for \$750 000 but in the end received only \$172 000. As the December 1962 documents are missing from the Operation Solo documents, we have to rely on John Barron’s book when looking for the total figure of Soviet subsidies in 1962. See Barron 1995, 339.

1094 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on December 12, 1963; OSD, part 51, page 214. The CPUSA requested for \$1 250 000 but received in the end only \$780 000. See memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on January 13, 1964; OSD, part 56, page 30 and memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on January 7, 1965; OSD, part 80, page 107.

1095 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 12, 1965; OSD, part 80, page 80.

Re-establishing a daily paper was not, however, an unproblematic undertaking. When the CPUSA's current bi-weekly newspaper was running a deficit, how could one launch a daily paper? As the CPUSA's 1966 subsidy request to the CPSU showed, *The Worker* and the party's West Coast newspaper *People's World* together ran an annual deficit of \$250 000.<sup>1096</sup> Considering this, launching a daily paper would require massive subsidies. Not surprisingly, in November 1967, as the party requested subsidies from the CPSU for the following year, it asked for \$700 000 to cover the deficit caused by the daily paper.<sup>1097</sup>

The new daily paper – renamed *Daily World* – was finally launched in July 1968 after long preparations.<sup>1098</sup> As the Operation Solo documents have only been published until August 1968, one cannot estimate the economic strain the newspaper caused the CPUSA. It is, however, likely to be significant. According to a CPUSA estimate, the annual costs of producing a daily paper would be \$600 000 a year.<sup>1099</sup> The income generated by such paper would be, however, much less. A small communist newspaper was not hugely popular among advertisers and circulation income was likely to remain modest. In 1963, for example, the circulation income of *The Worker* was about \$90 000. The total printing of the paper was 16 000 copies. The paper was heavily subsidized by the Soviet Union as 5 000 copies of every issue – almost every third copy – was sent to the Soviet Union. In addition to that, other communist countries ordered about 1 500 copies of the paper. Following all this, little more than half of *The Worker's* circulation income came from the Soviet Union and other communist countries.<sup>1100</sup>

The national executive board of the CPUSA was well aware of the financial strain created by daily paper. In order to ease the strain, the board in April 1967 suggested that “qualitative changes” would be made in the party paper in order to get more advertising revenue. According to the executive board, the new paper should not be confined to the role of a party organ, but room should be left for others in the American left: “While the paper would be the voice of our Party, it would also reflect the views and activities of other forces on the left. By this method room would be left for cooperation between all left forces.”<sup>1101</sup>

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1096 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 31, 1966; OSD, part 109, page 201.

1097 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on January 4, 1968; OSD, part 119, page 235. The total request of the CPUSA for the year 1968 was \$2 140 000, but according to Barron, it received only \$1 140 000. See Barron 1995, 340.

1098 Zipsper 1981, 192. Preview edition of the new daily was distributed at the CPUSA convention in New York in early July 1968. It included, among other things, an interview with North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh. See *The New York Times*, July 3, 1968 and July 5, 1968. Paul Buhle erroneously claims in his *Daily Worker* entry in the *Encyclopedia of American Left* that *Daily World* was launched already in 1967, but this was not the case. See *Encyclopedia of American Left*, 177.

1099 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 3, 1967; OSD, part 113, page 37.

1100 Memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 25. The circulation of *The Worker* had indeed come down from the top years of the *Daily Worker* which in 1940, for example, had a circulation of almost 49 000. See Levenstein 1974, 235.

1101 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 3, 1967; OSD, part 113, page 37. Hall's comment concerning the cooperation between all left forces is slightly surprising in light of what happened in *Political Affairs* in the early 1960s. Hall removed Herbert Aptheker from *Political Affairs* because he wanted to open the pages of the journal to a broader spectrum of leftist writers, not just to CPUSA members. The idea of cooperation between the various groups in the political left was cherished by many of Gus Hall's opponents in the CPUSA. Critics like Peggy Dennis and



The vision of the national executive board never materialized. Just few weeks after the launching of the *Daily World* the Soviet Union and four other Warsaw Pact countries occupied Czechoslovakia. This incident divided the American left and – to some extent – also the CPUSA. The new daily paper did not reflect the opinions of the left as a whole but rather served as the mouthpiece of the CPUSA leadership who uncritically accepted the Warsaw Pact occupation.<sup>1102</sup>

### 3.2.4. Eager investor in a communist party

While being a devoted communist, Gus Hall well understood the financial possibilities offered by American capitalism. During the early 1960s he started seeing investments in private companies as a potential source of extra income for the party. In 1963, as the Childs brothers had already gathered more than \$300 000 in their depositories, Hall started suggesting that Morris Childs should invest some of this money. The FBI had, however, instructed Childs that their top informer should not make any such investments under his own name. Instead, Childs should find trusted persons under whose names the investments could be made. Such people were not easy to find, which made the situation somewhat complicated for Childs.<sup>1103</sup>

Childs's procrastination angered the impatient general secretary who had authorized Childs to invest up to \$100 000. When Hall heard in October 1963 that no investments had been made, he blew up. "We can't let this money just sit", Hall reproached Childs.<sup>1104</sup> Childs felt that his role as the controller of the Soviet money flows was in jeopardy because of Hall's anger. Two weeks after the discussion with Hall, Childs invested \$7 500 of Solo funds in a housing development project of a Chicago company. As he had not had time to locate a trusted person under whose name he could make the investment, Childs made it under his own name, contrary to FBI's instructions.<sup>1105</sup>

Investments became a source of constant tension in the relationship between Hall and Childs. Hall pressured Childs to invest Solo funds and Childs, fearing that he would lose his position as Hall's right hand, reluctantly did as he was told. In November 1964 Childs invested \$20 000 in the Chicago-based First National Bank of Lincolnwood and in February 1965 \$11 500 in a Chicago jewelry business. Such a sluggish investment pace served also

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Dorothy Healey thought that Gus Hall's political line had isolated the CPUSA from other groups in the left. See Dennis 1977, 290; Healey & Isserman 1993, 185 and Murrell 2015, 146.

1102 Interestingly, *People's World*, the CPUSA's West Coast weekly, criticized the occupation of Czechoslovakia. Not surprisingly, this thoroughly angered Gus Hall and in 1969 Al Richmond, the chief editor of *People's World*, had to resign from his post. See Richmond 1972, 413 and Healey & Isserman 1993, 232.

1103 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 14, 1963; OSD, part 49, pages 14-15.

1104 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 14, 1963; OSD, part 49, page 14.

1105 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on November 7, 1963; OSD, part 49, pages 121-122.

the FBI's interests as the enrichment of the CPUSA was something the Bureau was trying to avoid.<sup>1106</sup>

Although the CPUSA's investment business grew only slowly, Hall seems to have believed in its future. When briefing Morris Childs before his trip to the Soviet Union in October 1965, Hall told him to tell the Soviets that they would have to support CPUSA only for a few more years. After that time the party would be making enough money that it would no longer need Soviet support.<sup>1107</sup>

By the spring of 1966, Hall seems to have been completely enchanted by the investment possibilities offered by the capitalist system. As he was briefing CPUSA members travelling to the Soviet Union, he wanted them to tell the Soviets that they are "darn fools" if they do not set up an investment agency in the United States since "there is a lot of money which can be made in the investment field". At the same time, he requested for a \$500 000 investment loan for the CPUSA. The request for an investment loan got an icy response from Boris Ponomarev, the head of the international department of the CCCPSU, who did not share Gus Hall's vision of a communist party being a major investor in capitalist enterprises.<sup>1108</sup>

During the latter half of the 1960s the investments of Morris and Jack Childs and Morris's wife Eva led them to serious trouble which also caused a considerable headache for the FBI agents handling Operation Solo as they feared that the incident might jeopardize the whole operation. The Childs brothers and Eva Childs had invested considerable sums of money in a company called Hercules Galion Products.<sup>1109</sup> Following the instructions of Gus Hall, some of the Hercules Galion investments were also made in the name of his daughter Barbara.<sup>1110</sup> The name of this person and her relation to Hall was redacted from most Operation Solo documents, but one unredacted document page reveals that this person was Hall's daughter.<sup>1111</sup>

After the prices of Hercules Galion stocks had fluctuated sharply in 1965 and 1966, the American Stock Exchange in April 1967 announced that it was investigating the trading with these and some other stocks which had possibly been manipulated. The investigation was conducted in cooperation with Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) – which regulates the securities business in the United States – and the U.S. Attorney's office. The

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1106 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on December 2, 1964; OSD, part 74, pages 3-6 and report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 3, 1965; OSD, part 83, pages 15-18.

1107 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 21, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 129. It is unclear whether Hall really believed in what he said or whether he only tried to please the Soviets.

1108 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 16, 1966; OSD, part 100, pages 127-128 and report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on June 6, 1966; OSD, part 106, page 194.

1109 Memo from C.D. Brennan to W.C. Sullivan on April 24, 1967; OSD, part 113, pages 162-163. Hercules Galion was a manufacturer of dumptruck bodies and hoists.

1110 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 11, 1967; OSD, part 114, pages 139-142.

1111 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 19, 1967; OSD, part 114, pages 176-178. Interestingly, the Solo document also tells us that Gus Hall considered Barbara to be "the apple of his eye".

American Stock Exchange suspected that the stock manipulators had artificially raised the prices of the stocks of Hercules Galion and some other companies and had made a sizeable profit by selling their holdings afterwards.<sup>1112</sup>

Based on the Operation Solo documents, the SEC investigation concerning the Hercules Galion stocks was a considerable source of stress for both Hall and Morris Childs. Hall was worried about a major embarrassment if his name could be connected to shady securities transactions. Childs worried that the mess could be a “devastating blow” to Operation Solo if the investigation resulted in any publicity to Hall.<sup>1113</sup> Eva Childs’s brother Irving Projansky, who was the chairman of the board of the First National Bank of Lincolnwood, was one of the prime suspects in the case, which did not make the situation any easier for Hall and Morris Childs.<sup>1114</sup>

Morris and Eva Childs were interviewed by the SEC investigators in July 1967. The interview may have relieved the stress of Morris Childs and Gus Hall a little, because Morris and Eva Childs were told that they were not the target of the investigation and there was no allegation of wrongdoing on their part. They were also happy to notice that no questions were asked by anyone concerning Morris Childs’s communist background or the large amounts of funds that had passed through Morris Childs’s bank account into the First National Bank of Lincolnwood, some of which were CPUSA funds which Childs was investing for the benefit of the family of Gus Hall. “The entire thrust of the questioning was directed at developing information incriminating Irving Projansky in an alleged manipulation of Hercules Galion stock”, Morris and Eva Childs told their FBI handlers.<sup>1115</sup>

In August 1967, 16 defendants were indicted in the Hercules Galion case. Unlike Irving Projansky and his son Stuart, Morris and Eva Childs were not among the defendants. While they were not indicted, they were, however, named as so-called coconspirators in the case. The FBI had – on the very top level of the organization – weighed different scenarios in case Morris and Eva Childs would have been indicted. Director J. Edgar Hoover had instructed that in such a case nothing should be done to forestall any prosecution.<sup>1116</sup>

The legal process related to the Hercules Galion stock manipulation continued until September 1971 when four men, Irving Projansky among them, were sent to prison for fraud and conspiracy to manipulate the price of a listed stock. Projansky received a one-year prison sentence and two years probation. According to the prosecutor, the public was defrauded of about \$4 million by the maneuvers of Projansky and his associates.<sup>1117</sup>

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1112 *The New York Times*, April 22, 1967 and *Wall Street Journal*, April 24, 1967. The price of Hercules Galion share rose from \$6.75 in July 1965 to a high of \$14.50 in early 1966 before collapsing to \$5.00 later in 1966. See *The New York Times*, September 18, 1971.

1113 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on May 11, 1967; OSD, part 114, pages 139-142.

1114 Memo C.D. Brennan to W.C. Sullivan on July 20, 1967; OSD, part 116, page 72.

1115 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on August 2, 1967; OSD, part 116, pages 146-149.

1116 Memo from C.D. Brennan to W.C. Sullivan on August 23, 1967; OSD, part 116, pages 200-201. The names of Morris and Eva Childs were mentioned in a *Wall Street Journal* story concerning the indictments, but their links to the CPUSA were not mentioned. See *Wall Street Journal*, August 24, 1967.

1117 *The New York Times*, September 18, 1971.

### 3.2.5. Seizing every opportunity

Gus Hall did not only want to make money through investing Solo funds, but he was actively looking for different ways to increase the party's earnings. In the fall of 1963, for example, Hall presented an idea of the CPUSA renting an exhibition booth at International Pavilion of the forthcoming New York World's Fair. According to Hall, toys and handicraft products from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries would be sold at the exhibition booth which would be operated by the CPUSA personnel. Hall thought that such an operation would be "a very profitable venture" since none of the socialist countries were renting booths at the World's Fair.<sup>1118</sup> As renting a booth for the duration of the Fair would cost \$38 000, Hall hoped that the Soviet Union would subsidize the venture. He asked Morris Childs to travel to the Soviet Union to discuss the business proposal with the Soviets.<sup>1119</sup> Hall strongly believed in the appeal of Soviet and Eastern European toys and handicrafts among American consumers, because he expected the monthly sales of the booth to be around \$100 000. Profit after expenses – which would have gone to the CPUSA – would have been around \$20 000, Hall estimated.<sup>1120</sup>

For unknown reasons, Hall's business idea apparently never materialized. He did send a message to the Soviets concerning the idea in late September or early October 1963<sup>1121</sup>, but there is no further information on the exhibition booth rental in the Operation Solo material.

Renting an exhibition booth at New York World's Fair was not Hall's only business idea related to Eastern European products. In the spring of 1966, long-time party member Max Weinstein made a two-month tour in Eastern Europe, covering the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, the Soviet Union, Poland and Yugoslavia. The purpose of Weinstein's tour – during which he, among other places, visited the Leipzig Fair – was to negotiate business arrangements which could financially benefit the CPUSA. The U.S. party hoped to find competitive products in Eastern Europe which it could import and sell in the United States. Whether such products were found during Weinstein's tour is unclear, as the endeavor was not discussed further in the Operation Solo documents.<sup>1122</sup>

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1118 J. Edgar Hoover's letter to the attorney general on September 23, 1963; OSD, part 48, page 102.

1119 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on September 23, 1963; OSD, part 48, page 131.

1120 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on September 24, 1963; OSD, part 48, pages 160-162. In addition to Soviet and Eastern European toys and handicrafts, the booth could have sold African products such as leopard skins. It could have also displayed Soviet and Eastern European products and provided favorable propaganda from these countries. See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on September 17, 1963; OSD, part 48, pages 164-166 and report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on September 18, 1963; OSD, part 48, page 135.

1121 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on October 3, 1963; OSD, part 49, pages 35-36.

1122 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 1, 1966; OSD, part 100, pages 61-68. Weinstein's trip to Eastern Europe was not a brand new idea, because Morris Childs had discussed this kind trip to Poland with Polish diplomats in Moscow already in November 1963. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on December 16, 1963; OSD, part 52, pages 72-75.

Sometimes Hall's love of money led to conflicts and confusion as happened in the case of Carlton Goodlett. In the spring of 1965, African American party members Claude Lightfoot, William Patterson and William Taylor made – without Hall's knowledge – a recommendation to the Soviets that Carlton Goodlett, a San Francisco -based African American doctor, newspaper publisher and civil rights campaigner, would be a recipient of the Lenin Peace Prize.<sup>1123</sup> This angered Hall, who thought it was foolish to recommend any non-party persons as a peace prize recipient. He wanted to make sure that the CPUSA gets its share of the \$25 000 prize money.<sup>1124</sup>

Hall first contacted a female member of the Women's Strike for Peace Committee – whose name is redacted from the Operation Solo documents – and asked whether she would accept the Lenin Peace Prize if it was awarded to her. She was deeply moved and honored by Hall's question, but she had to refuse because she was afraid that receiving such a prize could lead to “misunderstanding and trouble”.<sup>1125</sup>

Hall's second suggestion was Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the party's former chairman. She would receive the prize posthumously because she had died in Moscow in September 1964 at the age of 74. However, Hall gave up the idea after Arnold Johnson, the CPUSA's director of public relations, had discussed the issue with the CPUSA's lawyer John Abt. If the Lenin Peace Prize would be awarded posthumously to Gurley Flynn, Abt said, it would appear that the Soviets were subsidizing the CPUSA. Abt also pointed out that there was a possibility that Flynn's relatives might succeed in obtaining the prize money if they took the matter to court. Instead of Gurley Flynn, Hall decided to recommend Herbert Aptheker, Marxist historian and a long-time party member, as the recipient. In late March 1965 Hall informed the Soviets that the CPUSA's recommendation for the Lenin Peace Prize for 1964 is “Dr. Herbert Aptheker instead of Carlton Goodlet”. He also sent the Soviets a brief biography of Aptheker.<sup>1126</sup> According to Hall, Aptheker would donate the entire \$25 000 to the CPUSA, if he was awarded the prize.<sup>1127</sup>

Hall's message concerning Herbert Aptheker came too late, however. In mid-April the Soviets informed Hall that the nomination of candidates had already been closed and it would be impossible to convince the Lenin Peace Prize committee members to discuss new candidatures. Carlton Goodlett, “an active participant in the world peace movement”,

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1123 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 19, 1965; OSD, part 84, page 204. In addition to being a family doctor, Carlton Goodlett (1914-1997) ran a publishing company which published weekly newspapers for African American readers in Northern California. He was an active member in the Democratic Party and ran for governor of California in 1966. He was also a leading member in the World Peace Council which followed the policies of the Soviet Union. For more on Carlton Goodlett, see, for example, his obituary in *The New York Times*, February 2, 1997.

1124 J. Edgar Hoover's letter to the Attorney General on April 2, 1965; OSD, part 84, page 111. The FBI also informed the White House about the CPUSA's candidate for the Lenin Peace Prize. See J. Edgar Hoover's letter to president's special assistant Marvin Watson on April 2, 1965; OSD, part 84, page 100.

1125 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on March 26, 1965; OSD, part 84, page 103.

1126 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on March 26, 1965; OSD, part 84, pages 103-104. Aptheker's brief biography can be found in report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 6, 1965; OSD, part 84, pages 150-151.

1127 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 6, 1965; OSD, part 84, page 151.

had been nominated a Lenin Peace Prize candidate. The Lenin Peace Prize committee paid attention to Goodlett's "considerable contribution" to the work of the World Peace Council. The committee also pointed out that Goodlett's possible Lenin Peace Prize might support "the democratic forces and Negro people of the USA".<sup>1128</sup> Hall commented on Goodlett's nomination bitterly. He did not think that a businessman like Goodlett was a suitable candidate for such a precious award. In Hall's opinion, "by nominating a Negro as a recipient of the Lenin Peace Prize, the Soviets were 'aping' the bourgeois who nominated Martin Luther King as the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize".<sup>1129</sup>

Apparently Hall's bitter comments had some impact, because on the very next day the Soviets sent Hall a brief message stating that "Committee on Lenin Peace Prize postponed discussion on Goodlett and Herb Aptheker for one year".<sup>1130</sup> Hall remembered this and in February 1966 he sent the Soviets a suggestion that they should "give serious consideration to Comrade Herb Aptheker receiving the Lenin Peace Prize". In Hall's opinion, Aptheker's activities within the international peace movement – especially in relation to the war in Vietnam – deserved special consideration.<sup>1131</sup> However, Aptheker's peace prize never materialized – but neither did Goodlett's.<sup>1132</sup>

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1128 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 13, 1965; OSD, part 84, pages 173-174.

1129 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 19, 1965; OSD, part 84, page 204. Martin Luther King had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

1130 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 20, 1965; OSD, part 84, page 187.

1131 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on February 25, 1966; OSD, part 100, page 46.

1132 All in all, it can be said that Gus Hall's views were not closely followed by the Lenin Peace Prize committee. In March 1968 the committee was considering nominating scientist and peace activist Linus Pauling as a peace prize candidate. Hall said then that he was "dead set" against Pauling receiving any prize. Instead of Pauling, Hall supported another possible American candidate, pediatrician and peace activist Benjamin Spock. Spock never received the Lenin Peace Prize, but Pauling was awarded the prize in 1970. For Hall's views on Pauling and Spock, see report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 22, 1968; OSD, part 122, page 30.

## 4. Gus Hall's position on the map of international communism

### 4.1. Balancing between Manhattan and Moscow – Gus Hall's relationship with the Soviet Union

#### 4.1.1. Obtaining the correct party line

In 1959 when Gus Hall started campaigning for the post of general secretary of the CPUSA, the Soviet Union did not play a big role in his writings. In the two articles he wrote for the *Political Affairs* journal in 1959 he barely mentions the first socialist state. Instead he wrote about the CPUSA's need to break out from its isolation and about the boldness needed to probe new paths, new ideas and new angles.<sup>1133</sup> The party had to look in all directions, because Marxism-Leninism was not something narrow and sectarian, but rather “a guide with which you can open up the whole world”.<sup>1134</sup> According to Hall, the CPUSA was not a foreign agent but a product of American industrial and political system, just like mass production, the 50 states and the Bill of Rights – and jazz and blues and baseball.<sup>1135</sup>

In a similar vein, the Soviet Union and the entire international communist movement were mentioned only in passing in Hall's lengthy keynote speech which he gave on the first day of the CPUSA's 17<sup>th</sup> national convention on December 10, 1959. Instead, Hall discussed the internal situation of the party and the political situation in the United States and how the party needed to “break the bonds of its isolation and become more and more a factor in the life of our nation”.<sup>1136</sup>

Although Hall did not pay very much attention to international communism or to the Soviet Union in his speech, he exceptionally quoted Mao Tse-tung and, equally surprisingly, Feodor Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* when he was discussing the internal situation in the CPUSA.<sup>1137</sup> Although the so-called Sino-Soviet split had not yet publicly erupted in late 1959, a Mao quotation in such a speech was nevertheless unexpected. And a lengthy quotation from *Notes from the Underground* was also unanticipated, as the gloomy and pessimistic novel was not considered a major literary masterpiece among communists.<sup>1138</sup> Considering all this, it was not surprising that when a Russian translation

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1133 Hall 1959b, 21-23.

1134 Hall 1959b, 24.

1135 Hall 1959a, 1-3.

1136 Hall 1960b, 3.

1137 Hall 1960b, 15-18. This may be the only speech or article in which Gus Hall quotes Mao – at least the writer of this study has not seen a Mao quotation made by Hall in any other context.

1138 The general attitude towards Dostoyevsky in the Soviet Union was critical because “Dostoyevsky's philosophy and Soviet ideology were fundamentally incompatible”. Both Lenin and Maxim Gorki were highly critical of Dostoyevsky, who was considered a petty bourgeois writer and “an offspring of the inhuman capitalist system”. *Notes from the Underground* was seen as perhaps

of Hall's speech was published in the Soviet journal *Kommunist*, it came out in a severely edited form. The Soviet editors removed, among other things, Hall's Mao and Dostoyevsky quotations and also his highly positive comments concerning the Cuban revolution.<sup>1139</sup>

The heavy editing of Hall's December 1959 keynote speech may have – at least partly – contributed to the visible change in the tone of his speeches and writings after he became the general secretary. Looking at Hall's writings in 1960, one gets the impression that he was now actively following what was going on in the Kremlin. In one of the first articles he published in the *Political Affairs* journal as general secretary, Hall studied closely a recent Soviet book *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*, which had been written under the editorship of another communist with a Finnish background, namely Otto Kuusinen. Kuusinen was a familiar character to Hall, as he had been listening to Kuusinen's lectures in Moscow's International Lenin School in the early 1930s. Hall did not spare his words when praising the book. According to him, *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism* was "Marxism-Leninism at its best" and "a brilliant, a live, a fresh – yes, an exciting book". In Hall's opinion this "masterpiece of Marxist theory" showed how the theory had been "developed and deepened after it was freed from the fetters and restrictions placed there by the cult of the individual".<sup>1140</sup>

Another example of Hall's new tone is his September 1961 article, in which he compared the publication of the CPSU's new party program to the world's first manned spaceflight by Yuri Gagarin. Hall, devoted admirer of natural sciences and scientific worldview, had no problems linking these two "dramatic developments":

And, as we Marxists know, it is not an accident of life that both of these developments, both of these rockets and missiles zoomed to the horizon from the Soviet Union, the center of the Socialist world. The 25-hour, half million mile space journey was a giant step in man's effort to conquer the cosmos. The draft program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union sets up the broad outlines of man's breakthrough from barriers set up by a class society.<sup>1141</sup>

Although Gus Hall could not travel to the Soviet Union because of the passport restrictions due to McCarran Act trials, he was well aware of the Soviet thinking from the very beginning of his term as the general secretary of the CPUSA. Jack Childs visited Moscow in February 1960, and Morris Childs made similar trip in July and again in the fall of 1960. For Hall, a

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the worst example of Dostoyevsky's bourgeois writing and its main character was considered a passive egocentric social degenerate which indeed could not serve as a model for the Soviet citizen. For more on Soviet attitudes towards Dostoyevsky, see, for example, Seduro 1957, 83-93 & 295-305. 1139 *The New York Times*, April 17, 1960. *The New York Times* reporter was not surprised of the removing of the Dostoyevsky quotation as "Soviet ideologists regard Dostoyevsky as one of the most troublesome figures in the Russian cultural heritage since much of his writing was anti-totalitarian in spirit".

1140 Hall 1960c, 47-51. In his article, Hall erroneously calls Kuusinen's book with a title "Foundations of Marxism-Leninism". According to Jukka Renkama's thorough study on Otto Kuusinen, *The Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism* "represented an important step away from number of Stalinist dogmas", but at the same time it did not fully reflect the Kuusinen's reformism. Privately Kuusinen was willing to eliminate the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat from the CPSU ideology but he could not advocate such a radical idea in a CPSU textbook. See Renkama 2006, 146-148.

1141 Hall 1961a, 2.



central purpose of these trips was to obtain information on the current line of the CPSU. This was spelled out clearly when Hall briefed Morris Childs before his departure to the Soviet Union in July 1960. According to Childs, Hall appeared “to be anxious to obtain the current party line from the Kremlin in order to give proper guidance to and direction to the CP, USA and to strengthen the ties of the CP, USA with other communist nations”.<sup>1142</sup> According to another FBI document, Hall told Childs in late June that during his Moscow visit he needed to “obtain the current political line of the CP, SU and any instructions from the CP, SU for the CP, USA”.<sup>1143</sup>

The Moscow trips of the Childs brothers were of course not the only way of receiving information concerning Soviet views. Operation Solo documents include examples of cases of Gus Hall sending his article drafts through Jack Childs to Moscow for a preliminary review or Hall directly asking for Soviet views on certain issues.<sup>1144</sup> In December 1963, for example, Hall openly asked for the Soviet opinion on the situation in Venezuela. Hall was about to deliver a speech at CPUSA’s national executive committee meeting. Hall was highly critical of the Cuban-supported guerillas fighting in Venezuela and he planned to reproach them in his report to the national executive committee. According to Hall, these guerillas were “petty-bourgeois anarchistic political juvenile delinquents”.<sup>1145</sup>

The Soviets answered to Hall’s question shortly before the national executive committee meeting. In their opinion such criticism would not be expedient as it could lead to the deterioration of relations between the CPUSA and the Venezuelan, Cuban and other Latin American parties. The CPUSA should also consider the wider international perspective, the Soviets pointed out, as such criticism “could provide the Communist Party of China with an occasion for further accusations and attacks upon the CPUSA and furnish support for pro-Chinese activists in the USA”.<sup>1146</sup> Hall seems to have followed the Soviet instructions. At least in the printed version of his speech, Hall does not mention Venezuela or Cuba at all.<sup>1147</sup>

The Soviets naturally also informed Gus Hall about their undertakings on their own initiative through the Solo apparatus. Hall gave a great importance to these announcements. This could be well seen for example in February 1964, when Morris Childs flew on a Sunday evening from Chicago to Minneapolis only to deliver a Soviet letter concerning Sino-Soviet relations to Gus Hall. Childs met Hall late on Sunday evening in the Minneapolis’s Ritz-Sheraton Hotel where Hall was staying. After reading the letter Hall said that there was nothing surprising or shocking in the letter.<sup>1148</sup> He expressed his satisfaction with the fact

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1142 Memo from F.J. Baumgartner to A.H. Belmont on July 1, 1960; OSD, part 20, page 205.

1143 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on July 11, 1960; OSD, part 20, page 231.

1144 Gus Hall sent preliminary drafts of his articles or statements concerning China to Moscow in October 1963 and March 1964. Hall did not explicitly ask for CPSU’s comments, but it is likely that that was the purpose of sending these texts. See Gus Hall’s message to CCCPSU on October 2, 1963; OSD, part 49, page 35 and Gus Hall’s message to CCCPSU on March 11, 1964; OSD, part 58, page 172.

1145 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on December 9, 1963; OSD, part 51, page 74.

1146 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on December 18, 1963; OSD, part 53, pages 67-68.

1147 Hall’s speech was published in January 1964 as a pamphlet *Which Way U.S.A.? The Communist View*.

1148 In their letter to fraternal parties the CPSU leaders declared that they had ceased publishing

that The Worker's forthcoming article about the Sino-Soviet dispute was "directly in line with the CPSU position".<sup>1149</sup>

Hall could not always receive vital information on the CPSU's line from Moscow. One such occasion was the removal of Nikita Khrushchev from his leading position in October 1964. Hall was profoundly angered by the fact that the Soviets did not inform their U.S. comrades about the leadership change. This is well reflected by Hall's letter to Leonid Brezhnev which he sent to Moscow through the clandestine apparatus on October 19, 1964, five days after the Khrushchev's removal. Instead of polite diplomatic phrases Hall began his very first letter to Brezhnev by chiding the new leadership somewhat directly:

The world understands and accepts the fact that there can be differences that can and even do result in changes in leadership and that people do get old and sick. What it does not understand is any vagueness or an element of mystery while such changes are made. Any period of unexplained vagueness could result in damaging the prestige of the Soviet Union.<sup>1150</sup>

According to another FBI document, Hall was "extremely upset" by Khrushchev's removal. The U.S. media was eager to hear Hall's comments concerning the Soviet leadership change, but the leading American communist could not issue a statement because he was "ill informed".<sup>1151</sup> When Morris Childs met Gus Hall in New York on October 16, 1964, he was "in a very foul and ugly mood". "Hall complained bitterly that he had been embarrassed and placed in a very bad position because the CPSU had failed to notify this Party [CPUSA] of the pending changes", Childs reported to his FBI handlers. In Hall's opinion the Soviets should have informed the CPUSA in advance of the upcoming change.<sup>1152</sup> Hall did not hide his irritation from the new Soviet leader. "This lack of knowledge and background does not add to the prestige of Communist leaders in capitalist countries who should be at all times some step ahead of the press", an angry Hall wrote to Brezhnev.<sup>1153</sup>

Although Hall was thoroughly angered by the CPSU's lack of communication around Khrushchev's removal and he criticized the Soviets strongly for this, he soon came back into the fold. In November 1964, just a month after Khrushchev's removal, Hall was already ready to reproach Hyman Lumer's editorial comment in *Political Affairs* in which Lumer criticized the CPSU and praised Khrushchev. In his editorial Lumer stated that

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polemical material concerning the Chinese and urge that the Chinese CP would do the same. See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on February 18, 1964; OSD, part 58, pages 1-2.

1149 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on February 18, 1964; OSD, part 58, page 4.

1150 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on October 19, 1964; OSD, part 70, pages 153-154.

1151 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on October 23, 1964; OSD, part 70, page 218.

1152 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 20, 1964; OSD, part 71, pages 14-15. Because of Khrushchev's removal, Hall wanted to send Morris Childs to the Soviet Union as soon as possible. Childs traveled to Moscow on October 19, 1964.

1153 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on October 19, 1964; OSD, part 70, page 154. Gus Hall's wrath seems to have continued for several days. When he met with Jack Childs on October 28, 1964, Hall was again "in a particularly bad mood". He said that "he will never forgive those 'G-- d--- lousy Russians' for their lack of trust in him and also in leaders of the other CPs throughout the world". "He said he could not understand why he had not received advance information with respect to the change in the Soviet political situation." See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on October 29, 1964; OSD, part 72, page 99.

Khrushchev's departure from the CPSU's top position was not – as the CPSU had stated – a resignation because of age and health but rather “a change of leadership stemming from sharp criticism of Khrushchev by his colleagues, centering chiefly on his methods of work”.<sup>1154</sup> Hall's criticism of Lumer may have been influenced by Morris Childs who said to Hall that Lumer's editorial comment might create serious problems for him when he negotiates for assistance funds on behalf of the CPUSA for the year 1965. The editorial was also criticized in the CPUSA's national board meeting after which Lumer personally wrote an apology note to the CPSU. According to Lumer, the editorial was written and sent to printers before the CPUSA was informed about the details of Khrushchev's resignation and was thus outdated when the November issue of *Political Affairs* was published. He apologized for “unduly sharp” language of the editorial and wrote that CPUSA will do what it can to correct “false impressions” created by the text.<sup>1155</sup>

#### **4.1.2. Fighting for unity and proletarian internationalism**

Although Gus Hall occasionally lost his temper with the Soviets, there was no doubt who Hall saw as the true leaders of the international communist movement. As a young communist in the 1920s and 1930s Hall had grown up in a Comintern-led movement which – at least when compared to the inflamed situation in the 1960s – was unified and resolute. The Comintern, in turn, was unquestionably a tool of the Soviets through which they controlled the international communist movement. According to Operation Solo documents, Hall seems to have seriously missed the unity of the Comintern decades. He was a devoted proponent of increased co-operation among communist parties which in the 1960s was not the most fashionable way of thinking.

For example, Hall warmly supported all attempts to hold international conferences of communist and workers' parties – similar to the one arranged in November 1960 when 81 parties from all around the world gathered in Moscow. In Hall's opinion, not only the Sino-Soviet dispute but also the barbarous acts of the United States in Vietnam made the international conference of world's CPs most urgent.<sup>1156</sup>

But arranging international conferences was not enough. In the spring of 1964 Hall proposed forming a new Communist International in order to solve the ongoing dissension in ranks of the international communist movement. The Comintern – formed originally

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1154 Lumer 1964, 1. Expressing disbelief in CPSU's official explanation of Khrushchev's departure was of course a somewhat sharp statement but otherwise Lumer's editorial is rather moderate and acceptable.

1155 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on November 24, 1964; OSD, part 72, pages 236-237. Morris Childs discussed Lumer's editorial with Mikhail Suslov when they met in Moscow in late December 1964. Suslov referred to Lumer's letter of apology and considered the case closed. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on January 14, 1965; OSD, part 80, page 161.

1156 According to CPUSA, the disunity of the international communist movement had encouraged the United States to commit its shameful acts in Vietnam. The party believed that “unified communist opposition” could – together with the mass protests of the American people – reverse the U.S. policy. See J. Edgar Hoover's report to the attorney general on May 4, 1965; OSD, part 85, page 41.

in 1919 – had been dissolved by Joseph Stalin in 1943 as a gesture of good will towards the Soviet Union’s western WWII allies. It was followed by the Cominform in 1947, but the new organization never achieved great significance. It became dormant after Stalin’s death in 1953 and was formally dissolved in April 1956 as Khrushchev’s gesture of reconciliation with Yugoslavia. According to Hall, “the formation of a new Comintern would be the only way to prevent the communist parties of the world, including the CPUSA, from ‘drifting’”. In his opinion, the formation of a new Comintern would be “the best method of fighting the Chinese”. CPUSA’s national board unanimously accepted Hall’s proposal in March 1964. Hall planned to submit his proposal to the CCCPSU and expected the Soviets to receive his proposal enthusiastically.<sup>1157</sup>

This was not the case, however. The Soviets answered to Hall’s proposal later in the spring when Jack Childs visited Moscow. According to Vitaly Korionov, the first deputy of Boris Ponomarev, the head of the CCCPSU’s international department, it would have been premature to discuss setting up a new Comintern at that moment within the international communist movement. A number of fraternal parties would not accept the idea and the Chinese would surely accuse the Soviets of a new move in the Sino-Soviet dispute. In addition to that, Korionov pointed out that the editorial board of *World Marxist Review* journal – composed of dozens of fraternal parties from around the world – was an already existing form of international coordination and cooperation.<sup>1158</sup> Later during Childs’s visit Ponomarev also commented on Hall’s proposal by saying that “this is not feasible at the moment”.<sup>1159</sup>

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1157 Report of the FBI’s New York office to the Director on March 6, 1964; OSD, part 58, pages 165-166. This was not the first time Hall had suggested setting up a new international communist organization. In October 1963 as Hall briefed Morris Childs before his trip to the Soviet Union, he brought up the idea of establishing a full-time international body which would be made up of representatives of various parties. This organization could help parties which are “in a bad state of affairs” – such as the parties in New Zealand, Japan and Indonesia were in Hall’s opinion – and could “swing them away from the Chinese”. According to Hall, the organization would not interfere in the internal affairs of the parties which are following the Marxist-Leninist line but would work with the parties in times of difficulty. See report by FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 5, 1963; OSD, part 49, pages 171-172.

1158 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 11, 1964; OSD, part 64, page 73. In her study of Western European CPs and the Czechoslovak crisis in 1968, Maud Bracke briefly discusses the role of *World Marxist Review* which was also known as *Problems of Peace and Socialism*. According to Bracke, the Prague-based journal was in practice edited by the international department of the CPSU and it “informed communist parties worldwide of the orthodox developments in Marxism-Leninism and of ‘the right line’”. Bracke writes: “Publications in this review were often a way for Soviet and East European leaders to criticize deviating communist parties or to announce changes in the general line. Although its influence diminished in the 1970s, in the 1960s, generally, the journal was still a highly important means of communication and control.” See Bracke 2007, 59.

1159 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 11, 1964; OSD, part 64, page 73. In October 1964 Morris Childs discussed the Comintern issue with Boris Ponomarev in Moscow and received a somewhat similar answer: “Upon requesting the reaction of the CPSU to this proposal by Gus Hall, the CPUSA representative was informed that the CPSU did not foresee the probability that any such permanent bodies or conferences would be set up for some time to come.” See report of the FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 3, 1964; OSD, part 72, page 31.

Although Hall's proposal got a somewhat cool reception among the Soviets, he did not discard the idea. Four years later, at the consultative conference of world's CPs in Budapest, Hall strongly spoke for an "organized system for exchanging experiences and for consultations between parties". This time, however, Hall emphasized that he was not proposing a "resurrection of the Comintern or Cominform".<sup>1160</sup> According to Hall, the incoherent and quarrelsome state of the international communist movement was a consequence of the insufficient co-operation between the parties:

The absence of a world system of relations between parties has not been an answer. For each party to retreat into its autonomous shell is also not an answer. These approaches are not meeting the problem. This is retreating from the problem. [...]  
We are for the unity of all Communist and Marxist Parties. [...] It is also our opinion that militant talk about a struggle against imperialism, while resisting every form of world Communist unity, is a contradiction in terms. Any serious approach to the struggle against imperialism inevitably leads one to new approaches to the question of World Communist Unity. [...]  
We cannot get the full benefits [...] as long as the world Communist movement remains formless and divided.<sup>1161</sup>

According to Morris Childs, Hall's speech in Budapest was "most extreme". Calls for organized co-operation between world's CPs were rare in the Budapest conference. "The only other party to raise something like this was the Iraqi CP", Childs reported later. "It is not believed likely that the world communist movement will accept the proposal by Gus Hall for the establishment of an organization for the exchange of views", Childs summarized.<sup>1162</sup>

The Soviet reaction to Hall's speech was in principle positive but the Soviets were also realists. Establishing a new, permanent organizational structure for the world communist movement was not feasible in the prevailing international situation:

The CPSU accepts Hall's thesis wholeheartedly but in order not to aggravate relations with more liberal CPs both in the East European socialist bloc and in the Western world and in order not to jeopardize chances for the International Conference in Moscow, has not deemed it advisable to take such a position either publicly or in such international forum as the current round of conferences in Budapest.<sup>1163</sup>

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1160 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 7, 1968; OSD, part 121, page 41.

1161 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 7, 1968; OSD, part 121, page 43-49.

1162 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on March 21, 1968; OSD, part 122, page 20.

1163 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on July 26, 1968; OSD, part 125, page 178. Although the Soviet reaction to Hall's initiative again was somewhat lukewarm, he continued advocating "some method of exchanges and discussion between the parties". He did that, for example, in a 1969 article which he wrote in order to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Comintern. According to Hall, the Comintern was "one of the finest achievements of the world revolutionary movement". In his opinion, there was no need for a Comintern-type world organization, but there was "a growing feeling that the world revolutionary movement needs to find new forms of relationships that reflect today's reality". "The set of circumstances are different, but the need for closer relations, stronger bonds and firmer unity of the world Communist-Marxist movement remains an urgent task", Hall wrote. See Hall 1972a, 319-320 & 328.

Advocating a “new Comintern” or “an organized system for exchanging experiences and for consultations between parties” were not the only ways for Gus Hall to try to restore the unity of the international communist movement. In addition to these initiatives, Hall also advocated establishing a “world communist news agency” to keep all CPs and their press fully informed on the situations and struggles of all other Parties.

Hall advocated this idea especially during his two-and-half-month world tour in the fall of 1966 after he finally had received a passport after the McCarran Act trials. According to Hall, he got the idea for the news agency while visiting the CPs of Uruguay and Finland during the first weeks of his journey. While visiting Finland in late August 1966, Hall was impressed by the achievements of the Finnish CP which had 41 seats in the 200-seat Finnish parliament and had two ministerial posts in the coalition. According to Hall, the Finnish CP was “a mature Party from which we have much to learn.”<sup>1164</sup>

According to Hall, he did not know anything about the situation of the Finnish CP before his visit to Helsinki. This, in Hall’s opinion, showed that “there is an urgent need for a world communist news agency”. “Such a news agency would improve the unity of the world communist movement and give it a sense of oneness”, Hall said to his CPSU hosts later when visiting the Soviet Union.<sup>1165</sup>

During the first weeks of his trip, Hall had also noticed that “only a few parties are aware of the struggles of the Communist Party, USA in the field of civil rights and other matters”, advancing another reason for a common communist news service.<sup>1166</sup>

Hall promoted his news agency idea actively when he met the socialist leaders during his tour of Eastern Europe. According to Operation Solo documents, he discussed the idea at least with Leonid Brezhnev, Nicolae Ceausescu, Wladyslaw Gomulka, Antonin Novotny and Yumjaagin Tsedenbal, the general secretary of the Mongolian CP. Hall was irritated by the fact that the CPUSA was often “at the mercy of the bourgeois press” as there was no communist news provider available.<sup>1167</sup> He pointed out that the agency should be the most modern, “utilizing all the latest and most modern techniques and equipment”. According to Hall, *World Marxist Review* – the theoretical journal of the international communist movement – could not, as a periodical magazine, play the role of a news agency. Neither could TASS fulfill the function as it was the news agency of the Soviet government.<sup>1168</sup>

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1164 *The Worker*, September 4, 1966. The communist-dominated Finnish People’s Democratic League actually had three ministerial posts in the coalition, but one of the ministers – Ele Alenius, who was a minister at the ministry of finance – was only a member of the FPDLP but not of the communist party.

1165 Report on the discussions between Gus Hall and CCCPSU representatives in late summer 1966, dated October 4, 1966; OSD, part 108, pages 34-35. The cover page of this document is missing.

1166 Report on the discussions between Gus Hall and CCCPSU representatives in late summer 1966, dated October 4, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 34. The cover page of this document is missing.

1167 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on October 19, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 231.

1168 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on October 21, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 198.

Most of the communist leaders with whom Hall discussed the idea reacted positively to his proposal. Not all, however. Both Nicolae Ceausescu and Wladyslaw Gomulka expressed reservations concerning the proposal. Gomulka warned that establishing such an agency “would stimulate the charge that it was passing on ‘orders from Moscow’”.<sup>1169</sup> Ceausescu compared the possible agency to *World Marxist Review* which he criticized for spreading one-sided information and for not being “a free forum”. “In regard to your proposal, Comrade Hall, for an international press agency, we believe it is a good idea. However we wonder if it will become an objective distributor of information or will it become like the *World Marxist Review*”, Ceausescu replied.<sup>1170</sup>

Despite the positive reactions from socialist leaders to Hall’s news agency proposal, no steps were taken to actually establish such an institution. Hall did not, however, give up advocating the idea. In his “most extreme” speech at the consultative conference of the world’s CPs in Budapest in February 1968 – in which he also suggested setting up an “organized system for exchanging experiences and for consultations between parties” – Hall again brought up the idea of a communist news agency:

Without a system of information about struggles, movements and political developments on a world scale we will continue to limp in all areas. [...]

We need urgently a new, modern, professionally competent progressive world press service.

The Communist newspapers, even the poorest of them could become overnight the most authoritative, most informative papers of their countries if they had the services of such a press service. They would become the source for a new sense of internationalism.<sup>1171</sup>

Again, Hall’s proposal did not lead to any further actions, but he did not give up advocating the idea. In early June 1968 – as Morris Childs was about to travel to Budapest to a meeting preparing for an international conference of communist and workers’ parties in Moscow later in 1968 – Hall told Childs that his idea of establishing an international communist press bureau needed to be somehow discussed in the preparatory meeting or at the Moscow conference itself. Hall wanted a document to be prepared on the subject, even if it would be handled separately from the general resolution of the international conference.<sup>1172</sup>

After taking part in the preparatory meeting in Budapest, Childs traveled to Moscow where he could discuss the news agency proposal with Boris Ponomarev. According to him, the CPSU had made a number of inquiries on this subject but it was found that very few parties were in favor of this idea. “Although the CPSU supports this proposal, none of the other big CPs do so”, Ponomarev told Childs. According to Ponomarev, establishing such a bureau and running it for a year would cost \$2-\$3 million and the parties supporting the idea do

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1169 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on October 21, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 200.

1170 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 171-172.

1171 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on March 7, 1968; OSD, part 121, pages 45-46.

1172 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on June 17, 1968; OSD, part 124, page 203.

not have enough money for this purpose. Ponomarev said he was not rejecting the idea but he wanted Gus Hall to know that financing such a bureau would be “a big problem”.<sup>1173</sup>

Setting up a “new Comintern” or a communist news agency were not the only ways in which Gus Hall tried to promote the unity of the international communist movement. As a former member of the Young Communist League – the CPUSA’s youth organization – Hall well understood that the future of the international communist movement depended on the communist youth growing up in the youth organizations. Having closely followed the 1960s youth unrest in the United States and elsewhere, Hall suggested that the communists would hold an international meeting to discuss organizational problems among youth. In Hall’s opinion, the youth of the 1960s was very different from earlier generations, thanks to technological development and changes in the world situation. Finding a proper method for youth work was “an acute problem” for CPUSA, Hall told Brezhnev in September 1966.<sup>1174</sup>

Hall presented his idea of holding a youth-related meeting of CPs to several socialist leaders during his grand tour in Europe in the early fall of 1966. In the summer of 1968, as the world’s CPs were preparing for the international Moscow conference scheduled for November and December, Hall again brought up the idea. He told Morris Childs to suggest to a preparatory meeting that a youth-related meeting could be arranged in connection with the Moscow conference.<sup>1175</sup> According to Hall, youth were strongly influenced by petty-bourgeois ideas not only in the capitalist countries but in socialist countries as well. When visiting Moscow, Morris Childs discussed the idea with Boris Ponomarev who thought it was “not a bad idea at all”. Ponomarev thought, however, that the youth meeting could be arranged after the Moscow conference, not as a part of it.<sup>1176</sup>

Because of the Czechoslovakian occupation in August 1968, the international conference of communist and workers’ parties had to be postponed until June 1969. Considering how actively Hall had advocated his ideas of communist news agency and a youth-related meeting of CPs it is surprising that he did not mention these proposals in his lengthy speech at the June 1969 international meeting.<sup>1177</sup> Perhaps Ponomarev’s reserved response had discouraged Hall. It is also possible that Hall no longer considered such proposals topical after the events in Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovakian occupation had further shattered the unity of the international communist movement which had been already fragmented and quarrelsome before August 1968.

As we can see, Hall was indeed a staunch defender of the cohesion of the international communist movement. This attitude could well be heard in his parlance. The word “unity” and the expression “proletarian internationalism” indeed had a central role in Hall’s vocabulary in the mid-1960s. Sometimes Hall even slightly overused these terms, as he

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1173 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on July 17, 1968; OSD, part 125, pages 66-67.

1174 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on October 19, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 231.

1175 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on June 17, 1968; OSD, part 124, page 203.

1176 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on July 17, 1968; OSD, part 125, page 66.

1177 See *International Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties*, 425-442.



may have done in his letter to Leonid Brezhnev and CPSU's 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress in March 1966. In his three-and-half-page letter Hall mentioned the word "unity" no less than 28 times in the following manner:

At this point in world affairs, at this stage in history, if one is to choose one key concept, one cardinal thought, one essential factor, that more than any other will determine all matters related to social progress, without question that concept would be summed up in one word: unity. Unity in struggle. Unity of all anti-imperialist forces, unity of the world's forces for peace, unity in the ranks of the countries of socialism, unity in the ranks of the world's Marxist parties, unity in the ranks of the working class. All experience of struggle, the successes and the failures all cry for unity. This is the supreme need of the moment. The molding of such unity is the most revolutionary task of the moment.<sup>1178</sup>

In the original version of the letter Hall does not mention the words "proletarian internationalism". However, after the letter had already been sent to the CPSU through Jack Childs, Hall decided that he wanted to add two sentences to the letter including these words. "The struggle for unity is the struggle for a proletarian internationalism. A rejection of unity in struggle is the rejection of proletarian internationalism", Hall wrote. Hall told Hyman Lumer, one of CPUSA's representatives at the CPSU's 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress, to make sure that these sentences were added to the letter.<sup>1179</sup>

Hall used the concept of proletarian internationalism especially frequently during his grand tour in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe in the early fall of 1966.<sup>1180</sup> According to Morris Childs's reports, this concept came up in discussions with almost all socialist leaders with whom Hall met during his trip. After a meeting with Wladyslaw Gomulka, the two leaders "underlined the need for close cooperation based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism".<sup>1181</sup> When discussing with the Venezuelan CP

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1178 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on March 25, 1966; OSD, part 100, page 150. Underlining by Gus Hall. The Soviets thought highly of Hall's letter and published it the CPSU's *Pravda* newspaper in early April 1966. See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on March 25, 1966; OSD, part 101, page 61. The concept of unity was prominently featured also in Hall's speech at the consultative meeting of CPs in Budapest in February 1968. He mentioned the word no less than 35 times in his speech on February 27, 1968. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 7, 1966; OSD, part 121, pages 32-50.

1179 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on March 30, 1966; OSD, part 101, page 51.

1180 Hall's trip to the Eastern Europe in 1966 was of course not the first context in which he used the concept of proletarian internationalism. It was mentioned already, for example, in his 1963 pamphlet *The Only Choice – Peaceful Coexistence*. He saw the willingness of the socialist countries to help Cuba and the communist volunteers in the Spanish civil war as products of same idea, proletarian internationalism. In his pamphlet, Hall strongly criticized Chinese dogmatism, which he saw as a consequence of "narrow nationalism". This nationalism had also weakened the idea of proletarian internationalism. For Hall, national interest and proletarian internationalism were perfectly combinable. A socialist country should not look at issues only from its own narrow viewpoint but should look at the larger whole of socialist countries. A socialist country could best serve its own interests through seamless cooperation with other socialist countries. "There is no contradiction between the national interest of a country and proletarian internationalism. [...] Proletarian internationalism and national interests merge and strengthen each other in the lands of socialism", Hall wrote. See Hall 1963, 42-43.

1181 Letter from the Director to FBI's Chicago office on November 3, 1966; OSD, part 109, page 104. The FBI translated into English the articles that were published in the Polish newspapers



*The CPUSA's general secretary Gus Hall and chairman Henry Winston in Moscow at the CPSU's 24th congress in April 1971. While being in prison in the early 1960s Winston had lost his eyesight due to a brain tumor. According to the communists, the negligence of the prison authorities in treating Winston's tumor led to the loss of eyesight.*

Source: Alamy

leader Jesus Faria in Moscow, Hall criticized Cubans of “petty-bourgeois nationalism” and emphasized that proletarian internationalism was very important for the CPUSA.<sup>1182</sup> To the Mongolian leader Yumjaagiin Tsendenbal Hall said that “proletarian internationalism is more than mere words, it is an indispensable weapon in our struggle”.<sup>1183</sup> With Bulgaria's leader Todor Zhivkov, Hall issued a joint statement in which the two parties promised to

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concerning Gus Hall's visit in September 1966.

1182 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 22, 1966; OSD, part 108, pages 208-209. During this discussion Hall also pointed out that Fidel “Castro's starting point is not the working-class”. By saying this Hall referred to the fact that Castro was originally a son of a wealthy farmer.

1183 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 20, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 255.

“continue to work in future for strengthening the unity of the international communist movement on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism”<sup>1184</sup>

Hall and other leaders may have been inspired to use the concept of proletarian internationalism partly because it had been used frequently by the Soviet leaders during the year.<sup>1185</sup> Proletarian internationalism had been emphasized during the 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the CPSU in late March and early April.<sup>1186</sup> In July the CPSU’s *Pravda* newspaper had stated that the party and the Soviet Union were firmly following the course of “strengthening unity on the principled basis of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism”<sup>1187</sup> Later when Gus Hall met with Leonid Brezhnev in late September, he told Hall that the Soviet Union characterizes its international policy as “proletarian internationalism based on Marxism-Leninism and the teachings of Lenin”<sup>1188</sup>

What did Hall mean with this concept? For a thorough-going answer we will have to look at Hall’s 1970 article which focuses on proletarian internationalism. Hall summarizes internationalism in the following manner:

Internationalism is class consciousness that reaches beyond national boundaries. Internationalism correctly sees the oneness of the national self-interest of one’s class and the worldwide nature of the class struggle. [...] More than ever the class enemy is international. Without the concept of internationalism the working class cannot rise above the limits set by narrow nationalism. [...] Without internationalism the working class cannot successfully challenge and defeat capitalism which operates and coordinates its activities on a world scale. [...] Without the concept of internationalism, imperialism cannot be crushed. The concept of internationalism is a working-class response to imperialism.<sup>1189</sup>

According to Hall, proletarian internationalism rests on “the unity of self-interests of all workers of all lands”. “It rests on the Marxist-Leninist concept that there is a basic class

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1184 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on October 28, 1966; OSD, part 109, pages 157-158.

1185 Maud Bracke examines briefly the concept of proletarian internationalism in her study of Czechoslovakian occupation and Western European CPs. In her opinion, it became widely used during Leonid Brezhnev’s reign. According to Bracke, the concept of internationalism had been introduced by Karl Marx and had been frequently used by V. I. Lenin, but it was not an “explicit element of the regular doctrinal arsenal of Soviet theorists and policy makers” before the death of Stalin. Bracke writes: “Under Khrushchev it was used somewhat more often, although only marginally to justify the invasion of Hungary in 1956. It was only under Brezhnev, and particularly after the Czechoslovak crisis and with the formulation in late 1968 what became known in the West as the Brezhnev Doctrine, that proletarian internationalism became a *consciously* established element of Soviet communist theory.” See Bracke 2007, 14 (emphasis in original).

1186 According to Morris Childs, the Soviets were very careful to avoid all signs of nationalism or chauvinism during CPSU’s 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress. Instead, they emphasized the idea of proletarian internationalism. “As an illustration, it should be noted that not once during the entire Congress was the Soviet national anthem played or sung. Instead, it was the recording of the Internationale which was played to the Congress from Luna 10 which had been launched into lunar orbit on April 3, 1966”, Childs reported to the FBI. See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on May 26, 1966; OSD, part 106, page 122.

1187 *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs 1966*, 33.

1188 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on October 19, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 237.

1189 Hall 1972a, 288-289.

self-interest that is worldwide”, Hall writes. Hall points out that the worldwide self-interest of the working class exceeds the self-interest of the working class of one single country. Hall refers to Lenin according to whom proletarian internationalism demands that “the interests of the proletarian struggle in any one country should be subordinated to the interests of that struggle on a world-wide scale”.<sup>1190</sup>

Interestingly, the frequent usage of the concept of proletarian internationalism by Hall and other socialist leaders in 1966 caught also Morris Childs’s attention. When the FBI asked Childs to write down his thoughts concerning the U.S. foreign policy toward the Soviet Union, Childs wrote a 55-page memo, in which he also analyzed the concept of proletarian internationalism. According to him, the concept of proletarian internationalism was a tool with which the CPSU could keep other communist parties in line:

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union camouflages its drive for national advantages and its national interest under the banner of ‘proletarian internationalism’. This is a traditional holdover from the days when the Soviet Union was the only communist state and all parties used the same slogan ‘Defend the Soviet Union’.<sup>1191</sup>

#### **4.1.3. “No agents of Moscow”**

While Gus Hall was among the world’s communist leaders a staunch proponent of proletarian internationalism and the unity of the international communist movement, in the United States he went through a lot of trouble to present the CPUSA as an independent actor with only very limited connections to the Soviet Union and to the international movement. Sometimes this led to awkward situations and even to minor diplomatic discord with the Soviets.

This attitude could be seen, for example, when the Soviets asked the CPUSA to send students to study at the Higher Party School for International Students in Moscow. The topic was discussed repeatedly during the 1960s. Hall was opposed to sending students to Moscow because in his opinion sending students to Moscow would “reflect the Soviet

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<sup>1190</sup> Hall 1972a, 291-292. The Lenin quote can be found in Lenin 1967, 425-426. In his article, Hall strongly attacked the Chinese concept of “progressive nationalism”. According to Hall, “progressive nationalism” was a non-working-class and petty-bourgeois concept which had replaced proletarian internationalism and had “led the Chinese leadership into a swamp of opportunism”. “There is nothing progressive about Mao’s ‘progressive nationalism’”, Hall wrote. “The concept of proletarian internationalism must always remain dominant in a working-class Marxist party”, he pointed out. See Hall 1972a, 294-295.

<sup>1191</sup> Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on May 1, 1967; OSD, part 114, page 82. Childs’s views are somewhat similar to the views of political scientists. According to Bernard S. Morris, proletarian internationalism meant unconditional support for the Soviet Union. According to Margot Light, proletarian internationalism meant “recognition of Soviet leadership”. In Maud Bracke’s opinion, the doctrine of proletarian internationalism “served primarily as a theoretical device for justifying submission to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and as justification for the latter’s dominance over, and right to interfere in, the communist parties of the world”. See Morris 1966, 40 & 44; Light 1988, 171 and Bracke 2007, 15.

influence on the CPUSA”.<sup>1192</sup> CPUSA was not the only Western party which was skeptical regarding the Moscow school. Also the British CP was reluctant to send its members to the school. Much like the U.S. communists, the British thought that the party could be accused of being a “foreign agent” if it sent students to Moscow.<sup>1193</sup> However, eventually the British CP decided to also send British students to the school. After that the CPUSA was – according to the Soviets – the only party which had not sent students to Moscow.<sup>1194</sup>

The CPUSA was not encouraged to send students to Moscow after hearing critical comments concerning the school from its Canadian students. They found the school too academic and spending too much time on irrelevant matters. Its point of view was too “Russian”. In addition, the school had shortages of teaching material. Meanwhile, the Soviets seemed eager indeed to get U.S. students in their school. They offered them shortened courses, a curriculum especially tailored for U.S. needs and a possibility to send American teachers to the school. These offers, however, did not make Gus Hall any more responsive to the school.<sup>1195</sup> Instead of sending students to Moscow, Hall preferred organizing a joint party school with the Canadian CP.<sup>1196</sup> This plan eventually materialized in the beginning of 1966, but the school had to be discontinued already in February as there was a suspected U.S. intelligence agent among the students.<sup>1197</sup>

In September 1966, as Hall was travelling in the Soviet Union, he also visited the Moscow party school which by then had been renamed as International Lenin School. According to the Soviet hosts, the CPUSA was one of the few parties in the world which was not sending students to the school. After visiting the institution Hall said that he might give consideration to sending some U.S. students to the school.<sup>1198</sup> It seems, however, that Gus Hall never actually changed his mind regarding the Moscow school. At least in the Operation Solo documents there are no signs of the CPUSA sending students to the school.<sup>1199</sup>

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1192 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on January 6, 1964; OSD, part 53, page 125. Interestingly, when discussing sending students to Moscow, Hall said that he had never been impressed with the former Lenin School. According to Hall, no less than 90 per cent of the U.S. students of the Lenin School had later defected from the party. Such a figure is, of course, a gross exaggeration but it may reflect Hall’s feelings after William Odell Nowell – who had studied in the Lenin School together with Hall – had testified against him in the Smith Act trial in 1949. See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 24, 1962; OSD, part 40, page 129.

1193 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on April 3, 1961; OSD, part 29, page 152. Also the Canadian CP leader Leslie Morris said that his party “cannot get away from the charge of being labeled foreign agents as long as they continue sending their people to the Soviet Union for training”. See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on July 8, 1964; OSD, part 66, page 88.

1194 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on December 7, 1961; OSD, part 34, page 230.

1195 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on April 3, 1961; OSD, part 29, page 152.

1196 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on January 6, 1964; OSD, part 53, page 125.

1197 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on February 21, 1966; OSD, part 100, page 17 and memo from J.A. Sizoo to W.C. Sullivan on February 28, 1966; OSD, part 100, page 31.

1198 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 109, page 39.

1199 According to long-time CPUSA member Betty Smith, Hall’s reluctance to send American students to study in Moscow could be explained by his own Lenin School experiences in the 1930s. “He didn’t think it was useful for us”, Smith said about the Moscow school for foreign communists. “I don’t think he was that enamored of it. [...] I think he thought that they were a bit out of touch with reality there”, Smith described Hall’s attitude towards Lenin School. See interview with Betty Smith in New York City, August 2007.

Hall's reserved attitude towards interaction with the Soviets could also be seen in June 1964 when the U.S. Supreme Court decided that the passport statutes of the McCarran Act were unconstitutional. These statutes had limited the Moscow trips of the U.S. communists. For Hall the Supreme Court decision was not only a positive occurrence, for he was he worried that the decision would result in a "mass exodus" of the CPUSA leaders to the Soviet Union:

Hall was most apprehensive that such action would convey the public impression of "Moscow agents running to get their instructions".

In the view of the foregoing, Hall plans to advise the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that only those comrades from the Communist Party, USA who have received official credentials from the Communist Party, USA, are to be treated as "guests" by the Soviets.<sup>1200</sup>

In a similar way, Hall wanted to avoid impressions of being Moscow's agent as he was planning for his two-and-half-month world tour in 1966. Hall, who had not been able to travel during the first six years of his reign, did not want to travel directly to the Soviet Union but wanted to visit Latin America and Western Europe first "in order not to give the world the impression that he is going to Moscow 'to take orders'".<sup>1201</sup> For this same reason Hall did not travel to CPSU's 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress right after he had received a passport in March 1966. By doing so, Hall thought, "he would be playing into the hands of both the U.S. press and the Government" as "they would have the basis for saying that Hall went to get instructions from the Russians".<sup>1202</sup> Not to travel to Moscow was a difficult decision for Hall as the Soviets very eagerly waiting to see him for the first time in Moscow as a general secretary. Hall explained his absence from the Congress to the Soviets by referring to the CPUSA's upcoming party convention in the summer of 1966 and to the draft of the new party program which had just been published.<sup>1203</sup>

Hall's need to preserve his independent image was also seen in the way he reacted to the invitations of the Soviet United Nations mission to join the annual reception celebrating the anniversary of the October revolution. In 1963<sup>1204</sup> and 1964<sup>1205</sup> Hall did not attend the reception which disappointed the Soviets. In addition to this, in May 1965 he did not attend the reception arranged by the Soviets in New York City to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ending of the WWII.<sup>1206</sup> The Operation Solo documents do not reveal any reasons for Hall's absence from these festivities, but considering his attitude toward Moscow's international party school and other examples listed above, it is very likely that Hall did not want to take part in these celebrations because he did want to be seen as Moscow's agent.<sup>1207</sup>

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1200 Report from FBI to Attorney General on July 9, 1964; OSD, part 66, page 3.

1201 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on September 14, 1964; OSD, part 68, page 219.

1202 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 10, 1966; OSD, part 100, page 99.

1203 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on March 25, 1966; OSD, part 101, page 2.

1204 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on October 28, 1963; OSD, part 49, page 61.

1205 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on November 25, 1964; OSD, part 74, page 11.

1206 Report from the FBI to Attorney General on May 12, 1965; OSD, part 88, page 7.

1207 When discussing the CPUSA's participation in the international communist movement in

#### 4.1.4. Anti-Semitism in a Workers' Paradise?

The CPUSA's need to preserve its independent image was not the only factor that complicated the relationship between the party and the Soviets. Also developments in the Soviet Union could cause headache for the CPUSA leadership, especially developments related to the Jewish population of the Soviet Union.

Issues related to Jews were sensitive for the CPUSA due to the high proportion of Jews in the party membership. There is no exact information available concerning the proportion of Jews in the CPUSA membership, but studies related to the social structure of the CPUSA suggest that Jews played a significant role in the party both before and after the WWII.<sup>1208</sup> Jews were especially well represented in New York City which was by far the biggest membership area for the CPUSA. According to FBI figures, almost 40 percent of the party membership lived in New York City in the early 1960s.<sup>1209</sup> According to Nathan Glazer, a great majority of these party members were Jewish.<sup>1210</sup> New York City was of course not the only area with large number of Jewish members as there were strong Jewish communist communities also, for example, in Chicago and Los Angeles. The strong proportion of Jews is also reflected by the fact that in 1961 more than 40 percent of the CPUSA's central committee members were Jewish.<sup>1211</sup> According to Glazer, no other Western communist party had such a large proportion of Jews in its membership.<sup>1212</sup>

Considering all this, Gus Hall could not be indifferent to reports concerning anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. The late 1950s and early 1960s were difficult times for Soviets Jews. In 1958 the CCCPSU had decided to launch an organized campaign against religion in the Soviet Union. Although Judaism was a minor religion in the Soviet Union in comparison to Christianity and Islam, it had a relatively large role in the CCCPSU's campaign. Hundreds of newspaper articles and dozens of books criticizing the Jewish religion were published.<sup>1213</sup> Simultaneously, more than fifty synagogues were closed down between 1958 and 1965.<sup>1214</sup>

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the 1960s it should be noted that the U.S. party did not have a representative in *World Marxist Review* which was one of the most important forms of ideological cooperation within the movement. While not having a representative in the journal the CPUSA leadership was however interested to hear about its operations. As a consequence, the CPUSA leadership was frequently in touch with Norman Freed, the Canadian representative in *World Marxist Review*. The reason for the absence of an American representative from the journal is not discussed in Operation Solo documents. Considering the CPUSA's reluctance to take part in international communist activities like Moscow's International Lenin School or the October revolution celebrations in New York City, it possible – or even likely – that the CPUSA did not send a representative to *World Marxist Review* because did not want appear too enthusiastic about international communist cooperation in the eyes of American public and authorities.

1208 See Glazer 1961, 130-168 and Klehr 1978, 37-52.

1209 FBI's CPUSA membership statistics can be found in Ernie Lazar's collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 1).

1210 Glazer 1961, 221.

1211 Klehr 1978, 46.

1212 Glazer 1961, 131.

1213 Pinkus 1988, 286-287. A crucial difference with this campaign and earlier ones was that attacks on Judaism were now published in languages that could be read by non-Jews, whereas earlier most of the literature had been published in Yiddish. See Gitelman 2001, 164.

1214 Pinkus 1988, 289; Levin 1990, 623-625. Synagogues were of course not the only places of

The CPUSA members visiting Moscow were informed about anti-Semitic incidents in the Soviet Union by *The Worker's* Moscow correspondent John Pittman. On Thanksgiving evening 1960, he invited Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Morris Childs and other CPUSA members for a dinner during which anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union was discussed. According to Pittman, he had heard of synagogues being burned and Jewish people being beaten.<sup>1215</sup>

Following all this, in November 1963 Hall instructed Morris Childs to discuss “the Jewish question in the USSR” during his upcoming visit in Moscow. He wanted Childs to point out that the CPUSA “was not looking for a fight on this matter but was raising it only from a tactical point of view”. Childs took up the matter both in written and oral form in Moscow. There was, however, no official response from the CPSU. The topic seems to have been an awkward one for the Soviets. “At every occasion where this matter was raised responsible CPSU representatives sought to avoid discussion of it”, Childs reported later.<sup>1216</sup>

In the spring of 1964, Soviet anti-Semitism became more widely discussed topic after a blatantly anti-Semitic book had been published in the Soviet Union in 1963. The book, *Judaism Without Embellishment*, was written by Trofim Kichko and was published by the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. The book – which linked Judaism, Zionism, Israel, Jewish bankers and Western capitalists in one big worldwide conspiracy – was condemned widely in Europe and in the United States. Many commentators paid attention to the book’s illustrations which closely resembled the coarse drawings of the Nazi period.<sup>1217</sup>

In Europe the book was condemned, for example, by the French, Italian and British communist parties.<sup>1218</sup> In the United States the book was denounced, for example, by the American Jewish Committee and by New York Senator Jacob K. Javits. In March 1964 Gus Hall also condemned the book as anti-Semitic.<sup>1219</sup> In his statement Hall pointed out that such a pamphlet was “a gross distortion of the actual position of the Soviet Union”. “It is in serious violation of the policy and the long struggle conducted by the Soviet Union against the ideology of anti-Semitism”, Hall wrote.<sup>1220</sup>

Such a book put Hall in a very difficult position. Not surprisingly, Hall was “very angry” about the book when he discussed the topic with Jack Childs. Childs told this to his KGB contact Aleksey Kolobashkin. According to Kolobashkin, the Soviets were sorry about the book which had been a mistake and which should never have been written.<sup>1221</sup> A couple

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worship which were closed down during the anti-religion campaign. According to Pinkus, about 10 000 Orthodox churches were closed down in Ukraine alone between 1958 and 1965. See Pinkus 1988, 290.

1215 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 20, 1961; OSD, part 28, page 96. Pittman’s claims are perhaps not wholly incorrect. According to Levin, in addition to propaganda campaign against Judaism and synagogue closures, there were also acts of violence against Jews in some parts of the Soviet Union in the early 1960s. See Levin 1990, 625.

1216 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on December 17, 1963; OSD, part 52, page 25.

1217 Levin 1990, 618; Gitelman 2001, 164-165.

1218 Levin 1990, 618-619.

1219 *The New York Times*, March 22, 1964.

1220 *The Worker*, March 24, 1964.

1221 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on April 1, 1964; OSD, part 60, page 122. The ideological commission of the CCCPSU partially repudiated the book as possibly insulting the



of weeks later, as Jack Childs was preparing for his Solo mission to Moscow, Hall told him to discuss the case with the Soviets. Hall wanted Childs to point out that anticommunist Jews in the United States were now conducting a campaign against the Soviet Union and using Kichko's book to prove that the Soviet Union is an anti-Semitic country.<sup>1222</sup>

Following the publication of Kichko's book Paul Novick, the chief editor of the Yiddish-language communist daily *Morning Freiheit*, wanted to travel to the Soviet Union to study the alleged Soviet anti-Semitism. Hall supported the idea although he apparently did not agree on all issues with Novick. According to Hall, "politically it would be a good thing for Comrade Novick to spend some time in the Soviet Union". In Hall's opinion, Novick had a one-sided approach to questions related to Jewish life in the Soviet Union. Hall hoped that a visit in the Soviet Union would give Novick "a greater mastery of this problem" and "a deeper understanding of the essence of the matter".<sup>1223</sup>

Novick spent several months in the Soviet Union in late 1964, visiting various parts of the country, including Ukraine. His visit did not have exactly the kind of consequences Hall had hoped for. To Nikolai Mostovets, the head of the North and South American section of the CCCPSU's international department, Novick said that he was "not at all satisfied with the results of his investigation or with the status of Jews in the Soviet Union".<sup>1224</sup> In December 1964 Novick gave an interview to *The New York Times* saying that while it was "preposterous" to speak of conscious anti-Semitic policy of the Soviet government, there was no doubt that anti-Semites existed in the Soviet Union. This was shown, among other things, by the publication of Kichko's book. According to Novick the Soviet Union had to wage "an overt campaign against anti-Semitism as part of its drive against nationalism and chauvinism". He paid attention to the fact that there were few Jews in the CPSU hierarchy and in the diplomatic service compared with the early years of the Soviet regime.<sup>1225</sup>

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feelings of believers, conceding that it "might even be interpreted in the spirit of anti-Semitism". The commission pointed out, however, that the book "serves as one tool in the nation's continued campaign against all religions". The commission's comments were published in *Pravda* on April 4, 1964. See Pinkus 1984, 339 and Levin 1990, 620-621.

1222 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 20, 1964; OSD, part 60, page 243. Hall most likely referred to the American Jewish Conference on Soviet Jewry which convened in Washington, D.C. in early April 1964. 24 Jewish organizations were represented in the meeting. Kichko's book and the public outcry following its publication were central factors leading to establishing the new organization. See Levin 1990, 640.

1223 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on August 6, 1964; OSD, part 68, page 104.

1224 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on January 18, 1965; OSD, part 80, page 222.

1225 *The New York Times*, December 26, 1964. There is no information on Hall's opinion on Novick's 1964 findings but in the long run the relationship between Novick and the CPUSA did not flourish. The CPUSA expelled him in 1972 after more than 50 years' membership, accusing him of serving "United States imperialism" and "Jewish nationalism and Zionism". In his reply, Novick affirmed his backing for democratic socialism and for the Soviet Union "the way it was during the Lenin period, when Jewish culture flourished". Novick, who was born in 1891, was one of the founders of *Morning Freiheit* in 1922 and served as its chief editor from 1939 to 1988. By the mid-1970s the paper had distanced itself from the CPUSA. In the 1976 presidential election, for example, the paper supported Democrat candidate Jimmy Carter instead of CPUSA's Gus Hall. The *Daily World* called upon loyal communist readers of the *Freiheit* to replace Novick as the editor, but the party's influence on the six thousand subscribers was so minimal that Novick remained in charge.

After Novick's trip, Gus Hall's attitude towards U.S. Jewish journalists traveling to the Soviet Union seems to have turned negative. When Chaim Suller from *Morning Freiheit* asked Hall to help him to travel to the Soviet Union, Hall ignored his letter.<sup>1226</sup> When Suller contacted the Soviets directly and they in turn asked Hall's opinion, he told the Soviets to ignore Suller's request, pointing out that Suller had no authority to contact the Soviets.<sup>1227</sup> Hall's reaction may be explained by the fact that Suller was known for being critical of the Soviet policy concerning Jews. In 1957 Suller had written an article for *Daily Worker* in which he accused Soviet leaders of refusing to allow a revival of Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union.<sup>1228</sup> Suller did eventually manage to travel to the Soviet Union after he had been invited by the Soviet Yiddish-language magazine *Sovietische Heimland*.<sup>1229</sup> Hall repeatedly opposed Suller's visit and, for example, declared that Suller could not be included in the CPUSA's annual visitor quota to the Soviet Union.<sup>1230</sup>

The discussion concerning the position of Soviet Jews was not entirely brushed aside in the Soviet Union. After Khrushchev's removal in October 1964, the propaganda campaign against religions was ended.<sup>1231</sup> The number of anti-Jewish articles in the media dropped and their tone changed.<sup>1232</sup> In addition, in 1965 the CPSU launched a series of measures aimed at strengthening secular Yiddish language and culture, and thus offsetting the influence of the Jewish religion. According to the CPSU, it was problematic that Yiddish language was only used in religious institutions and there were no secular alternatives available for Yiddish-speakers. As a part of these measures, the CPSU planned to launch a Yiddish-language newspaper and start radio broadcasts in Yiddish. These broadcasts were planned to be beamed not only to the Jews in the Soviet Union but also in Israel, Europe and the United States. In addition to these measures, a chair in the Hebrew language was to be established at the Moscow University.<sup>1233</sup> Gus Hall greeted these measures with delight. According to him, there was a "big anti-Soviet campaign in the making on the Jewish question" in the United States. In Hall's opinion, the Soviets should publish their pro-Yiddish measures widely "in order to take the wind out of the sails of the anti-Soviet campaign on this question".<sup>1234</sup>

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See Kling 1985, 68; Klehr 1988, 44 and *The New York Times*, August 22, 1989.

1226 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 9, 1965; OSD, part 84, page 162.

1227 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 15, 1965; OSD, part 84, page 208.

1228 See Suller's obituary in *New York Times*, May 31, 1998. According to Jewish CPUSA veteran Jack Kling, *Morning Freiheit* had already in the early 1960s – under the leadership of Novick and Suller – moved away from its traditional communist position and had become "anti-Soviet and anti-Party". Because of this, Kling resigned from the paper in 1963. See Kling 1985, 68-69.

1229 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on June 17, 1965; OSD, part 91, page 38.

1230 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on June 10, 1965; OSD, part 90, page 144.

1231 Levin 1990, 627.

1232 Such relaxing of the propaganda campaign was only temporary. In 1967, after the Six-Day War between Israel and Arab States, the anti-Jewish propaganda campaign was again strengthened. Pinkus 1988, 292-293.

1233 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on August 10, 1965; OSD, part 92, pages 180-181.

1234 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on August 27, 1965; OSD, part 93, page 117.

Not surprisingly, Soviet anti-Semitism was discussed by Gus Hall and Leonid Brezhnev when Hall visited Moscow in September 1966. Brezhnev assured Hall that the Soviet Union has no problems with its minorities, not with the Balts, the Ukrainians or with the Jews. In his opinion, such problems were invented in the West.<sup>1235</sup> Hall seems to have agreed with Brezhnev's account. After his trip Hall stated that he found no anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union but only "Soviet Jews angry over a campaign of falsehoods".<sup>1236</sup>

During their discussion Brezhnev brought up the conference the CPUSA was planning to arrange concerning anti-Semitism. He was not entirely assured that holding such a conference was a good idea. "Let me warn you that the enemy will use it to magnify the problem and will use it against us. But you have to decide on this", Brezhnev said to Hall.<sup>1237</sup>

Brezhnev referred to a conference which had been decided upon at the CPUSA's national convention in June 1966. The conference – which was originally scheduled for November 1966 – would have focused on alleged Soviet anti-Semitism and because of this the conference would have been highly awkward for the Soviets. Hall may well have been influenced by Brezhnev's comments, because the conference was postponed several times and finally cancelled altogether in June 1967 after the crisis in the Middle East erupted.<sup>1238</sup>

The Six Day War between Israel and Arab states in June 1967 led to a diplomatic breakdown between Israel and the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union the Six Day War was followed by increased attacks on the Jewish state, Zionism and world Jewry which, according to Nora Levin, spilled over to Soviet Jews. Newspapers and magazines again began publishing anti-Semitic cartoons and illustrations similar to Kichko's book. Jews supporting Israel were arrested and pressured to sign public condemnations of Israel. Kichko, who had been criticized for his earlier book, was again allowed to publish a book on Judaism.<sup>1239</sup>

The CPUSA followed the Soviet line closely during the Middle East crisis, placing all the blame on Israel which was seen as a tool of American imperialism. The CPUSA's line led to a small rebellion by some Jewish party members. Some were so distressed over the situation that they collected funds and even donated blood to Israel. Numerous comrades demanded that the CPUSA's line concerning the Middle East should have been independent and should have reflected the desires of party membership, but Hall remained staunchly on a Soviet-style pro-Arab line. So severe were the disagreements that Hall finally abolished

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1235 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 19, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 236. Denying the existence of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union was the traditional reply of the Soviet leaders to questions concerning the issue. Examples of Khrushchev's and Kosygin's replies can be found in Pinkus 1984, 70-79.

1236 *The New York Times*, January 22, 1967.

1237 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 19, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 236.

1238 *The New York Times*, January 22, 1967; Swearingen 1971, 594. The Soviets seem to have grown tired of being criticized of anti-Semitism by U.S. communists during the 1960s. At least in April 1967 Igor Mikhailov, deputy head of the North and South American section of the international department of the CCCPSU, told Jack Childs that the Soviets were "peevish" with *The Worker's* Moscow correspondent Harry Yaris who had been investigating alleged Soviet anti-Semitism. See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 26, 1967; OSD, part 113, page 185.

1239 Pinkus 1988, 293-294; Levin 1990, 652-653.

the CPUSA's national Jewish commission.<sup>1240</sup> These disagreements eventually led to many Jewish members leaving the party. According to Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, the Jewish presence in the party declined after the 1960s "in large measure due to intense party hostility to Israel and denial of Soviet anti-Semitism".<sup>1241</sup>

#### 4.1.5. Colliding worlds

The position of the Jews in the Soviet Union was not the only source of friction in the relationship between the CPUSA and the CPSU. The worlds of liberally-minded U.S. communists and their more conservative Soviet comrades collided also on many other issues.

One such example was the case of Bernard Koten. Koten, 51, was a library director from New York City who was arrested in Kiev in August 1963 and was charged with homosexuality which was considered a serious crime in the Soviet Union.<sup>1242</sup> Koten had been a tour guide for a group of U.S. students who had been touring the Soviet Union. Koten strongly denied all homosexuality charges and claimed that he had been framed. Hall reacted strongly to the news of Koten's arrest. He wrote a lengthy letter to the CCCPSU, pointing out that Koten had been "a most ardent fighter for Soviet-American friendship in the U.S.A. during a most adverse period". Hall reminded the Soviets that during WWII, Koten was decorated with the highest military award as a result of his participation in the initial contact between the American and Soviet troops at the River Elbe. "Koten has given his life to the improvement of friendship between the United States and the U.S.S.R.," Hall wrote. "Unless a more serious crime is involved the charge against Koten should be quietly dropped", he concluded.<sup>1243</sup> In addition to his letter, Hall instructed Jack Childs to inform his KGB contact Aleksey Kolobashkin that "unless they wanted to lose whatever friendship had been built up over the last 40 years, the Soviets must release Koten".<sup>1244</sup>

Hall's letter seems to have played a role, because in the end of September the CCCPSU officials told that they had requested the legal authorities not to put Koten on trial. This decision followed requests by Hall and number of progressive leaders for releasing Koten.

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1240 Swearingen 1971, 594-595.

1241 Klehr & Haynes 1991, 173.

1242 Homosexuality was not criminalized during the first decade of the Soviet Union but in 1933 the new Soviet penal code made male homosexual relations illegal. Female homosexual relations remained legal. Males found guilty of voluntary homosexual acts could be sentenced for five years of hard labor. For using force or threats or for having sex with a consenting minor one could receive an eight-year sentence of hard labor. See *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, 1137-1138 and memo from C.F. Downing to Mr. Conrad on October 1, 1963; OSD, part 48, page 171.

1243 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on September 6, 1963; OSD, part 48, pages 148-149. Interestingly, Hall does not mention the word "homosexuality" in his letter.

1244 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on September 6, 1963; OSD, part 48, page 150.

The Soviets did, however, warn the CPUSA against giving Kotten any confidential tasks.<sup>1245</sup> Kotten was released in the end of September and he immediately traveled to Vienna.<sup>1246</sup>

Hall's strong reaction in this case may seem surprising if one looks at the CPUSA's policy towards sexual minorities in general. The rights of sexual minorities did not play a role in the CPUSA's policies in the 1960s. Likewise, the party did not pay attention to them in the 1970s or in 1980s. In fact, as Gary Murrell points out in his biography of CPUSA intellectual Herbert Aptheker, the party's conservative stance towards issues like sexual equality and feminism was one of the factors that led to its split in 1991. According to Murrell, the CPUSA's stance towards homosexuality could even be described as homophobic.<sup>1247</sup>

It may well be, however, that sexual equality and gay rights were not the first thing in Hall's mind when he intervened in the Kotten case. His strong reaction can rather be explained by the fact that Kotten was indeed a central character in New York's left-wing scene. He was the director of the Library of Intercultural Studies which was the successor organization of the American-Russian Institute.<sup>1248</sup> In addition, he taught Russian at New York University.<sup>1249</sup> There is no information that Hall knew Kotten personally, but most likely they had at least several mutual friends.

Bernard Kotten was not the only individual whose treatment by the Soviets strained the relations between Gus Hall and the CPSU officials. In May 1967 Hall selected James Milton Peake and his wife Maureen to visit the Soviet Union as part of the CPUSA's annual visitor quota. Peake – who sat in a wheelchair – was an active party member and a leader in DuBois Clubs, a CPUSA-dominated youth organization. When Hall was informed that the CPSU “does not look favorably on sick or ill people coming to the Soviet Union”, he instructed that Peake's complete medical records needed to be sent to the Soviet Union. Hall said that he had promised this trip to Peake and he wanted “every effort made to see that he gets to the Soviet Union”.<sup>1250</sup>

The reaction of the Soviets was not surprising in light of the Soviet policy concerning disabled people. According to Sarah D. Phillips, persons with physical and mental disabilities were “stigmatized, hidden from public and thus made seemingly invisible”. A large proportion of disabled people were institutionalized and most of them suffered from poor education and employment opportunities and – as a consequence – had a low economic status. According to Phillips, the contradiction between the Soviet state rhetoric

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1245 Memo from C.F. Downing to Mr. Conrad on October 1, 1963; OSD, part 48, pages 171-172.

1246 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on September 30, 1963; OSD, part 48, page 229.

1247 Murrell 2015, 115 & 324. Herbert Aptheker tried to change CPUSA's policy towards homosexuals in 1979 but his efforts were not successful. Daniel Rosenberg points out that the CPUSA had over the years considered homosexuality to be, for example, a “non-working class tendency” which was “incompatible with Party membership.” See Murrell 2015, 237 & 305-306 and Rosenberg 2019, 6-7.

1248 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on September 12, 1963; OSD, part 48, page 167. According to *The New York Times*, the American-Russian Institute and Kotten were in the late 1940s accused of disseminating Soviet propaganda. See *The New York Times*, August 29, 1963.

1249 *The New York Times*, August 30, 1963.

1250 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 16, 1967; OSD, part 114, page 170.

and its actions was striking – the Soviet official discourse concerning the position of the disabled had little to do with the everyday realities.<sup>1251</sup>

In July 1967 Hall was informed that the Soviet Union would not issue visas to Peake and his wife. Again Hall reacted strongly and wrote an angry letter to the CCCPSU. “Your refusal at Washington D.C. Embassy to issue them visas is to me a great embarrassment and shock. Due to this there is a possibility that the remainder of these delegations will not travel”, Hall wrote. He pointed out that Peake was one of the best leaders in the DuBois Clubs and that no physical help was required during Peake’s visit. Hall demanded that the visas would be expedited. In his opinion, the issue was “urgent and politically most imperative”.<sup>1252</sup> There is no information in the Solo documents whether Peake was ever able to travel to the Soviet Union, but regardless of the outcome, the episode is a further reminder of how the mindsets of the American and Soviet communists differed.

Although Hall publicly always praised the Soviet Union and its achievements<sup>1253</sup>, the Solo documents show that in private he was often very critical and even contemptuous towards the Soviets. Although Hall continually emphasized the scientific nature of communism he had no trust in Soviet medicine. Before his 1966 visit to the Soviet Union, Hall wanted Morris Childs “to make sure that he is not subjected to any medical examinations or treatments in the USSR”.<sup>1254</sup> Such distrust was, of course, not surprising considering the track record of Soviet doctors in taking care of U.S. communist leaders in the early 1960s. Within five years three CPUSA leaders – William Z. Foster in 1961, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in 1964 and Pettis Perry in 1965 – had died in Moscow while being treated by Soviet doctors.<sup>1255</sup> In addition to that, both Italian party leader Palmiro Togliatti and French

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1251 In Phillips’s opinion the contradiction between the official discourse concerning the position of the disabled and the existing reality was an example of Soviet *pokazukha* or window-dressing. See Phillips 2009.

1252 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on July 24, 1967; OSD, part 116, pages 74-75.

1253 Operation Solo documents contain numerous examples of Hall extolling highly the Soviet Union. Perhaps most extreme example of this is Hall’s New Year’s greetings letter to CCCPSU and its new first secretary Leonid Brezhnev in December 1964. Hall writes: “Your leadership and the work of your Party guarantees to all that each passing year brings mankind closer to the day when civilization will cross the last barrier and reach the exalted heights of a Communist society. Once that point in history is crossed, the old designations of ‘BC’ and ‘AD’ will cease to have any real meaning. Instead history will be measured in terms of ‘Before the advent of a Communist society’ and ‘After the appearance of Communism.’” The letter continues in a similar, somewhat pompous manner. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on December 24, 1964; OSD, part 74, page 98.

1254 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on July 11, 1966; OSD, part 107, page 258.

1255 Elizabeth Gurley Flynn’s death in September 1964 came as a surprise to many, including Gus Hall. Her death raised questions concerning the skills of Soviet doctors. Dr. Harry Epstein, an American doctor who earlier had been taking care of William Z. Foster, participated in Flynn’s autopsy in Moscow and delivered a report to Gus Hall on the autopsy findings. According to Epstein, two things caused the death of Flynn, “sclerosis of the liver owing to alcoholism and fatty degeneration of the heart”. Hall said he was glad that Epstein had participated in the autopsy “because that squelched all rumors that the Russians are incompetent as physicians and further verified the fact that the Russians were not the cause of Flynn’s death”. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on September 14, 1964; OSD, part 68, page 221.

leader Maurice Thorez had died in the Soviet Union in the summer of 1964.<sup>1256</sup> Although all these leaders were elderly and had health problems, this series of deaths led many U.S. communists to question the quality of Soviet medicine.<sup>1257</sup>

Not always was Hall very respectful towards the Soviet leaders. As mentioned earlier, Hall criticized the Soviet leadership openly after they had failed to inform him concerning the removal of Nikita Khrushchev in October 1964. Similarly Hall was critical after he had had a lengthy meeting with Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko at the Soviet UN mission in New York in December 1964. Hall and Gromyko talked for over an hour without an interpreter. After the meeting Hall vented his frustration to Jack Childs:

Gromyko told Hall nothing that had not already appeared in *The New York Times*. Much of the conversation consisted of an exchange of pleasantries and, as far as Hall was concerned, the conference was “a complete waste of time”.

Hall attempted to emphasize the need for strengthening the communist international movement and, while Gromyko shook his head indicating agreement, Hall was sure Gromyko did not have the faintest idea of what was being said. Hall is concerned about what Gromyko will report to the Soviets with respect to this conference, since he feels Gromyko had no idea of what Hall was talking about.<sup>1258</sup>

In general, Hall was easily insulted by the Soviets if they did not show enough respect to the CPUSA leader. This could clearly be seen, for example, during Hall’s 1966 visit to the Soviet Union. When Hall and his delegation arrived to Moscow airport on August 17, they were met only by Mikhail Suslov, a member of the CPSU’s political bureau and a secretary of the CCCPSU. In Hall’s opinion Leonid Brezhnev, CPSU’s general secretary, should have been there to greet his U.S. colleague. Because of this Hall felt “slighted”. He had been in a bad mood already before his arrival to the Soviet Union because of visa difficulties at the Soviet Union’s Paris embassy and problems with his first-class ticket on the Aeroflot flight from Paris to Moscow. Because of all these adversities, Hall was “almost considering an early departure from the country”, Morris Childs later reported.<sup>1259</sup> Similar incident happened three months later in New York when Hall took part in the October Revolution celebrations at the Soviet Union’s UN mission. Hall was “extremely irked” by the indifferent reception he got there, saying that “I might as well have been a man from the street”.<sup>1260</sup>

Looking at Operation Solo documents, it is not an exaggeration to say that there certainly was an element of disdain and derision in Hall’s attitude towards the Soviets. In public,

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1256 In addition to Thorez and Togliatti, also Finnish-born CPSU veteran Otto Kuusinen died in the Soviet Union in 1964. Kuusinen, who had lived in the Soviet Union since the Finnish civil war in 1918, died in Moscow in mid-May in the age of 82.

1257 This distrust was not helped by the fact that two legends of American communism, John Reed and William “Big Bill” Haywood had also both died in Moscow, Reed in 1920 and Haywood in 1928. This long list was well remembered by CPUSA lawyer John Abt in 1978 when he did not want his wife Jessica Smith to remain in hospital care in the Soviet Union. See Abt & Myerson 1993, 296.

1258 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on December 24, 1964; OSD, part 74, page 59.

1259 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 4, 1966; OSD, part 109, page 260.

1260 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 22, 1966; OSD, part 110, pages 60-61.

Hall always presented the relationship of the CPUSA and the CPSU as one of unbroken mutual respect, but in private he was frequently irritated and even enraged by Soviet actions and inactions. Sometimes he could be “full of sarcasm and resentment towards the Russians”, as Morris Childs once put it.<sup>1261</sup> When discussing with the Childs brothers, Hall did not hesitate to call the Soviets “G-- d--- lousy”<sup>1262</sup>, “damn stiff”<sup>1263</sup> or “stupid”<sup>1264</sup>.

Gus Hall was not the only person in the Hall household who was scornful towards the Soviets. In October 1963 two persons, an American engineer and a Soviet chauffeur of Amtorg, the Soviet trading corporation in the United States, were arrested in New Jersey for espionage.<sup>1265</sup> According to Hall, these arrests had “a very negative effect” on the CPUSA. He discussed the issue with Morris Childs who was just about to leave for another Solo mission to the Soviet Union. Once again, Hall was frustrated with the Soviets:

How can the Soviets be so stupid and get themselves involved like this at this time? I made this remark to my wife and perhaps she had the best answer. She said, “What do you expect, they don’t even know the secret of raising wheat or other crops”.<sup>1266</sup>

#### 4.1.6. Getting too close?

Although Gus Hall’s and Moscow’s views concerning anti-Semitism, homosexual crimes or disabled people may have sometimes differed, in larger ideological questions there were very few disagreements. So great was the unanimity between Hall and the Soviets that the Kremlin leaders even started hoping that the U.S. party would not so closely follow Moscow’s line.

This exceptional wish was expressed in by Aleksey Belyakov, deputy chief of the CCCPSU’s international department, in a discussion with Morris Childs in Moscow in late June 1968. Belyakov noted that in the international meeting of communist parties in Budapest earlier in June, the CPUSA had consistently supported the position of the CPSU especially on the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat which was a major point of disagreement in

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1261 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 22, 1966; OSD, part 110, page 60.

1262 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 29, 1964; OSD, part 72, page 99.

1263 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 22, 1966; OSD, part 110, page 61.

1264 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 5, 1963; OSD, part 49, page 173.

1265 John W. Butenko, the American electronics engineer, worked for I.T. & T. and was involved in a top secret cooperation with Strategic Air Command of the U.S. Air Force. In December 1964, he received a 30-year prison sentence for his activities. Igor Ivanov, the Soviet chauffeur, received a 20-year sentence. See *The New York Times*, October 30, 1963 and *The New York Times*, December 19, 1964.

1266 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 5, 1963; OSD, part 49, page 173. Hall’s wife Elizabeth referred to the fact that in 1963 Soviet Union – which had excellent conditions for grain crops in Ukraine, for example – had to import millions of tons of wheat from Canada and Australia because of bad crops in the country. See, for example, *The New York Times*, September 19, 1963 and *The New York Times*, September 22, 1963.



the meeting. In the Budapest meeting the CPs were preparing an international conference of communist and workers' parties which was scheduled to be held in Moscow in November 1968. Morris Childs reported later:

Belyakov stated that that the CPSU thanks the CPUSA for its loyalty, but at the same time thinks that the CPUSA should act more independently, because it does not look right for both Parties to always present such a united front. According to Belyakov, the reason these two parties are so close is because their thoughts seem to coincide; nevertheless, if the CPUSA has some different opinions, it should be said so.<sup>1267</sup>

It was indeed exceptional that the CPSU asked a fellow party act more independently and not to follow its line so closely. It is difficult to estimate all the factors behind Belyakov's statement, but it may not be a wholly incorrect interpretation to say that the Soviets considered it awkward to have a party within the international communist movement which sheepishly echoed Soviet views and showed no signs of independent thinking. As Morris Childs pointed out in his report concerning the consultative meeting of world's CPs in Budapest in February and March 1968, the CPUSA's views concerning the international communist movement were indeed unique and "most extreme". Only the U.S. and Iraqi CPs were suggesting that international cooperation of CPs should be intensified by, for example, establishing a new organization for consultations. Such an organization would most likely have strengthened the position of the Soviet Union within the communist movement which was not a tempting idea for most CPs. By expressing such views the CPUSA was indeed swimming against the tide. As Morris Childs remarked in his report concerning the Budapest meeting, "most of the parties displayed a certain independence not displayed by communist parties before".<sup>1268</sup> In such a context the CPUSA may have looked like a stooge of the CPSU which the Soviets perhaps did not consider appropriate.

#### 4.1.7. Conclusions

In the light of Operation Solo documents, was Gus Hall the Moscow's parrot as some writers have claimed?<sup>1269</sup> One can justifiably say so, but describing Hall as a mere parrot gives a one-dimensional and deficient picture of him – the reality was more complex.

It is correct that Hall was very interested to hear Moscow's views on different issues. When it came to issues related to the Soviet Union or the international communist movement,

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<sup>1267</sup> Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on July 17, 1968; OSD, part 125, page 60. In this connection Belyakov also told that Leonid Brezhnev, the top leader of the CPSU, had requested that Hall would be told that Brezhnev would like to hear Hall's thoughts more frequently: "He [Brezhnev] asked that Hall would write frank letters to him about such problems that come to Hall's mind. Brezhnev said that he has had the impression that ordinarily Hall can be a very 'ornery guy' and speak his mind. Brezhnev got the feeling that the last time he and Hall had met in the fall of 1967, Hall had been holding back somewhat."

<sup>1268</sup> Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on March 21, 1968; OSD, part 122, pages 19-20.

<sup>1269</sup> See, for example, Hoover 1969, 84 and Kivisto 1984, 195.

Hall took care that the CPUSA's standpoints were acceptable to CPSU leaders. Because of this, the contents of *Political Affairs* journal were scrutinized closely.

For Hall the leading position of the Soviet Union in the international communist movement was a self-evident starting point. He strongly opposed those who challenged this notion. Not only did he do that, but he also eagerly tried to uphold this idea by advocating the arranging of international conferences for world's CPs and – even – establishing a new international body comparable to the Comintern. Also Hall's strong eagerness to speak for unity and proletarian internationalism reflects his stance in questions related to the international communist movement – he was indeed no friend of ideological mavericks.

While representing himself and his party as a staunch supporter of the Soviet Union in Moscow's eyes, Hall evidently had a need to distance the party from the Soviet Union in the eyes of the American public and authorities. Hall stated this need explicitly when he discussed the possibility of sending U.S. students to Moscow's Lenin School and when he wanted to restrain the Moscow trips of CPUSA leaders after the McCarran Act decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. It is possible – and even likely – that for this same reason Hall avoided joining annual Soviet October Revolution festivities in New York City in the mid-1960s. The Operation Solo material does not reveal whether this was the reason why the CPUSA neither had a representative in the *World Marxist Review*.

Hall's leadership was not made any easier by the recurring claims concerning anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. Considering the large amount of Jewish members in the CPUSA, this topic was very awkward for Hall. Hall's situation was further complicated by the fact that the Soviets gradually grew tired of U.S. journalists visiting the country and investigating claims of anti-Semitism. However, anti-Semitism was not the only awkward issue for Hall. As the Operation Solo documents show, the worlds of New York City progressives and the Soviets clashed also on issues like homosexuality and the rights of disabled persons.

Looking at the Operation Solo documents, Hall had to pay attention to two major audiences when formulating his policies: the Soviets and the international communist movement on one hand and CPUSA members and larger U.S. public on the other. Balancing between these two audiences was not an easy task as the case of Soviet anti-Semitism or the case of Bernard Kotten shows. Bowing to one direction often meant sticking out one's behind to another direction. As a leader of a small CP financially dependent on the Soviet Union, Hall was an excellent example of a communist leader who had to balance in the midst of the cross-pressures of national and international communism.

## 4.2. Gus Hall's relationship with the People's Republic of China

### 4.2.1. The CPUSA and cooling Sino-Soviet relations

As mentioned earlier, Gus Hall quoted Chairman Mao in his keynote speech at the CPUSA's 17<sup>th</sup> national convention in December 1959.<sup>1270</sup> This was indeed exceptional. It is likely the only time that Hall quoted the Chinese leader in a speech in a positive sense. Such a rare act of course raises questions: Was Hall aware of the fact that the relationship between the Soviets and the Chinese had been deteriorating ever since 1956 when Khrushchev revealed Stalin's atrocities and denounced the cult of personality that had surrounded Stalin?<sup>1271</sup> To what extent did Hall want such an act to please the Chinese and keep open a possible channel of financial aid to the CPUSA? To what extent was Hall affected by William Z. Foster, the grand old man of American communism, who in the late 1950s had begun to sympathize with the Chinese version of communist ideology?

These questions are of course difficult if not impossible to answer. What can be said, however, is that in addition to the Soviets, the CPUSA did interact bilaterally with the Chinese and also received financial assistance from them in the late 1950s. During the very first Solo mission in the spring and summer of 1958, Morris Childs visited both the Soviet Union and China, as he did during the third Solo mission in the fall of 1959.

Childs's reports from these visits indeed give an eccentric picture of the Chinese leaders. During his first Peking visit in June and July 1958 Childs discussed with Mao, for example, the internal situation of the CPUSA. Mao emphasized to Childs that the CPUSA must continue to fight against revisionism to the end. In his opinion, the CPUSA should not worry about the size of its party. "Numbers mean nothing. The CP of China was small at one time too", Mao said. Mao also pointed out that government oppression of the CPUSA is actually a good thing. "It will make the Party strong. Flowers that are raised in a hot house cannot weather a storm", Mao said. Apparently Mao had not understood how central the topics of antiracism and civil rights were on the CPUSA's agenda. He suggested to Childs that the CPUSA "should hold Negroes in the background in order to get wider support". Mao did not think it was a good thing to have Ben Davis leading the New York CP.<sup>1272</sup>

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1270 Hall 1960b, 17.

1271 According to Lorenz M. Lüthi's study on the Sino-Soviet split, the 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the CPSU in February 1956 "established the ideological foundation for the disagreements that would rock the Sino-Soviet partnership in the years to come". "Apart from de-Stalinization, the soviet policy of peaceful coexistence with the United States, which was also announced at the twentieth congress, gradually undermined the Chinese rationale for the Sino-Soviet alliance", Lüthi writes. For Mao Khrushchev's secret speech at the CPSU congress was a "surprise attack". See Lüthi 2008, 46-50.

1272 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on July 23, 1958. OSD, part 2, pages 54-56. Teng Hsiao-ping, general secretary of the Chinese CP, echoed the thoughts of Mao as he discussed with Morris Childs. He predicted that the CPUSA will lose some more members, but while doing so it may become stronger. "It is better to have a small, but fighting, party. A communist party is not a debating society", Teng said. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on July 31, 1958. OSD, part 3, page 3. A more thorough report on Childs's first visit to China can be found in OSD, part 8, pages 86-191.

During this visit, the international department of the Chinese CP told Childs that it was ready to give the CPUSA substantial financial aid. Childs “was told to name the amount and it would be received”. He was told that “at any time the CPUSA needs financial help it should let the CP of China know and this help would be given”. Childs told the Chinese that he had no instructions from the CPUSA in this regard and thus did not convey any request for assistance.<sup>1273</sup>

The money offer to Morris Childs was not an exception, but the Chinese repeatedly signaled their willingness to support the American party. Sometime later James Jackson was offered \$20 000 in order to establish a communist magazine for African Americans. Before accepting the money, cautious general secretary Eugene Dennis, however, wanted Morris Childs to discuss the issue with the Soviets. According to Dennis, Childs needed to point out to the Soviets that CPUSA “is not shopping around for funds”.<sup>1274</sup>

Not surprisingly the money issue came up again when Morris Childs visited China in September and October 1959 and met with China’s president Liu Shao-chi and Wang Chia-hsing, the head of the international department of the Chinese communist party.<sup>1275</sup> Wang said that China was ready to deliver the CPUSA \$25 000 within two months and \$100 000 within six to twelve months – it was up to the CPUSA to say how much it wants. According to Wang, there would be no strings attached to these funds and the CPUSA could use them as it wanted. The only condition for receiving these funds was that the CPUSA should not tell the Soviets about the transfer. The money would be transmitted through Prague via Chao Yi-min, who was one of the chief editors of the *World Marxist Review*, the theoretical publication of the international communist movement.<sup>1276</sup>

Morris Childs considered the discussion on Chinese funding awkward. On the one hand he did not want to insult the Chinese by refusing to receive the money, but on the other, he did not want to jeopardize the CPUSA’s good relations with the CPSU. After returning to the United States in November, Childs discussed the issue with Eugene Dennis. He blamed James Jackson for creating the uncomfortable situation as he had been discussing financial issues with the Chinese. As the situation was complicated, Dennis could not immediately make up his mind considering the Chinese funding.<sup>1277</sup>

The relations between the CPUSA and the Chinese party indeed seemed to have been warm in the end of 1959. The Chinese sent a lengthy greetings letter to the CPUSA’s 17<sup>th</sup>

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1273 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on July 23, 1958. OSD, part 2, page 57.

1274 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on September 21, 1959. OSD, part 13, page 90.

1275 During Morris Childs’s 1959 visit to China he did not meet Mao or Teng Hsiao-ping but he had a lengthy discussion with president Liu, who promised that the Chinese communist party will do everything possible to support the CPUSA. Just like Mao and Teng Hsiao-ping before him, he pointed out that the CPUSA should not worry about its small membership figure. He reminded that the Chinese CP had less than 800 members in 1927. A thorough report on Childs’s discussions with Liu can be found in report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 19, 1959. OSD, part 14, pages 142-153.

1276 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 21, 1959. OSD, part 14, pages 188-189.

1277 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 21, 1959. OSD, part 14, pages 188-190.

national convention and the letter was prominently published in *The Worker*. Nothing in the greetings letter hinted that the relations between China and the Soviet Union would be seriously damaged within just a few months.<sup>1278</sup>

Finally in mid-December Dennis decided to accept the Chinese offer and told Morris to go ahead with the plans according to which the money would be picked up in Prague. Dennis said that a “refusal to accept the offer of the Chinese might antagonize and adversely affect the relationship between the CPUSA and the CP of China”<sup>1279</sup> Interestingly, J. Edgar Hoover wanted to stop the CPUSA from taking money from the Chinese. In mid-December 1959 Hoover wrote:

Informant [Morris or Jack Childs] should be instructed that it would be most undesirable to obtain any funds from the Chinese while in Prague, Czechoslovakia. He should be instructed that in discussing this matter with Eugene Dennis and/or Gus Hall they should be advised that the acceptance of money from the Communist Party (CP) of China could incense the Russians and could lead to a rupture in the relations between the CP, USA, and the CP of Soviet Union. He should point out that the CP, USA, has not committed itself to accept this money and it could be graciously declined without affecting future contacts between the CP, USA, and the CP of China.<sup>1280</sup>

Such an intervention by J. Edgar Hoover was indeed exceptional. In the Operation Solo documents of the years 1958-1968 there is no other example of Hoover so clearly trying to affect the decisions of the CPUSA through the Childs brothers. Hoover’s letter does not reveal the reasons for such an intervention but one can easily come up with couple possible explanations for the letter. Firstly, Hoover most likely wanted to maintain the connection which the FBI had created through Operation Solo to the highest leadership of the CPSU. Secondly, Hoover may have wanted to avoid the risk of the CPUSA sliding into the arms of the Chinese CP and thus becoming more radical, uncompromising and unpredictable.

Hoover’s wishes did not, however, affect the CPUSA’s decisions. It is unclear whether the Childs brothers ever received Hoover’s instructions or if they ever discussed the Chinese funds with Hall or Dennis. Be that as it may, in early February 1960 Jack Childs embarked on the fourth Solo Mission which took him to Prague and Moscow.<sup>1281</sup> In Prague Childs contacted Chao Yi Min, one of the editors of the Prague-based communist magazine *World Marxist Review*. Sometime in late February or early March Chao gave Childs \$50 000 in

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1278 *The Worker*, January 3, 1960.

1279 Teletype message from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director and New York office on December 16, 1959. OSD, part 16, page 114.

1280 The Director’s letter to unknown recipient on December 15, 1959. OSD, part 16, page 210. The recipient of the letter cannot be read, but it is most likely FBI’s Chicago or New York office.

1281 Detailed information on Jack Childs’s mission can be found in report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on March 11, 1960. OSD, part 18, page 212-213. This was the first of Jack Childs’s five Solo Missions. Morris Childs concluded 52 Solo missions. Complete list of all Solo missions can be found in Barron 1995, 335-337.

\$100 bills which Childs transported successfully to the United States.<sup>1282</sup> Childs returned to the United States on March 10, 1960 with “no trouble getting through the customs.”<sup>1283</sup>

During their discussions Chao “gave no indication whether the Chinese CP intended to make further donations to the CP, USA.”<sup>1284</sup> This was perhaps no coincidence, because the relations between China and the Soviet Union were rapidly worsening during the early months of 1960. In February at a Warsaw Pact conference the Chinese had strongly criticized Khrushchev’s policy of peaceful co-existence with the United States.<sup>1285</sup> In April, on V.I. Lenin’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Chinese continued their criticism by publishing an article which highlighted Lenin’s thesis that war was the inevitable result of the imperialist system of exploitation.<sup>1286</sup> The Soviets interpreted the article as an attempt to undermine their monopoly on communist orthodoxy.

The deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relations did not end here. In June 1960 the dispute could clearly be seen and heard by all when Soviet and Chinese delegations exchanged bitter accusations in Bucharest at the congress of the Romanian CP.<sup>1287</sup> In July the split was made official by the Soviets who withdrew their technicians and advisers from the numerous Chinese projects they had been involved in.<sup>1288</sup> These events have been often seen as the starting point of the Sino-Soviet split which lasted until the 1980s.

For CPUSA’s leadership, however, the split was not so clear-cut in the summer and early fall of 1960. Although Gus Hall was largely a supporter of the Soviet line, he seems to have wanted to keep all doors and all possibilities for cooperation open. In late June, as Hall was briefing Morris Childs before his Solo mission, he told Childs that he “should show CP, USA, loyalty to the political line of the CP of the Soviet Union without breaking with the Chinese.”<sup>1289</sup> This line of thinking seems to have been in force also a few months later, although the Soviets had meanwhile pulled out their technicians and advisers from China. When Hall and Dennis briefed Childs before another Solo mission to Moscow, Childs was told that he should not “give in on principle”, but he should at the same time “retain friendly relations” with the Chinese and “again raise the question of money.”<sup>1290</sup>

Money was, however, not discussed when Morris Childs visited Chinese embassy in Moscow together with CPUSA’s vice chairman Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in early October 1960. The

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1282 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on March 18, 1960. OSD, part 18, pages 219-220. Childs visited Prague both before and after visiting Moscow. He received the money from Chao only after visiting Moscow. Childs did not want to travel to Moscow with such a large sum of money “as the CPSU had no knowledge of this money transaction between the Chinese CP and the CP, USA”.

1283 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to A.H. Belmont on March 10, 1960. OSD, part 18, page 91.

1284 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on March 18, 1960. OSD, part 18, page 220.

1285 Lüthi 2008, 161-162.

1286 According to Lorentz M. Lüthi, this so-called Lenin polemic opened a public Sino-Soviet polemic which lasted until Mao’s death in 1976. See Lüthi 2008, 163.

1287 Lüthi 2008, 170-172.

1288 Lüthi 2008, 174-180.

1289 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on July 11, 1960. OSD, part 20, page 231.

1290 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on September 9, 1960. OSD, part 24, page 99.

visitors were given a 165-page letter which they had to read at the embassy premises without being able to take notes. The letter had been sent by the CPC to the CPSU in September 1960 and it strongly criticized Khrushchev, calling him “a tool of imperialism”. Childs and Gurley Flynn told the Chinese that the CPUSA supported the position of the CPSU in the ideological dispute. Having said this, they also told the Chinese that the CPUSA wanted to “retain fraternal relationships with the CPC”.<sup>1291</sup>

Although both parties of the Moscow meeting expressed their willingness to remain in contact, the relationship between the CPUSA and the CPC seems to have deteriorated after October 1960. Looking at the Operation Solo documents, bilateral contacts between the two parties became scarce. Morris Childs no longer travelled to China during his Solo missions. At the same time Hall’s opinion of the Chinese seems to have become increasingly negative. In late November Hall called the Chinese “two-faced” and said that for the past two years the Chinese have been aiming at “establishing an International of their own”.<sup>1292</sup>

#### **4.2.2. The awkward ideological inclinations of William Z. Foster**

The CPUSA’s relation to Chinese communism was complicated by the fact that William Z. Foster, the then highly respected grand old man of American communism, had during the 1950s developed a sympathy for the Chinese interpretation of communism. In his 1955 book *The History of the Three Internationals* Foster wrote extensively on the Chinese revolution and Mao calling him “a brilliant theoretician”, a “creative Marxist genius” whose writings constitute “major contributions to the general body of Marxist theory”. Later in the 1950s Foster was not bothered by the fact that the Chinese refused to endorse Khrushchev’s condemnation of Stalin.<sup>1293</sup>

The Soviets paid attention to Foster’s writings. When Morris Childs visited Moscow during his very first Solo mission in the summer of 1958, the Soviets told him that “while William Z. Foster is considered an honored leader of the CPUSA, from a practical standpoint, Eugene Dennis is accepted as the leader of the CPUSA”.<sup>1294</sup> Such a comment was surely welcomed by the CPUSA’s general secretary Eugene Dennis whose relationship to chairman Foster was indeed tense. In the spring of 1958 Dennis had accused Foster of being doctrinaire, rigid and engaged in factionalism. In addition to that, he accused Foster of never bringing younger persons into the party leadership and thus hindering the development of future leaders for the party.<sup>1295</sup> Foster’s illness did not make the situation any better. In October

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1291 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 18, 1961. OSD, part 28, pages 23-24. See also memo from F.J. Baumgardner to A.H. Belmont on January 25, 1961. OSD, part 27, page 84.

1292 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on November 25, 1960. OSD, part 25, page 154.

1293 Foster 1955, 509-512 and Johanningsmeier 1994, 348.

1294 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on July 22, 1958. OSD, part 2, page 61.

1295 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on April 11, 1958. OSD, part 1, page 133.

1957 Foster had suffered a stroke which had affected his ability to speak and to hold a pen and had rendered him bedridden.<sup>1296</sup>

Although Eugene Dennis had very few positive things to say about Foster, the Chinese held him in high regard. Morris Childs was able to observe this when he visited China in the summer of 1958. According to Childs, Foster was always “praised to the sky” in China. Because of such an attitude, Childs could not tell the Chinese about Foster’s failing health. After such praising comments, Childs wrote later, “it certainly would have been improper to say that Foster is now senile and his brain is not working properly”.<sup>1297</sup>

In December 1958 Foster caused confusion when he sent Mao a 5 000-word personal letter in which he extravagantly praised the accomplishments of the Chinese revolution. The letter had not been approved by the CPUSA, and it caused no small amount of unease when *The New York Times* published a story about it and Mao’s warm response. In his letter Foster suggested that he would like to visit China and be treated there for his medical problems. The possibility that the chairman of the CPUSA might spend the last days of his life in China surely was not warmly welcomed by the party leadership.<sup>1298</sup>

Foster’s antics strained his relations with the party leadership. This could be seen already the summer of 1959 when Foster wanted to publish an article entitled *The Fight Against Revisionism Is Not Over* in one of the party publications. The CPUSA’s national executive committee decided unanimously not to publish the article because it was “not based on reality”. Foster’s “inclinations toward the current line of the Communist Party of China” were also noted by the national executive committee.<sup>1299</sup>

Although Mao had warmly welcomed Foster to come to China for medical treatment in his January 1959 reply letter<sup>1300</sup>, Foster ended up travelling to the Soviet Union in January 1961. Such a choice did not mean, however, that he had changed his political line. Upon his arrival to the Soviet Union, he submitted to Mikhail Suslov and Otto Kuusinen a lengthy document reflecting his political thinking and his disagreement with the leaders of the CPUSA. Suslov and Kuusinen had the text translated into Russian. After studying and

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1296 Johanningsmeier 1994, 347.

1297 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on August 13, 1958. OSD, part 3, page 174.

1298 *The New York Times*, February 1, 1959 and Johanningsmeier 1994, 347-348. Foster’s letter and Mao’s reply were published in full length in *Political Affairs* in March 1959. See Foster 1959, 22-31.

1299 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on August 11, 1960. OSD, part 23, page 10. CPUSA was not the only organization to turn down Foster’s writings. In November 1959 Alexei Rumyantsev, the chief editor of *World Marxist Review*, told Morris Childs in Prague that the communist journal could not publish Foster’s article because such an act would have conflicted the then-prevalent mood in the Soviet-U.S. relations. Shortly earlier Nikita Khrushchev had visited the United States and following the visit, the relations between the two great powers had become warmer. As a result of this, *World Marxist Review* would not print anything “containing the language of the cold war” or anything that would cause friction between the Soviet Union and the United States. See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on December 9, 1959. OSD, part 16, page 116.

1300 See Foster 1959, 31.



discussing the text Suslov and Kuusinen met with Foster and told him that they “rejected the document in its entirety”.<sup>1301</sup>

Foster’s disagreement with the Soviet and CPUSA leaders could be clearly seen also on February 25, 1961, when Nikita Khrushchev and members of the CPSU’s secretariat visited Foster on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday at a rest home located outside Moscow. Before going to see Foster, Khrushchev and other visitors had agreed to avoid all political discussions and only talk about Foster’s health and personal matters. This, however, turned out to be difficult, because Foster declared in the very beginning of the meeting that he wanted to discuss his disagreement with CPUSA’s political line. A high-ranking Soviet official later told to Morris Childs:

Khrushchev told him [Foster] that he had not come to discuss politics, but only Foster’s health. Further, Khrushchev said that the occasion was not opportune for a political discussion. Foster became very angry, and pointing his finger at Otto Kuusinen, member of the Secretariat group present, said, “You are responsible for this. You told them not to listen to me. You are a centrist!” The situation at the moment was tense and embarrassing in that there were photographers and several other outsiders present. Foster was taken back to his room in a wheel chair. He was told not to excite himself and to rest for a while before having his picture taken with Khrushchev.<sup>1302</sup>

Foster’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated widely in the communist newspapers around the world. He was hailed as one of the world’s “greatest Marxist theoreticians”.<sup>1303</sup> One of Foster’s proudest moments came in late March when Moscow State University awarded him an honorary professorship in recognition of his contributions to Marxist history and theory.<sup>1304</sup>

Not everyone, however, could join the glorification of Foster. Gus Hall, after having heard of Foster’s outbursts in Moscow, described his behavior as “politically atrocious”.<sup>1305</sup> Hall’s

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1301 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on July 21, 1960. OSD, part 32, page 65. Unfortunately, Foster’s text is not included in the Solo documents.

1302 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on July 19, 1961. OSD, part 32, page 52. The incident is mentioned in a slightly different form in Johanningsmeier 1994, 350. A photo of Foster’s and Khrushchev’s meeting is also included in Johanningsmeier’s book. Interestingly, Otto Kuusinen could not sleep after meeting with Foster and after hearing his accusations. Early next morning Kuusinen travelled back to Foster’s rest home and asked Foster why he had accused him of being a centrist and what was his definition of centrist. To Kuusinen’s surprise Foster “hemmed and hawed, but could not give an adequate definition of a centrist”. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on July 19, 1961. OSD, part 32, page 53.

1303 Johanningsmeier 1994, 350.

1304 Barrett 1999, 270. Foster’s professorship was indeed a great source of pride for him. He wanted Gus Hall to hang a copy of his certificate on the wall of CPUSA’s headquarters. Ben Davis, Foster’s most prominent follower, was to make sure that Hall would not forget.

1305 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 16, 1961; OSD, part 31, page 21. Hall seems to have been well aware of the risks related to Foster’s political inclinations already in the summer of 1960. When briefing Morris Childs before his trip to Moscow in July, Hall wanted Childs tell the Soviets that they “should not make too much fuss about Foster’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday”. See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on July 11, 1960; OSD, part 20, page 236.

attitude towards Foster had indeed changed because earlier during his career he had lavishly praised the veteran leader.<sup>1306</sup>

Quite soon it became obvious that Foster's behavior was not caused solely by ideological factors but it was rather a reflection of his mental imbalance. Otto Kuusinen, who had visited Foster several times after his arrival to Moscow, came to the conclusion that his old friend was "a very sick man".<sup>1307</sup> Jack Childs, who visited Foster in July 1961, came to a similar conclusion and estimated that he was suffering from paranoia.<sup>1308</sup> The Soviets made a similar diagnosis. Dimitri Shevlyagin, a high-ranking official from CCCPSU's international department, told Childs that the CCCPSU was "at a loss to know what to do about Foster". According to Shevlyagin, it would not be humane to prevent people from meeting Foster. "Consideration must be given to the fact that he is a very sick man and apparently paranoid", Shevlyagin said to Childs.<sup>1309</sup>

These considerations could soon be forgotten, however, because William Z. Foster died in the sanitarium outside Moscow on September 1, 1961 at the age of 80. Otto Kuusinen organized the memorial service for his old friend in Moscow. Nikita Khrushchev took part in the ceremony and notable CPSU leaders such as Leonid Brezhnev, Alexei Kosygin and Mikhail Suslov were among the pallbearers. Unlike John Reed and Big Bill Haywood – who had also died in Moscow – Foster's ashes were not interred in the Kremlin Wall but they were transported to the United States where they were later deposited in the Waldheim Cemetery in Chicago where numerous CPUSA leaders and other left-wing politicians have been buried.<sup>1310</sup>

Foster was, of course, remembered prominently also in the United States. A memorial meeting was arranged in Carnegie Hall in New York where about one thousand people gathered to hear eulogies by Gus Hall, Foster's disciple Ben Davis and workers who knew Foster through his organizing work among miners and textile workers.<sup>1311</sup> *Political Affairs* published Gus Hall's lengthy eulogy in its October number as well a detailed report from the Moscow memorial ceremony. As could be expected, Gus Hall made no references to Foster's inclinations toward the Chinese line in his speech – in fact, China, CPC or Mao were not at all mentioned in the six-page speech. Instead, Hall claimed that Foster was "a tireless fighter for peaceful coexistence".<sup>1312</sup> Foster himself might have disagreed with such

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1306 For example, in a 1950 speech Hall called Foster "the foremost Marxist leader and theoretician" of the CPUSA and "a model Communist leader and worker" who had "set for himself a high standard of work, a well-organized, systematic, self-disciplined style of work" and who had shown "extreme boldness in tackling and solving new problems and especially theoretical questions". In Hall's opinion there was "no other American, living or dead, who so embodies in his work, thinking, the experiences, the traditions of our working class". See Hall's undated speech at CPUSA's 15<sup>th</sup> national convention in New York in December 1950; CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 194, folder 2.

1307 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on July 19, 1961. OSD, part 32, page 53.

1308 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on July 21, 1961. OSD, part 31, page 150.

1309 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on July 19, 1961. OSD, part 32, page 53.

1310 Johanningsmeier 1994, 351 and Barrett 1999, 271-272.

1311 Johanningsmeier 1994, 351 and Barrett 1999, 271.

1312 Hall 1961b, 3.

a characterization – peaceful coexistence was, after all, one of the main sticking points in the Sino-Soviet dispute.

It was no coincidence that the CPUSA remembered Foster prominently. Gus Hall was afraid that the Chinese-minded small communist fractions might try to appropriate Foster for themselves – after all, Foster had been clearly pro-Chinese during his last years. There were several pro-Chinese fractions operating in the United States already in the early 1960s. Milton Rosen’s Progressive Labor Movement was perhaps the most notable group. Rosen had been expelled from the CPUSA in 1961 after he had demanded that the party should dissolve and start operating secretly. Another pro-Chinese fraction was led by Homer Chase who similarly had been expelled from the CPUSA in 1961. In 1963 he was editing a publication called *Hammer and Steel*. According to the Gus Hall, *Hammer and Steel* was “filled with the most slanderous and crude falsehoods against the CPUSA and the CP of the Soviet Union”.<sup>1313</sup> In addition to *Hammer and Steel*, there appeared also at least two other pro-Chinese publications in the United States, namely *Far Eastern Review* and *Marxist-Leninist Quarterly*. Gus Hall suspected that at least some of these publications were receiving financial support from China.<sup>1314</sup>

Hall’s concern for Foster’s legacy could be seen clearly as he in early 1964 discussed a Soviet documentary film about Foster. The film focused mainly on Foster’s memorial service in Moscow in September 1961 and was – in Hall’s opinion – “terrible”.<sup>1315</sup> Hall wanted the film to be re-edited in the United States. Older American film material on Foster should be gathered and added to the Soviet film. After that the film could be shown by the CPUSA. “Hall thinks that they better do this because of the likelihood that if they don’t, the left and pro-Chinese people in the United States might try and adopt Foster as their own. By showing this film, Hall believes that he might be able to prevent the left and pro-Chinese usage of Foster”, Morris Childs reported.<sup>1316</sup>

While Hall publicly praised Foster and struggled to stop the pro-Chinese groups from adopting Foster as their own, in private he seems to have been much more critical. According to one source, Hall said at a CPUSA event in the fall of 1961 – shortly after Foster’s death – that it was Foster, after all, who “had wrecked the American Party”.<sup>1317</sup>

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1313 In October 1963, the CPUSA sent CCCPSU a list of organizations distributing Chinese propaganda material in the United States. The groups led by Rosen and Chase were both included in the list. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 3, 1963. OSD, part 49, pages 37-41.

1314 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 5, 1963. OSD, part 49, page 170. In addition to the publications mentioned above, Hall also suspected that *The Militant*, the publication of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party received financial assistance from China.

1315 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on December 23, 1963. OSD, part 53, page 54.

1316 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 20, 1964. OSD, part 56, page 50.

1317 Starobin 1965, 153.

### 4.2.3. Ideological clashes with the Chinese

As mentioned earlier, after the fall of 1960 there are very little signs of bilateral contacts between the CPUSA and the CPC in the Operation Solo documents. This is not surprising. As the Sino-Soviet split grew more and more serious, it would have been surprising if the CPUSA – which had chosen to side with the Soviets – would have maintained bilateral connections with the Chinese.

Gone were the days when Morris Childs visited China and conversed politely with Mao and other Chinese leaders. After 1960 CPUSA and CPC seem to have exchanged views mainly on pages of newspapers and other party publications. The tone was critical, if not hostile. A good example of such an exchange is the short-lived debate that took place in early 1963 following a CPUSA statement which was published in the *Political Affairs* journal.

In its statement the CPUSA strongly attacked Chinese views concerning the Cuban crisis which had taken place in previous October. According to the Chinese, the Cuban crisis was equivalent to the 1938 Munich conference which had permitted Nazi Germany's annexation of portions of Czechoslovakia. In their opinion, the Soviet Union should have followed a stricter policy line of no concessions to the United States. The Soviets had made a compromise with imperialism and sacrificed the sovereignty of Cuba. "A compromise of this sort can only be regarded as one hundred percent appeasement, a 'Munich' pure and simple", the CPC wrote in an editorial of *Peking Review*.<sup>1318</sup>

According to the CPUSA, the Chinese views were "unbelievable and irresponsible slander against the CPSU – Party of Lenin". According to the Americans, the Chinese leaders had "failed to grasp the realities of today". Their policy of no negotiations and no concessions would have led to a thermonuclear war and "final, total disaster for millions of people including every major city on the three continents of the northern hemisphere".<sup>1319</sup> The CPUSA wrote:

The victory for the policy of peaceful coexistence with its negotiations and compromises to maintain peace and the integrity of nation has nothing in common with the slanderous charge of "Munich". Rather, the events in the Caribbean are the exact opposite of a "Munich". They are not steps to war but to peace.<sup>1320</sup>

The CPC answered by publishing a lengthy editorial in the *People's Daily* in early March 1963.<sup>1321</sup> In the editorial the CPC called "certain leaders" of the CPUSA "willing apologists for U.S. imperialism" who were "doing their utmost to prettify U.S. imperialism, to prettify

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1318 The *Peking Review* editorial is quoted in *On Cuba, China and the U.S.S.R.*, 4-5. Lorentz M. Lüthi also mentions Chinese "Munich" claims in his study of the Sino-Soviet split. According to Lüthi, the Chinese also accused the Soviets of "adventurism" and "capitulationism" and of "showing vacillation in the struggle". See Lüthi 2008, 227.

1319 *On Cuba, China and the U.S.S.R.*, 5. Interestingly, according to *Political Affairs*, the article was written by "The Communist Party, U.S.A.". *Gus Hall Bibliography*, however, lists the article as one written by Gus Hall. See *Gus Hall Bibliography*, 90.

1320 *On Cuba, China and the U.S.S.R.*, 5.

1321 The editorial was published in *People's Daily* on March 8, 1963. It was later published in English as an 18-page pamphlet *A Comment on the Statement of the CPUSA*. A copy of the pamphlet can be found in the collections of Tamiment Library of New York University. See CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 194, folder 19.

Kennedy, the U.S. imperialist chieftain, and to affirm their loyalty to the U.S. ruling class”. According to the Chinese, the policies of these leaders were close to the revisionism of Earl Browder, the former general secretary of the CPUSA whose name had become a swearword among world’s communists after the CPUSA was in 1945 under his leadership temporarily transformed into a political association.<sup>1322</sup> Not surprisingly, the Chinese advised the CPUSA to follow the revolutionary tradition of William Z. Foster, “the outstanding leader of the U.S. proletariat”.<sup>1323</sup>

Although the February 1963 statement *On Cuba, China and the U.S.S.R.* was not published under the name of Gus Hall, he seems to have agreed with it more or less completely. In his March 1963 pamphlet *The Only Choice – Peaceful Coexistence*, Hall strongly attacked “dogmatists” who had distorted the events and accused the Soviet Union of Munich-like behavior during the Cuban crisis. “This is irresponsible, calculated slander which can only divide the socialist forces and play into the hands of imperialism. [...] Such slander must be rejected”, Hall wrote.<sup>1324</sup>

Instead of “Munich”, the Cuban crisis was in Hall’s opinion “a decisive victory for peaceful co-existence”:

And what was the outcome of that crucial test? Nuclear war did not take place. Cuba was not invaded. And socialism was not destroyed. [...] In the Caribbean, the policy of peaceful coexistence became the policy of victory. [...]

Only eyes blinded by dogmatism and factionalism could see this victory for the forces of progress in complete reverse. [...]

That victory gave to the mass of people of all lands new assurances and renewed confidence in the peace policy of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries. [...] Such a victory must not be thrown away into the garbage can of slander!<sup>1325</sup>

And while the Cuban crisis was a victory for peaceful co-existence, it was also a “defeat for dogmatism”. “This crucial test of the policy of peaceful coexistence in the crucible of life’s reality has again proven that the policies of dogmatism are bankrupt and false”, Hall wrote.<sup>1326</sup>

According to Hall, following dogmatist policies would lead to “self-defeating adventurism and sectarianism”. Following dogmatist policies would sever the CPUSA’s relations with American trade unions, the peace movement and the civil rights and youth organizations, because from a dogmatist point of view, these would be bourgeois organizations. The

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1322 *A Comment on the Statement of the CPUSA*, 2-7. This was not the only time the Chinese accused CPUSA of “Browderism”. A Chinese communist in Cuba presented similar accusation to the Havana correspondent of the *Daily Worker*, saying that “your whole party is for Earl Browder”. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 12, 1964. OSD, part 64, page 35.

1323 *A Comment on the Statement of the CPUSA*, 16-17. This was not the first time the Chinese advised the CPUSA to follow the line of Foster. In January 1962 they sent CPUSA a telegram in which they suggested that CPUSA should adopt “the William Z. Foster line” with regard to the Soviet-Chinese dispute. Not surprisingly, such a suggestion never led anywhere. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on January 23, 1962. OSD, part 40, page 152.

1324 Hall 1963, 24. Interestingly, when Hall writes about “dogmatists” he never mentions China. However, it is obvious that he is referring to the Chinese with this term.

1325 Hall 1963, 29.

1326 Hall 1963, 30.

CPUSA could not raise the question of public ownership of industry because that would be a “bourgeois demand in a capitalist society”. The dogmatists would have the CPUSA stop talking about peaceful roads to socialism and instead emphasize the dictatorship of the proletariat and the smashing of the bourgeois state and call for “militant revolutionary actions”.<sup>1327</sup> “We reject such nonsense because we participate in the class struggle and do not intend to let phrasemongers and dogmatists create barriers between our Party and the working class”, Hall writes.<sup>1328</sup>

This example shows clearly the basic tension that existed between the CPC and the CPUSA in the 1960s. The CPUSA criticized the CPC for being reckless and categorical and the CPC in turn accused the CPUSA of being too soft and ready for compromises.<sup>1329</sup> This tension can clearly be seen also in the Operation Solo documents.

The Operation Solo documents include, for example, Gus Hall’s statement which he published in February 1964, after the central committee of the CPC had published an editorial concerning the international communist movement in its theoretical publication *Hung Chi*. In the editorial the central committee of the CPC asserted that “the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeois is inevitably reflected in the communist ranks” and thus “the working class movement tends to divide itself in two”. According to the Chinese, “such is the dialectics of the development of the international working class movement”.<sup>1330</sup>

Gus Hall, a staunch proponent of the unity of the international communist movement, fiercely attacked the Chinese position. According to Hall, the Chinese view glorified “irresponsible, disruptive factional activities aimed at splitting Communist Parties”. Hall wrote:

A thesis which justifies splitting its ranks can at no time be in the interest of the working class. It is a disservice to the struggle for world peace, harmful for the people against imperialism and for colonial liberation, and detrimental to the struggles for democracy and for socialism. [...]

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1327 Hall 1963, 32-34.

1328 Hall 1963, 34-35. According to Hall, dogmatism seemed to have a special appeal to certain kinds of people: “It appeals to ‘formalists’, to people who deal with ‘neat little systems’ and to people who feel secure only behind rigid fences constructed from dogmas. It appeals to people to whom the struggles and the considerations of life have become ‘too much’ and too involved. It appeals to people who like to play at ‘heroics.’ It appeals to people who do not have oneness with the working class, who do not accept the discipline of that class and who do not in fact understand the historic driving motive of the working class. Dogmatism appeals to windbags who cover up with shallow theories and who play upon moods, mostly moods of pessimism. They take pleasure in using bombast and enjoy coining new phrases that have nothing to do with life’s realities.” See Hall 1963, 35.

1329 The CPC also accused the CPUSA of “lack of militancy” as the party was not supporting the African American rioters during the riots of the summer of 1964. Instead of supporting the rioters the CPUSA condemned violence. The Chinese hailed the Progressive Labor Movement as the “true Marxist labor movement” in the United States after William Epton, one of PLM’s leaders, was arrested in New York during the riots. See *The New York Times*, August 16, 1964.

1330 Quoted in report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on February 17, 1964. OSD, part 58, page 101. According to *The New York Times*, the *Hung Chi* editorial “appeared to have laid down a theoretical justification for a formal break with Moscow and the formation of an independent Communist movement”. See *The New York Times*, February 4, 1964.

There is indeed a struggle within the ranks of the working class. It is a struggle against capitalist ideology whose purpose is to divide the workers and set them against one another. The method of fighting against his influence is to fight for unity of the working class, for a common struggle against a common enemy. It cannot be fought by striving deliberately to split the working class.<sup>1331</sup>

Hall disagreed strongly with the Chinese also in relation to the war in Vietnam. The Chinese believed that the North Vietnamese could beat the U.S. forces in Vietnam militarily and thus they should not negotiate with the Americans. Hall, however, did not support the idea of solely aiming for military victory. In his opinion, the possibility of reaching a solution through diplomacy should not be ruled out. According to Hall, the Chinese glorified war “in an infantile manner”. He did not believe in Mao’s maxim that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun”. Nor did he agree with Mao’s idea that “the seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of issues by war is the central task and the highest form of revolution”. Marshal Lin Piao, the Chinese defense minister, had referred to these ideas in an article in early September 1965, just a few days before Hall spoke at a CPUSA’s national youth encampment in Culver, Indiana.<sup>1332</sup> In his speech Hall also criticized Mao’s idea that the countryside could serve as a basis for revolution by providing revolutionary bases from which the revolutionaries can move forward to their final victory. Hall made his thoughts clear when speaking to the CPUSA youth:

We disagree with Marshal Lin and Comrade Mao. Political power does not grow out of the barrel of a gun. Economic and political power and class consciousness are behind the barrel of a gun. The concept that the “countryside” is the basis of the revolution is a complete distortion of Marxism-Leninism. According to the Chinese, everything depends on war – we empathically disagree.<sup>1333</sup>

The CPUSA’s view on Lin Piao’s September 1965 article was further elaborated in the lengthy editorial of the January 1966 issue of *Political Affairs*. It is unclear whether Gus Hall was involved in writing the editorial but nevertheless the basic approach of the editorial is very similar to Hall’s speech at the CPUSA’s national youth encampment in Culver, Indiana. As the editorial is an exceptionally thorough study and critique of the Chinese political line, it is worth a closer look.

According to the editorial, the Chinese considered that there is no path to victory over imperialism other than the military path. The Chinese justified their view by referring to the Chinese civil war through which the communists had become the ruling power

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1331 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on February 17, 1964. OSD, part 58, page 102. Hall sent his statement to the CPSU through Jack Childs “for publication or to be used in any effective manner which you wish to the CP press in socialist countries”.

1332 Lin Piao’s article was covered by *The New York Times* on September 4, 1965. In his massive 50 000-word article Lin stated that U.S. imperialism could be defeated “piece by piece” through “people’s wars” in Asia, Africa and Latin America. According to *The New York Times*, the article was published in all Chinese newspapers and in CPC’s theoretical journal *Hung Chi*.

1333 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on September 15, 1965. OSD, part 93, page 192. It was not a coincidence that Hall denounced the Chinese line so loud and clear in his speech to the CPUSA youth. As Morris Childs points out in his letter concerning the youth encampment, the pro-Chinese elements had been “making headway among the radical youth with the slogan ‘no compromise’”. See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on September 15, 1965. OSD, part 93, page 189.

in the country. The U.S. communists did not share this view. According to the editorial, “completely to generalize the applicability of the path of armed struggle taken by the Chinese people is an utterly dogmatic approach, entirely alien to the methodology of Marxism-Leninism”. The editorial refers to Mikhail Suslov, who had criticized the Chinese because “they completely ignore the immense variety of conditions in which the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America exist”. *Political Affairs* wrote:

The peoples of these countries face diverse tasks at widely differing levels which require varied methods of struggle involving political, diplomatic, economic and military forms in various combinations. To reduce all these to a single formula of armed struggle is to depart from reality.<sup>1334</sup>

The editorial pointed out that countries can take the road to socialism also without armed revolt as Kwame Nkrumah’s Ghana had done.<sup>1335</sup> The communists were not hoping for war:

The source of war, it is true, is imperialism; and war, it is also true, may lead to revolution. But Communists do not on that account seek war as the necessary path to revolution; on the contrary, they strive to prevent war and to win their aims without it.<sup>1336</sup>

The editorial continued to discuss the war in Vietnam in which the United States had become more closely involved in 1965. The Chinese believed that American imperialism could be defeated by launching a series of “people’s wars” in Asia, Africa and Latin America. According to Lin, U.S. imperialism was like “a mad bull dashing from place to place” which would be finally “burned to ashes in the blazing fires of people’s wars it has provoked by its own actions”.<sup>1337</sup> According to the editorial, such thinking was dangerous. The writers reminded their readers that the Truman administration had seriously considered using nuclear weapons in the Korean War and that “the Eisenhower administration was no less ready to resort to such weapons”.<sup>1338</sup> Considering the risk of nuclear war, the American imperialism should not be fought solely militarily but also on a political level. The editorial writers argued:

To reject the political fight for peace in Vietnam, for reversal of the Johnson policy, for removal of all U.S. forces and instead to call only for continuation of the war until finally these forces are driven out militarily, is to gamble with nuclear catastrophe.<sup>1339</sup>

The editorial also pays attention to the belittling attitude of the Chinese leadership towards the massive consequences of a possible nuclear war. Achieving socialism through nuclear war would not be such a tremendous victory as the Chinese considered it to be. The editorial

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1334 *War and Revolution*, 4.

1335 Nkrumah was still in power in Ghana in January 1966 when the *Political Affairs* editorial was published. In February 1966 he was, however, overthrown in a military coup.

1336 *War and Revolution*, 5. In this connection, the editorial quotes the 81-Party Statement that was agreed upon between the world’s CPs in 1961: “The fact that both world wars, which were started by imperialists, ended in socialist revolutions by no means implies that the way to social revolution goes necessarily through world war.”

1337 Lin’s article is quoted in *War and Revolution*, 7.

1338 *War and Revolution*, 9.

1339 *War and Revolution*, 10.



writers – sound supporters of the idea of peaceful coexistence – could not “subscribe to the concept of a socialism built upon the decimation of mankind”:

Such a concept is totally at odds with the humanism, the concern for the welfare of their fellow men by which Communists are motivated. To fight for socialism is to do everything to prevent nuclear war.<sup>1340</sup>

#### 4.2.4. Conclusions

The Operation Solo documents show clearly how Gus Hall’s attitude towards the Chinese changes during the 1960s. In 1960 he was still ready to discuss receiving financial assistance from the Chinese, but only a few years later he was in an open conflict with the Chinese CP.

Interestingly, Hall did not cut off all co-operation with the Chinese when the Sino-Soviet split became public in the summer of 1960. Although Hall was still ready to discuss financial assistance with the Chinese in September 1960, he soon afterwards became a relentless critic of the Chinese. Hall’s behavior in September 1960 may be explained by the fact that Soviet financial assistance to the CPUSA was in 1960 still quite modest – only around \$300 000 – and the CPUSA was in constant need of financial support.<sup>1341</sup> After the early fall of 1960 Hall sided closely with the Soviets in the Sino-Soviet split.

The Chinese version of communism was a challenge to the CPUSA not only in the field of international communism but also on the domestic scene. After having briefly supported the CPUSA financially in 1960, the Chinese started financing small Maoist groups in the United States. Such groups – which were often founded by former CPUSA members – were a headache for Gus Hall, especially because many students and other young communists preferred joining more radical Chinese-minded organizations instead of joining the CPUSA. Considering this ideological competition, it was indeed problematic for the CPUSA that William Z. Foster – the most revered living hero of American communism in the very beginning of the 1960s – had during the last years of his life become a supporter of Chinese communism. The CPUSA wanted to keep Foster’s legacy to itself. Therefore it was not a surprise that in his memorial speech Hall presented Foster as “a tireless fighter for peaceful coexistence”, in effect a sound supporter of the Soviet – and the CPUSA – line.

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<sup>1340</sup> *War and Revolution*, 11. Nine months later, *Political Affairs* published another editorial severely criticizing China. In this text the editorial writers attacked the Chinese Cultural Revolution. According to the editorial writers, the teenage Red Guards burning books and destroying priceless artworks while fighting against bourgeois culture and revisionist thinking were mere hoodlums. The Chinese Cultural Revolution had “nothing in common with the Marxist-Leninist concept of ideological struggle”. The Chinese cult of Mao-worship bore “no resemblance to scientific socialism”. The developments in China were not merely an internal issue as the Chinese were fomenting “intensified hostility against the Soviet Union” and rejecting all forms of united action with the Soviets against U.S. aggression in Vietnam. Instead the Chinese accused the Soviets of plotting against the Chinese with the Americans. “To advocate such a policy in the name of fighting imperialism is to part company with reality. It serves only to split the world’s anti-imperialist forces further at the very moment when unity is more urgently needed than ever before”, the *Political Affairs* wrote. See *On the “Proletarian Cultural Revolution” in China*, 1-8.

<sup>1341</sup> Barron 1995, 339.

The concept of peaceful coexistence is indeed central when looking at Hall's relationship with the Chinese. Unlike the Chinese, Hall was an unwavering proponent of peaceful coexistence, a key concept of Khrushchev's foreign policy. In the spirit of peaceful coexistence Hall did not – unlike the Chinese – rule out the possibility of achieving a peaceful solution to the Vietnam War through negotiations. He criticized the Chinese for glorifying war “in an infantile manner”. He did not agree with Mao's idea that the countryside and peasantry could serve as the basis for revolution. Like Khrushchev, Hall believed that socialism could beat capitalism through peaceful competition in political, social, economic, technological and cultural spheres. To the Chinese such thoughts were revisionism and capitulationism.

The Sino-Soviet split was by far the most dramatic and ideologically divisive phenomenon within the international communist movement in the 1960s. After 1960 it was not for a moment unclear on which side Gus Hall was on regarding the split. For Hall the Soviet Union – the very first workers' state – was the unquestioned leader of the international communist movement. China's challenge to the leading position of the Soviets only strengthened Hall's loyalty to the land of the October revolution.

### **4.3. Gus Hall's relationship with the revolutionary Cuba**

#### **4.3.1. Cuba's troubled relationship with the Soviet Union**

Before looking into the bilateral relationship between Gus Hall and the Cubans, we have to take a look at the complicated relationship between Cuba and the Soviet Union. The difficulties in the relations between the first socialist country on the western hemisphere and the communist party functioning in the very heart of world capitalism cannot be understood in the absence of proper context.

As Cuba for decades was a prominent member of the Soviet bloc, it is often forgotten that Fidel Castro, who led Cuba's revolution and afterwards ruled the country for almost 50 years, was originally not a communist. Castro could originally be described as an Anti-American nationalist and a populist, but in the early 1960s – as Cuba little by little became more and more closely connected to the socialist bloc – Castro gradually turned into a Marxist-Leninist. Such development was fostered by the growing negative attitude of the United States towards the new Cuban leader. In April 1961 – just before the U.S.-supported Bay of Pigs invasion – Castro declared that the Cuban revolution had been a socialist revolution.<sup>1342</sup> In the summer of 1961 Castro's 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement was merged

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<sup>1342</sup> U.S.-supported counterrevolutionaries bombed Cuban airbases on April 15, 1961, destroying a large part of Cuban air force. In a funeral oration for the victims of the bombing Castro for the first time announced that the Cuban revolution had been essentially a socialist revolution. In the same speech Castro praised the achievements of the Soviet Union which had just few days earlier launched Yuri Gagarin into space. The Bay of Pigs invasion began on April 17, 1961. See, for example, Coltman 2003, 180 and Gott 2004, 193.

with the Popular Socialist Party – Cuba’s equivalent of the CPUSA – and in December Castro stated that he was a Marxist-Leninist.<sup>1343</sup> As a logical consequence of all these steps, in October 1965 the merger of the revolutionary parties became the Communist Party of Cuba and Castro became the general secretary of the party.<sup>1344</sup>

Although Castro gradually turned into a Marxist-Leninist, it did not mean that his – or Cuba’s – relationship with the Soviet Union was unproblematic. For a large part of the 1960s the relations between the Soviet Union and its only ally in the western hemisphere were tense and strained.

The main bone of contention was the question of armed struggle. It was not surprising that Castro and his comrades in arms, who had just a few years earlier led a successful armed revolution, considered armed struggle as a central element in the revolutionary process. Castro wanted himself to be seen as an example of a revolutionary leader in the Third World countries and Cuba as an example of a successful revolution. The Soviet Union, however, emphasized the doctrine of peaceful coexistence between the two blocs and thus wanted to fade the armed struggle into the background. Instead of guerillas fighting in the mountains and jungles the Soviets stressed united fronts of all democratic forces and peaceful transitions to socialism.<sup>1345</sup>

Castro was of course not the only significant character in the Cuban leadership. The two other top leaders in Cuba were Castro’s close guerilla comrade Che Guevara and Castro’s younger brother Raul. Whereas Raul Castro was “the most reliable partner” from the Soviet point of view<sup>1346</sup>, Guevara was not such an easy person to deal with. Guevara did not believe in the Soviet idea that material incentives for workers could make the communist economy more efficient – instead, Guevara called for a “new man” whose incentive to work would not be the egoistic accumulation of material goods but rather a selfless moral duty towards society.<sup>1347</sup> The Soviets were irritated by Guevara’s rhetoric, especially when he used the Trotskyist term “permanent revolution” in his speeches.<sup>1348</sup> In March 1965 Guevara angered the Soviets by accusing socialist countries of imperialist exploitation

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1343 Coltman 2003, 190 and Gott 2004, 197. According to an FBI report, special schools were established in 1961 for the functionaries of Castro’s July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement in order to educate them in the principles of Marxism-Leninism when the party merged with Cuba’s Popular Socialist Party. Fidel Castro himself was taught the principles of Marxism-Leninism by a personal instructor. See report from The Director to the Attorney General on July 18, 1961; OSD, part 31, page 119.

1344 Brown 2009, 300-301.

1345 Castro biographer Volker Skierka emphasizes the role of Moscow’s policy of peaceful coexistence in the Soviet-Cuban relations: “It was in accordance with this policy that Moscow had been cautious about any active exporting of the Cuban Revolution to other countries. Cuba was supposed to serve as a kind of shop-window demonstrating the superiority of the socialist system but the Kremlin was not prepared to give significant financial or logistical backing to guerrilla movements elsewhere in the Third World.” See Skierka 2004, 156.

1346 Skierka 2004, 157.

1347 Skierka 2004, 163. Castro made Guevara the minister of industry in 1961 but he was not very successful in this position. Between 1961 and 1963, for example, Cuba’s sugar harvest decreased by 40 percent. According to Volker Skierka, Guevara was responsible for this disaster. In 1964 an autonomous ministry was created for the sugar industry after which Guevara was no longer responsible of Cuba’s main export product. See Skierka 2004, 164-168.

1348 Skierka 2004, 166.

of Third World countries. This angered also the Castro brothers who criticized Guevara severely when he returned to Cuba.<sup>1349</sup> Shortly afterwards Guevara decided to leave Cuba in order to help revolutionary fighters in the Third World. He traveled first to Congo and later to Bolivia where his revolutionary crusade ended violently in October 1967.

Castro's and Guevara's emphasis on the armed struggle of course brought them close to the Chinese understanding of Marxism-Leninism. They did not, however, wholly commit themselves to either side in the Sino-Soviet dispute, but rather used the rift to their advantage. By skillfully balancing between the two camps of the split, Cuba was able to sign favorable trade deals with the Soviet Union. For the Soviets it was of great importance to keep Cuba away from aligning itself with the Chinese and they were thus ready to support Cuba economically and militarily. As W. Raymond Duncan puts it in his study on Soviet-Cuban relations, "the Soviets needed the Cubans for political legitimacy as the Third World natural ally" whereas "Castro, in turn, needed the Soviets to sustain Cuba's economic survival and physical security".<sup>1350</sup>

#### 4.3.2. Ideological wrestling on a Caribbean island

Cuba is prominently featured in Operation Solo documents. This is partly due to the fact that *The Worker* newspaper had a correspondent in Havana and her numerous letters to Gus Hall are included in the Solo material. Beatrice Johnson, the Havana correspondent for *The Worker* and the CPUSA's representative in Cuba, was an old friend of Hall and was thus frequently writing to him about the problems she faced in Cuba. Hall and Johnson had, for example, studied at Moscow's International Lenin School at the same time in the early 1930s.<sup>1351</sup> The tone of Johnson's letters was indeed cordial – perhaps it was no coincidence that the Canadian CP leader William Kashtan jokingly called Johnson Hall's "girl friend".<sup>1352</sup>

In addition to Johnson, also the Childs brothers wrote numerous reports concerning Cuba. They both visited Cuba – Morris twice in 1960 and Jack once in 1964 – and produced extensive reports concerning their trips. In addition to that, questions related to Cuba were naturally discussed during their visits in Moscow.

Operation Solo documents effectively reveal the mutual distrust between the Soviets and the Cubans and the unstable nature of the Cuban-Soviet relations. Despite Castro's declaration in 1961 that Cuba's revolution was essentially a socialist revolution, the Soviets saw Castro as "petty bourgeoisie or even anarchist".<sup>1353</sup> Their image of Castro did not get

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1349 Skierka 2004, 170-171.

1350 Duncan 1985, 54. Skierka seems to agree with Duncan. According to Skierka, Castro could play "the Chinese card" to "push up the price he could expect from Moscow". See Skierka 2004, 157.

1351 *Communist Leadership*, 44 and *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities*, 7012. In the 1930s Johnson was known as Beatrice Siskind. Also in the Operation Solo documents she is sometimes referred to as Beatrice Siskind Johnson.

1352 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on January 6, 1965. OSD, part 80, page 35.

1353 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on January 4, 1962. OSD, part 40, page 67.

any better over the following years. In April 1967 Nikolai Mostovets, head of the North and South American section of CCCPSU's international department, told Jack Childs that "Castro was never a Marxist-Leninist and never will be". Instead he is "petty bourgeois intellectual, an adventurer, and romanticist, an individual who has 'tantrums' if he cannot have his way".<sup>1354</sup>

Operation Solo documents also show clearly the tension that prevailed between Castro and his comrade-in-arms Che Guevara. The Soviets as well as Jack Childs saw Guevara as the leading proponent in the Cuban leadership for the so-called Chinese line, which emphasized the importance of armed struggle.<sup>1355</sup> The Soviets hoped that Castro would not "fall under the influence of Guevara" and were happy to see that Castro's political line became more Soviet-minded after his five-week trip to the Soviet Union in the late spring of 1963.<sup>1356</sup>

Such a trend was not permanent, however. In 1966 Castro was again "under the influence of the 'reckless ones'", as Beatrice Johnson put it.<sup>1357</sup> In the spring of 1967 Johnson reported that Castro had "declared war on all Parties who don't agree with his conception of armed struggle as the only form of struggle."<sup>1358</sup> Not surprisingly, a few weeks later Jack Childs reported that "the relations between Fidel Castro and the CPSU are worse than ever". Castro had, for example, refused to see Yuri Andropov, a member of CPSU's central committee, who had travelled to Cuba to meet him. Instead Castro had demanded Leonid Brezhnev to visit him.<sup>1359</sup> In March 1968 top Soviet leaders told Morris Childs that the CPSU and the Cuban CP were "almost not on speaking terms, just like the Chinese".<sup>1360</sup> The unstable

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1354 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 21, 1967. OSD, part 113, page 155. Mostovets's characterization of Castro is rather similar to the one by Vitaly Korionov, the deputy of Boris Ponomarev, the head of the CCCPSU's international section. According to Korionov Castro is "a man of many moods". "If his mood is good, he will listen, he will agree with you, but should it be bad, he would pout and shout", Korionov said. Castro is "a very sensitive comrade" and he has to be talked to "most carefully". Khrushchev met Castro twice during his visits to the Soviet Union and, according to Korionov, talked to him "very precisely, accurately but tenderly, as one would to a child". See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on June 11, 1964. OSD, part 64, page 74.

1355 Jack Childs's views on Che Guevara can be found in OSD, part 64, page 1. The document is missing its cover letter but most likely it was sent from FBI's New York office to the Director on June 19, 1964.

1356 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on August 31, 1963. OSD, part 46, page 67. Vitaly Korionov, the deputy chief of CCCPSU's international department, said to Morris Childs: "Fidel today is no longer as naïve as he was a few months ago. He is changing his mind now and doesn't go about telling people they should take their guns and go to the mountains. This we feel is an achievement in itself."

1357 J. Edgar Hoover's report to the Department of State on September 28, 1966. OSD, part 108, page 31. According to W. Raymond Duncan, the U.S. invasion to the Dominican Republic in April convinced Castro to believe that a "violent path was necessary in the face of U.S. military power". See Duncan 1985, 53.

1358 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 6, 1967. OSD, part 113, page 96.

1359 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 21, 1967. OSD, part 113, page 153. Jack Childs's source was Nikolai Mostovets, head of the North and South American section of CCCPSU's international department. According to Mostovets, Castro said that he was "very busy harvesting the sugar cane crop" and could therefore not meet Andropov. The Soviets were shocked by Castro's attitude.

1360 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on March 19, 1968. OSD, part 121, page

phase in Soviet-Cuban relations ended within six months, however, as Fidel Castro in August surprisingly supported the Warsaw Pact invasion to Czechoslovakia in order to stop the reformist policies of country's new leader Alexander Dubcek.<sup>1361</sup>

If Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union was problematic before August 1968, this was the case also with the relationship between CPUSA and the Cubans. In 1963 the Cubans would not, for example, co-operate with the U.S. party in providing proper working conditions for *The Worker's* correspondent. Beatrice Johnson travelled to Cuba in the fall of 1963 via Moscow where she visited Cuban embassy. The ambassador received Johnson cordially and assured that she would be most welcome in Cuba. However, when Johnson travelled to Havana, "she was met with extreme coolness and lack of cooperation of any nature from both the Cuban government and the Party".<sup>1362</sup> She was not able to meet and talk to people and had difficulties in "integrating into a regular systematic work".<sup>1363</sup> Johnson's situation was not helped by her financial difficulties which forced her to live in a cheap and distant apartment without a telephone. In addition to all this, her life was hampered by complicated and slow mail connections with the CPUSA.<sup>1364</sup>

Instead of the CPUSA, the Cubans preferred interacting with more radical U.S. groups. This could be seen clearly in the distribution of CPUSA literature in Cuba. According to the CPUSA, its literature was not allowed to be imported to Cuba whereas the ultra-leftist groups could have their material distributed on the Caribbean island. Morris Childs discussed the issue when he met with Cesar Escalante, the head of the ideological department of the United Party of the Socialist Revolution of Cuba:

The CPUSA representative took this occasion to complain to Cesar Escalante that while the literature of every type of renegade left in the United States is able to get into Cuba, the CPUSA has been unsuccessful in getting its literature into Cuba in spite of all its efforts to do so. The CPUSA has tried direct shipments, shipments through Canada and through Prague, Czechoslovakia, but nothing seems to work. The CPUSA representative stated that he did not believe that it was the result of United States Government action in withholding this literature because the literature of the anti-Soviet, anti-CPUSA and pro-Chinese groups gets through without trouble.<sup>1365</sup>

According to Beatrice Johnson, her professional isolation in Cuba was caused by the U.S. ultra-leftists and Trotskyists residing on the island. Their literature was "spread with abundance throughout the country". Johnson's situation was not made any easier by

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1361 According to Richard Gott, after 1968 Cuba was "an irreproachable Soviet supporter" and it reconstructed its society following the Soviet example, thus becoming an "orthodox Soviet satellite". See Gott 2004, 237-238.

1362 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on December 17, 1963. OSD, part 52, page 31.

1363 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on February 4, 1964. OSD, part 56, pages 216-217.

1364 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on March 12, 1964. OSD, part 58, page 181.

1365 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on December 12, 1963. OSD, part 51, page 202.

the “far too many” Chinese some of whom saw the CPUSA as a party of Earl Browder’s supporters.<sup>1366</sup>

Beatrice Johnson’s isolation seemed to end in May 1964, when Jack Childs visited Cuba and met several Cuban luminaries, including Fidel Castro. When Childs met Castro in the end of May he mentioned that a CPUSA representative had been in Cuba for eight months and had not been able to meet him in spite of numerous attempts. Castro was surprised to hear this and wanted to meet Johnson immediately. Johnson was brought to Childs’s and Castro’s meeting within 15 minutes. According to Childs, Johnson was “practically half dressed” and surprised to find herself suddenly in the company of Cuba’s top leader. Childs introduced Johnson to Castro and told him that some people in Cuba and in the U.S. are doing their best to isolate the CPUSA from the Cuban party by spreading malicious rumors. He also wondered why CPUSA literature cannot be found anywhere in Cuba “whereas the Trotskyist ultra-left literature is found in great bundles”.<sup>1367</sup>

Castro was surprised and angered when he heard that some people in Cuba had tried to isolate the CPUSA. “I never heard of such a situation. I never heard of such people who are spreading rumors against us and you. Who are they? Where are they?” Castro said angrily.<sup>1368</sup>

Childs did not answer Castro’s questions right away but later delivered him a letter from Gus Hall. In his letter Hall names New York lawyer Victor Rabinowitz and Progressive Labor leader Milt Rosen as the principal actors in “complicating the establishment of closer ties” between CPUSA and the Cuban party. Rabinowitz was in close contact with the Cubans as he was the head of a law firm which represented the Cuban government in the United States in legal matters. According to Hall, Rabinowitz had been a CPUSA member until the early 1960s but was now very active in Rosen’s Progressive Labor.<sup>1369</sup> “Victor Rabinowitz does not do very much publicly but is very active in inner circles of this group and, I believe, is the main financial support for their activities”, Hall wrote.<sup>1370</sup>

The Cubans did not break off their relations with Progressive Labor after Hall’s letter. At least in the summer of 1964 a student group from Progressive Labor visited Cuba. According to Beatrice Johnson, the “varied collection of beatniks, Trotskyites and irresponsible, with four black nationalists thrown in, caused nothing but trouble all the time”. These

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1366 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 12, 1964. OSD, part 64, page 35. See also report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on February 4, 1964. OSD, part 56, page 217.

1367 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 11, 1964. OSD, part 64, pages 84-85.

1368 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 11, 1964. OSD, part 64, page 85.

1369 Interestingly, neither Progressive Labor nor Milt Rosen are mentioned at all in Rabinowitz’s 1996 autobiography *Unrepentant Leftist*. Nor does *The New York Times* mention his alleged links to Rosen’s organization in its Rabinowitz obituary. See Rabinowitz 1996 and *The New York Times*, November 20, 2007.

1370 Gus Hall’s letter to Fidel Castro dated on April 15, 1964. OSD, part 77, page 4. Also Jack Childs named Victor Rabinowitz as one of the main reasons for CPUSA’s isolation in Cuba in his discussions with Ramon Calcines, a high-ranking Cuban party official. According to Childs, Rabinowitz’s office was the headquarters of the ultra-leftists in the United States and it was conducting a fight against the CPUSA and for the Chinese. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 11, 1964. OSD, part 64, page 79.

“Rabinowitz boys” – as Johnson called them – slandered the CPUSA and found many eager listeners among the ordinary Cubans. In Johnson’s opinion, the visit did the CPUSA “no good”. “The press here ate up their leftist statements and gave them powerful publicity”, Johnson wrote.<sup>1371</sup>

Despite Jack Childs’s successful visit in Cuba and his friendly discussions with Castro, it took months before Johnson’s situation got any better. In her letter to Jack Childs in late July Johnson wrote that “the frustrations are still the same and continue”. The Cubans were not keeping their promises.<sup>1372</sup> This did not surprise Johnson as she had learned that in Cuba “promises are always made but rarely kept”.<sup>1373</sup> Some signs of improvement in the relations between the Cuban and the U.S. parties could be seen, however, as an article by Gus Hall was published in the Cuban press.<sup>1374</sup>

The CPUSA’s position in Cuba seems to have improved gradually after the summer of 1964. At least in April 1966 Beatrice Johnson could write to Gus Hall in a following manner about CPUSA’s position in Cuba:

It was rough going at first, since they knew about us from our opponents and our enemies. In this respect there are big changes. Our materials appear in the press. They get our literature and solicit information. [...] Your statements always get front page. *The Worker* comes regularly and in better time and all the people who should have it, get it.<sup>1375</sup>

#### 4.3.3. A beautiful friendship turns sour

When Gus Hall became the general secretary of the CPUSA in December 1959, the Cuban revolution had not yet had its first anniversary. Although the revolutionaries were not explicitly socialist, Hall seems to have had a feeling of togetherness with the new Cuban regime. In his keynote speech in CPUSA’s 17<sup>th</sup> national convention on December 10, 1959 Hall pointed out that “the revolutionary development in Cuba and courageous resistance of the Cuban people to American imperialist intervention is an inspiration to the people’s forces throughout this hemisphere”.<sup>1376</sup>

Three months later in one of his first pamphlets as the new general secretary Hall criticized the Eisenhower administration for following “a shameful policy” with regard to Cuba:

Cuba is a bright star pointing the way to liberation and progress for all Latin America. The administration which supported the despotic Batista regime is now trying to present the democratic, popular government of Cuba as a tyranny and is seeking to discredit it in the eyes of the American people. It is encouraging violence

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1371 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on September 22, 1964. OSD, part 68, page 249. See also report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on September 22, 1964. OSD, part 69, page 10.

1372 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on August 11, 1964. OSD, part 68, page 86.

1373 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 11, 1964. OSD, part 64, page 79.

1374 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on August 11, 1964. OSD, part 68, page 86.

1375 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on May 13, 1966. OSD, part 103, page 154.

1376 Hall 1960b, 4.



against it and is preparing for intervention in behalf of the sugar and banking interests. We must emphatically protest this conduct and rally every support behind the Cuban revolution which for the first time is providing land, homes, education and democratic rights for the masses of the people.<sup>1377</sup>

During the first years of Castro's regime the friendship seems to have been mutual. In January 1961 several Cuban newspapers published a lengthy interview of Hall which was conducted by a reporter of the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina. Some of the newspapers even published large photos of Hall on their front pages, as *The Worker's* Havana correspondent pointed out in his excited report. In the interview Hall warned Cubans of an impending U.S. attack. "Imperialism is ready to attack Cuba. Danger of invasion is real. The Eisenhower government fools no one with its false allegations of blamelessness and neutrality. There is great danger", Hall said just a few months before the invasion of the Bay of Pigs.<sup>1378</sup>

The CPUSA's closest connection in Cuba seems to have been Blas Roca, the general secretary of the Cuban communist party Partido Socialista Popular, whose articles on Cuban revolution were published in *Political Affairs* in 1960 and 1961. In July 1961 Gus Hall sent Roca a congratulatory letter which was published also in *The Worker*. Hall had clearly paid attention to Castro's April declaration in which he announced that the Cuban revolution had been a socialist revolution. Now Cuba could also legitimately be called a socialist country:

Under the inspired leadership of Premier Fidel Castro heroic Cuba has thrown off the yoke of foreign imperialism and domestic reaction and advances along the way to a rich and happy life for its millions in a social order free of the exploitation of man by man.

The monopolists and militarists of our country who launched their puppet army against you and saw it smashed in the Bay of Pigs still view your unparalleled tempo of progress with lustful and vengeful eyes. [...]

Long live revolutionary, democratic and socialist Cuba under the leadership of united revolutionaries headed by Fidel Castro!<sup>1379</sup>

Not always, however, was Hall's relationship with the Cubans so unproblematic. Especially after the first years of the new regime – as the Cubans began their balancing act between the two centers of world communism, Moscow and Peking – cracks began to appear. As an ardent advocate of the Soviet interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, Hall could not accept such behavior.

Operation Solo documents show that Hall was especially critical – if not hostile – towards the Cuban leader Fidel Castro in the mid-1960s. Castro's character seems to have touched a sensitive nerve in Gus Hall, so furiously the American communist leader sometimes reacted to Castro's undertakings.

A good example of Hall's wrathful attitude towards Castro is his reaction to the news that the Cubans would not accept Beatrice Johnson as *The Worker's* correspondent in Havana.

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1377 Hall 1960d, 10.

1378 *The Worker*, January 20, 1961.

1379 *The Worker*, July 30, 1961.

Jack Childs furnished Hall this information in October 1963. Childs later reported: "Upon hearing this report, Hall became enraged shouting 'That S.O.B. Castro! After all the trouble we took to send her (Johnson) there, that b-----d ignores us!'"<sup>1380</sup>

Following this outburst listed Castro's other misdemeanors: interacting with "wrong people" in the United States (i.e. anti-CPUSA and pro-Chinese youth organization), not signing the nuclear test ban treaty, aligning himself with the Chinese, "acting like a dictator" and not holding elections in Cuba and refusing aid from the American Red Cross after a disastrous hurricane hit Cuba in early October 1963.<sup>1381</sup> According to Hall, Castro's antics were "making it impossible for the CPUSA to create any American sympathy for the Cuban regime". According to Jack Childs, Hall was so agitated during the discussion that "he picked up a handful of toothpicks and broke them into bits and then tore to shreds some papers he had in his hand".<sup>1382</sup>

Hall's opinion of Castro did not get any better although the Cuban leader met and had a lengthy discussion with Jack Childs in May 1964. When discussing the trip to Havana with Childs in June 1964, Hall called Castro "middle-class, intellectual, romantic nut", "an adventurer and a petty bourgeoisie romanticist" and "a bag of wind". Hall also said that he did not believe that Castro would keep his promises concerning improving the relations between the Cuban and the U.S. parties.<sup>1383</sup>

Castro was of course not the only Cuban leader who was criticized by Hall. Even the seemingly warm connection between the CPUSA and Blas Roca, the long-time leader of Cuba's Popular Socialist Party, seemed to deteriorate during the early 1960s. In April 1964, as Hall was briefing Jack Childs before his visit to Cuba, he accused Roca for being "a crook" and told Childs to ignore Roca completely. According to Hall, Roca had been "absconding with funds that had been sent to the Cuban CP by the CPUSA". In Hall's opinion, Roca had been "the iron curtain between the CPUSA and the Cuban CP".<sup>1384</sup>

The negative feelings were mutual. After CPUSA veteran Carl Winter had visited Cuba in the fall of 1965, he reported to Hall that Roca, whom Winter had met in Cuba, had been "inimical toward the American Party in general and to Gus Hall in particular". According

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1380 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on October 23, 1963. OSD, part 49, page 55. This was not the only time when Hall lost his temper when discussing Castro. When CPUSA veteran Carl Winter told Hall that he could not meet Castro during his two-week visit in Cuba in the fall of 1965, Hall "blew his top" and "castigated Castro". See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on November 16, 1965. OSD, part 96, page 36.

1381 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on October 23, 1963. OSD, part 49, page 55-56. In another context Hall called Castro "an idiot" for refusing the American Red Cross aid after the hurricane. As a result he perhaps "alienated a number of people in the United States who might have been sympathetic to the Cuban people". See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on November 5, 1963. OSD, part 49, page 171.

1382 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on October 23, 1963. OSD, part 49, page 56. The disrespect seems to have been mutual between Hall and Castro. After Hall complained to Castro that he was dealing with anti-CPUSA and pro-Chinese youth organization in the United States, Castro replied to him by stating that he would deal with whomever he pleased. In Castro's opinion Hall "should mind his own business and not try to tell him who to see or what to do".

1383 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on June 16, 1964. OSD, part 64, pages 21-22.

1384 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 20, 1964. OSD, part 60, page 246.

to Winter, “Roca’s attitude reflected that of the entire Cuban CP”. Roca was irritated by the fact that the CPUSA leadership had not recognized either in its published documents or in the speeches of its leaders that Cuba is “the first country of socialism” in the Western hemisphere.<sup>1385</sup>

As mentioned earlier, one of the main sticking points in the relationship between the CPSU and the Cuban party was the question of armed struggle. Not surprisingly, it also became a bone of contention between Gus Hall and the Cubans.

The question of armed struggle came to prominence in November 1963, when a three-ton arms cache was discovered on a beach in Northern Venezuela. The weapons bore Cuban army markings. After studying the case, an investigating committee of the Organization of the American States accused Cuba of supporting terrorism in Venezuela.<sup>1386</sup>

The fact that Cuba was supporting revolutionaries in other Latin American countries did not come as a surprise to anyone who had listened to Castro’s speeches after the Cuban revolution. He and his comrade-in-arms Che Guevara wanted to export the revolution not only to the Caribbean islands but also to the the South American mainland. He wanted to make the Andes the new Sierra Maestra, referring to the mountains in eastern Cuba where his guerrillas had been hiding during their fight against Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. Castro’s motivation for exporting revolution grew only stronger as Cuba became more and more isolated in Latin America the early 1960s. In addition to Venezuela, Cuba supported revolutionaries in several other Latin American countries during the 1960s.<sup>1387</sup>

Gus Hall, who profoundly supported the doctrine of peaceful coexistence between the two blocs, considered guerrilla warfare in Venezuela to be “wrong and harmful tactics”. According to him, such tactics were activities of “petty-bourgeois anarchistic political juvenile delinquents”. In Hall’s opinion such tactics did great harm to Marxist-Leninist policies both in the United States and on a world scale. Hall was planning to discuss the Venezuelan developments in his report to the CPUSA’s national executive committee. Before doing so he, however, wished to hear the Soviet views on the Venezuelan situation.<sup>1388</sup>

The central committee of the CPSU answered Hall shortly before the meeting of the CPUSA’s national executive committee. The CCCPSU’s answer reflects well the delicate situation in the international communist movement in 1963. The Soviets did not want

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1385 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on November 16, 1965. OSD, part 96, pages 34-35. Operation Solo documents show that Roca’s claim that the CPUSA leadership had not recognized Cuba as “the first country of socialism” in the Western hemisphere was not exactly correct. In his letter to Fidel Castro in April 1964 Gus Hall writes: “You have the great honor and heavy responsibility of building the first socialist country in our hemisphere – and building it 90 miles from the center of world imperialism”. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on April 17, 1964. OSD, part 62, page 24.

1386 *The New York Times*, December 22, 1963.

1387 Gott 2004, 215-218.

1388 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on December 9, 1963. OSD, part 51, page 74. The FBI agents seldom commented CPUSA actions in their reports, but Baumgardner makes an exception: “It is interesting to note that despite the claims of the CPUSA that it is a domestic party, Hall is awaiting instructions from Moscow before taking to task ‘some forces in Venezuela’”.

to aggravate the tensions any further between world's CPs. According to the CCCPSU, criticizing the guerrilla warfare in Venezuela might not be "expedient" at that moment:

It could provide the Communist Party of China with an occasion for further accusations and attacks upon the CPUSA and furnish support for further pro-Chinese activists in the USA. Such criticism can be attacked by the Venezuelan and Cuban parties as interference in their internal party affairs. Such criticism would also lead to the deterioration of relations between the CPUSA and Venezuelan Communist Party, as well as between the CPUSA and other fraternal parties in Latin America.<sup>1389</sup>

In November 1965, after a thorough internal discussion, the Venezuelan Communist Party decided to recommend "the suspension of armed action". The fighting continued for some years, however, partly thanks to Cuba which kept on supporting the guerillas despite the suspension decision of the Venezuelan CP.<sup>1390</sup>

Gus Hall criticized Cuba's policies strongly when he met Jesus Faria, general secretary of the Venezuelan CP, in Moscow in August 1966. Faria had been expelled from Venezuela in the beginning of 1966 and he lived in exile in Moscow. Morris Childs took detailed notes of the lengthy discussions between the two general secretaries.

Faria told Hall that Castro was supporting a young Venezuelan communist leader called Douglas Bravo who had joined the ultra-leftist Movement of the Revolutionary Left. According to Faria, members of this group are "verbal revolutionaries" who want to get rid of old CP leaders because they have "abandoned the struggle". According to Castro, no one in the CP of Venezuela leadership is worth anything except Bravo. In Castro's opinion, "today no one can be a Marxist except one who uses the rifle".<sup>1391</sup>

According to Hall, the Cubans "follow a policy of interference in the internal affairs of other Parties". In his opinion, Castro's policies displayed "petty bourgeois nationalism". Hall reminded that "Marx spoke against such petty bourgeois radicalism". He also pointed out that "Castro's starting point is not the working class", referring to Castro's background as a son of wealthy farmer.<sup>1392</sup>

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1389 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on December 18, 1963. OSD, part 53, pages 67-68. During his Solo mission to Moscow in November 1963 Morris Childs discussed the failed Cuban arms shipments to the Venezuelans with the Soviets. They were "very disappointed with the behavior of Fidel Castro". They were particularly disturbed by the clumsy and uncoordinated way the shipments were made. As a result, the shipments were found by the Venezuelan authorities. See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on December 18, 1963. OSD, part 51, page 131.

1390 Gott 2004, 218.

1391 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 22, 1966. OSD, part 108, pages 204-205.

1392 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 22, 1966. OSD, part 108, page 208. Interestingly, in this connection Hall and Faria discussed also Pablo Neruda's recent visit to the United States. Cuba had denounced Neruda's trip. Hall and Faria did not agree with the Cubans. According to Faria, communists should visit bourgeois countries when they are invited. "We must know how to use the bourgeoisie", Faria said. Hall agreed with him and pointed out that Neruda's visit was "much more effective" than Che Guevara's recent visit to the United States.

Referring to the question of armed struggle in Venezuela, Gus Hall pointed out that a CP cannot follow two separate lines of action at one time, a military line and a peaceful line. “The attitude of the working class in Venezuela is important. It is obvious that they are not ready for an armed struggle and you cannot have a revolution without the working class. It is not a question of what the CP does with the working class but what is the working class ready to do objectively”, Hall said.<sup>1393</sup>

Faria agreed with Hall concerning the lines of action. “One of our biggest errors was to think that we could go forward on two fronts – armed and legal. In self-criticism I must admit that this was impossible. But revolutionary fever clouded the judgment of our comrades and in this could be seen the Cubans’ influence. Now, we are trying to get back to reality.”<sup>1394</sup>

#### **4.3.4. Conclusions**

The relationship between Gus Hall and the Cubans is yet another example of Hall’s difficulty of accepting dissent within the international communist movement. Hall wanted the international communist movement to be a solid monolith and not a bundle of individual actors pulling in different directions. In Hall’s opinion this monolith should have been led by the first workers’ state which had the first-hand knowledge of going through a successful socialist revolution.

During the very first years of Cuba’s new regime Hall’s relationship to the Cuban leadership was uncritically benevolent. However, as Cuba became a member of the socialist bloc, Hall grew more critical in his comments, especially after it turned out that Cuba was not unconditionally following the guidance from Moscow. Although Fidel Castro turned himself into a Marxist during the 1960s, Hall was skeptical about his Cuban counterpart. Hall considered Castro to be a petty bourgeois intellectual, an adventurer and a romanticist. He could not accept Cuba’s policy of exporting revolution and supporting guerrilla warfare in the Third World countries. Instead Hall passionately advocated the Soviet policy of peaceful co-existence which – as Hall put it in the title of one of his pamphlets – was “the only choice”.

For Hall Cuba’s policy of exporting revolution was an example of “petty bourgeois nationalism”. In Hall’s worldview this was a major offence – it was after all the complete opposite of proletarian internationalism which, as this study has shown, was the bedrock of Hall’s political thinking.

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1393 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on October 22, 1966. OSD, part 108, page 209.

1394 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on October 22, 1966. OSD, part 108, page 210.

## 4.4. Gus Hall's relationships with Western and Romanian communist parties

### 4.4.1. Italian "polycentrism" causes ideological headache

While the CPUSA always remained a minuscule player in U.S. politics, in many Western European countries the communist parties played a significant role during the post-WWII decades. This was especially the case in Italy and France. In both countries the communist parties usually gathered more than 20 percent – in Italy sometimes more than 30 percent – of all the votes in parliamentary elections during the postwar decades.<sup>1395</sup> In Italy the communist party PCI remained the second biggest party until its dissolution in 1991.<sup>1396</sup> In France the weakening of the PCF started a bit earlier. Its share of the votes in the national assembly elections dropped below the 20 percent threshold in the 1981 elections and has not recovered since.<sup>1397</sup>

With its 1.5 million members and as the largest communist party in the capitalist world, the PCI was an exceptional phenomenon in the international communist movement during the post-WWII decades. Given the party's exceptional support basis, it is not surprising, that the party followed an exceptional line in relation to the international communist movement during that time.

Palmiro Togliatti, who led the PCI from 1927 until his death in 1964, played of course a central role in defining the PCI's international line. After Khrushchev's speech at CPSU's 20<sup>th</sup> party congress in February 1956 Togliatti became an advocate for de-Stalinization in the international communist movement, emphasizing the autonomy of national communist parties. In an interview in June 1956 he introduced the idea of polycentrism when discussing the international communist system.<sup>1398</sup> According to Togliatti, "the system overall is becoming polycentric and one cannot speak of sole leadership of the communist movement itself, but of progress that is achieved by following different paths".<sup>1399</sup> In Togliatti's opinion, the communist parties operating in similar environments – in capitalist

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1395 The Italian and French communist parties were unique in Western Europe when it comes to electoral success. The only comparable CP in Western Europe was the Finnish communist party which in the 1960s gathered more than 20 percent of the votes in parliamentary elections. See Sassoon 1996, 281.

1396 The PCI was third biggest party in the chamber of deputies elections in 1946 but in every elections after that until the 1990s the party was the second biggest. It was also the second biggest party in all senate of the republic elections from 1948 to 1987. For PCI's electoral results, see Bracke 2007, 376.

1397 Between 1945 and 1981 the PCF's share of votes dropped below 20 percent only once, in the national assembly elections of 1958, when the party got 18.9 percent of the votes. The PCF was the biggest party in national assembly elections in 1945, 1946 and 1956. For PCF's electoral results, see Bracke 2007, 376.

1398 Togliatti's famous interview *Nine Questions on the 20th Congress of the CPSU* was published in the non-communist journal *Nuovi Argomenti* in June 1956.

1399 Quoted in Agosti 2010, 633.

countries, for example – should cooperate more closely in order to exchange experiences and opinions.<sup>1400</sup>

Although Khrushchev himself had emphasized the idea of national roads to socialism in his speech to the CPSU's 20<sup>th</sup> party congress, the Soviet Union was not willing to let go of its leading position in the communist bloc. In a meeting held in Moscow in June 1956, deputy premier Vyacheslav Molotov told Italian communist leader Giancarlo Pajetta that the Soviets would never accept the type of analysis Togliatti made in his recent interview. As a result, Togliatti moderated his views and – among other things – reaffirmed the superior character of the Soviet Union.<sup>1401</sup>

The Hungarian popular uprising and the Soviet Union's reaction to it in the fall of 1956 did not change Togliatti's attitude towards the Soviet Union. Although Togliatti had openly spoken for the autonomy of national communist parties, he fully approved of the Soviet actions in Hungary. According to him, the rebellion was fanned by Hungarian reactionaries and American imperialist agents and if it would not have been crushed, it would have led to a reactionary and even fascist restoration.<sup>1402</sup>

Togliatti is today remembered first and foremost as the father of the concept of polycentrism<sup>1403</sup>, but as Aldo Agosti points out in his detailed Togliatti biography, he did not really use the concept after 1956.<sup>1404</sup> To represent Togliatti and PCI only as a proponent of polycentrism would give inaccurate picture of the Italian party and its leader in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The picture was much more nuanced and complex. While Togliatti eagerly spoke for autonomy of national CPs, he simultaneously held the Soviet Union in great respect. And although Togliatti and the Italian party were not eager to arrange an international conference of communist parties after the Sino-Soviet split had erupted at the turn of the decade, the foremost reason for this was not the opposition to the Soviet Union's leading position in the communist world but rather a concern that arranging such a conference would only aggravate the split between the two largest communist countries.<sup>1405</sup>

Gus Hall's picture of the Italian CP in the mid-1960s, however, seems to have been based largely on Togliatti's concept of polycentrism. This could be seen clearly when two high-ranking Italian communists, Giuliano Pajetta and Luigi Conte, visited the United States in September 1965. They were both senators and, in addition to that, Pajetta was the

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1400 Urban 1986, 236-237 and Bracke 2007, 64-65.

1401 Bracke 2007, 66.

1402 Urban 1986, 239 and Agosti 2008, 241.

1403 See, for example, Eley 2002, 333-334.

1404 Agosti 2008, 245 & 288. According to Bracke, the concept of polycentrism was dropped in Italy in 1956 until 1961. At the same time, however, the Italian CP "took a series of initiatives with an implicit polycentric character". The party, for example, arranged secret meetings with the French CP and proposed, among other things, establishing a joint journal. These initiatives were not, however, very successful as the two parties disagreed on many central questions concerning the international communist movement and Stalinism. In addition to the co-operation with the French, the Italian CP also remained in touch with Yugoslavian CP. Togliatti met Josip Broz Tito in Belgrade in May 1956 and the parties arranged regular meetings throughout the 1960s, despite the cool relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet-led communist movement. See Bracke 2007, 66-67.

1405 Agosti 2008, 286-287.

director of the international department of the central committee of the CPI.<sup>1406</sup> Their New York meeting with Gus Hall turned into a serious argument with the U.S. party leaders. According to Jack Childs, the two parties were “trading punches”.<sup>1407</sup> Childs later reported to the FBI:

Although published reports of the conference between leaders of the Communist Party, USA and the delegation of the Communist Party of Italy in the communist press in the United States and Italy reflect there was complete agreement on matters discussed, there were some heated arguments. The major issue of dispute concerned the Communist Party of Italy’s advocacy of polycentrism, the doctrine that there may be many autonomous centers of communism.<sup>1408</sup>

Also Gus Hall later described the discussions as “heated”. According to him, the Italians became “very alarmed and excited”.<sup>1409</sup> Unfortunately the Operation Solo documents do not contain detailed information on the discussions so it is impossible to say what exactly caused the controversy. It is possible, however, that the Italians were irritated by the use of the concept of polycentrism when the CPUSA representatives discussed the line of the Italian CP. It must be noted that only six months earlier in March 1965, the Italians had explicitly denied that their party advocates polycentrism. The CPI delegation outlined the Italian party line in a Moscow meeting in which Morris Childs was present:

Some people have said that the CPI is opposed to any world conference and that their position is that of Comrade Togliatti, meaning “polycentrism”. Let us point out that the word “polycentrism” was used only once eight years ago. This word has been built up for one reason or another. Let us make it clear that we are not for regional organization that would divide the socialist world from parties in capitalist countries. We are for a wider world organization which would be all-inclusive. Unity in the world communist movement can be organized today on the basis of a different form that was used in the past without a new world center. The CPI is wholeheartedly for autonomy of each party. We favor initiative on the part of every party, yet we favor unity on our common aim.<sup>1410</sup>

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1406 Giuliano Pajetta (1915-1988) was the younger brother of Giancarlo Pajetta (1911-1990) mentioned above. In the early 1930s Giuliano Pajetta fled Mussolini’s fascists to the Soviet Union. From there he traveled to Spain where he fought for the Republicans in the civil war. During WWII Pajetta was a member of the partisan resistance movement in Italy. After the war he was elected to the Italian parliament, just like his older brother. Giuliano Pajetta served as a parliamentarian until 1972 and was a member of the central committee of the CPI until his death. For more on Pajetta brothers, see, for example, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, 349 and *The New York Times*, August 16, 1988.

1407 Report for FBI’s New York office to the Director on September 23, 1965. OSD, part 94, page 43.

1408 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on October 6, 1965. OSD, part 94, page 91. Hall was not the only person criticizing the Italians for their alleged polycentrism. According to Maud Bracke, also the French CP attacked the Italian party for “its theses on polycentrism”. Bracke writes: “One reason why the PCF leadership reacted in such a harsh way to the carefully initiated changes of its Italian counterpart was the fact that it feared the diffusion of ‘Italian’ ideas inside its own ranks; after 1956, the reform-minded in the PCF were often referred to a *les Khrushcheviens* or as *les Italiens*.” See Bracke 2007, 70 & 87.

1409 Report for FBI’s New York office to the Director on September 30, 1965. OSD, part 94, page 77.

1410 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on May 5, 1965; OSD, part 86, pages 173-174. When outlining their party line, the CPI representatives emphasized that the conditions were



The dispute with Pajetta and Conte was not the first nor the last time when Hall demonstrated his disagreement with the Italian party. In January 1965 Hall had expressed his disapproval when he was told that the CPI was planning to suggest the dissolution of *World Marxist Review*, the theoretical journal of the international communist movement. Hall's reaction was not surprising considering the fact that only a little later he suggested that the international communist movement should establish a brand new news agency for itself. In Hall's opinion, the dissolution would have further weakened the ties between world's Marxist parties.<sup>1411</sup> Hall's analysis was undoubtedly correct – after all, *World Marxist Review* was the most notable form of ideological co-operation between the world's CPs in the 1960s, after Cominform had been dissolved in 1956.<sup>1412</sup>

Two years later, in the spring of 1967, Hall was again angered by the Italian CP when it did not help the CPUSA to get an invitation to send an observer to the conference of European CPs in Karlovy Vary in Czechoslovakia. Hall had asked among others the general secretaries of Italian and British CPs, Luigi Longo and John Gollan, to help the CPUSA, but to no avail. According to Jack Childs, the reply letters of CPI and CPGB infuriated the U.S. party leader. "Hall was so angry with the CPs of Italy and Great Britain that he could hardly control himself. In his anger he has been showing these letters to various people and raving against Gollan and Longo", Childs reported to the FBI.<sup>1413</sup>

Hall's negative attitude towards the Italian CP may have been strengthened by the fact that some of his critics within the CPUSA were great admirers of the CPI and its political line. One of these persons was Gil Green, a long-time party veteran who was – just like Gus Hall – a defendant in the Smith Act trial of the CPUSA leadership in 1949. Just like Hall, Green did not report to the authorities in July 1951 in order to begin his five-year prison sentence but became a "cold war fugitive", as Green later titled his memoirs of the 1950s. Green's fugitive years continued until February 1956, when he voluntarily surrendered to the authorities. After his surrender, Green was imprisoned in Leavenworth together with

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not ripe for organizing a general meeting of world's CPs. "We foresee a danger in this action to exacerbate existing differences which might lead not to unity but to just the opposite", the Italians said. This line was very similar to the line of Palmiro Togliatti who had died in August 1964 in the Soviet Union after suffering a brain haemorrhage while visiting a pioneer camp on Crimean peninsula.

1411 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on January 13, 1965; OSD, part 80, page 144 and report from J. Edgar Hoover to Department of State on January 15, 1965; OSD, part 80, page 176.

1412 *World Marxist Review* is the English-language title for the journal *Problems of Peace and Socialism*. It was founded in the international conference of CPs in Moscow in November 1957. First issue of the Prague-based journal was published in September 1958. The journal was published in all major Eastern European languages and in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Chinese and Korean. In absence of a Comintern-style international coordinating body the Soviets gave a lot of weight to *World Marxist Review*. For example Vitaly Korionov, the deputy of Boris Ponomarev, the head of CPSU's international department, told Jack Childs in the late spring of 1964 that *World Marxist Review* "in effect performs the function of an international coordinating body". Korionov's comments were a reply to Gus Hall's comments concerning the need to establish a new coordinating body for world's CPs. See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on June 23, 1964; OSD, part 64, page 160.

1413 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 4, 1967; OSD, part 114, page 58.



*Gus Hall at a press conference in Rome, Italy in October 1966 with Giancarlo Pajetta, Italian parliamentarian and communist leader. Hall's relationship with the Italian Communist Party was tense. His domestic critics – Gil Green and Dorothy Healey, for example – admired greatly the democratic and open atmosphere within the Italian Party. The CPI was indeed very different from the CPUSA. With its 1.5 million members, the CPI was by far the biggest Communist Party in the capitalist world. Source: Alamy*

Gus Hall. Green was released from prison in July 1961, but could not fully take part in party activities for another three years.<sup>1414</sup>

The long period away from CPUSA activities had changed Green's thinking, and his return to the party did not go smoothly. In January 1965 a Solo report stated that Green "was having certain problems in properly orientating himself" and "at times had taken political positions not entirely in agreement with the overall leadership".<sup>1415</sup> Another Solo report revealed the source for Green's unorthodox thoughts. In a letter to CPUSA's vice chairman Henry Winston, Green writes in a very positive manner of the Italian CP which – according to Green – had "developed a real inner democratic life and a real atmosphere of real discussion over basic questions". According to Green, the Italians debated issues "without name-calling or vitriol of any kind".<sup>1416</sup> It is unclear whether Green had visited Italy when he wrote the letter in November 1963, but in the spring of 1965 he did visit the home of the largest and most powerful CP in the capitalist countries.<sup>1417</sup>

Another prominent CPUSA member who greatly admired the Italian CP was Dorothy Healey, the long-time chairman of the Southern California CP.<sup>1418</sup> Healey was one of the staunchest critics of Gus Hall in the CPUSA in the 1960s. In 1959, before Hall became the general secretary, Healey had seen him in a positive light<sup>1419</sup>, but her opinion soon changed after Hall became the top leader. Healey became critical of Hall's numerous prerogatives as general secretary.<sup>1420</sup> In Healey's opinion, Hall ruled the CPUSA like a feudal lord, surrounding himself with loyal vassals, each in charge of a minor fiefdom. According to Healey, Hall used "extra funds", trips to the Soviet Union and book publishing deals to reinforce his power.<sup>1421</sup>

In Healey's opinion, the atmosphere in the CPUSA did not support critical discussion and new ideas. Instead, the views of the general secretary became the only correct doctrine to which others had to submit. According to Healey, this was the case in most communist parties around the world. The general secretaries never had to "test their ideas in an atmosphere of genuine controversy and challenge". One of the few exceptions to this rule

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1414 Just like in Gus Hall's case, three years were added to Gil Green's prison sentence because he had gone underground in 1951. For more information on Green, see, for example, *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 169-171 or *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 277-278.

1415 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on January 13, 1965; OSD, part 80, page 146. Despite these shortcomings Nikolai Mostovets, the head of the North and South American section of the international department of the CCCPSU, thought that Green could be included in the CPUSA delegation at an international communist party meeting in Moscow in March 1965. According to Mostovets, this gave the Soviets a possibility to "work on him [Green] and straighten him out".

1416 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on December 10, 1963; OSD, part 51, page 47.

1417 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 13, 1965; OSD, part 88, page 117.

1418 For more information on Healey, see, for example, *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 195-197; *Leaders from the 1960s*, 529-535 or *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 300.

1419 Healey & Isserman 1993, 172-173.

1420 Healey & Isserman 1993, 175.

1421 Healey & Isserman 1993, 175-176. Healey's critical remarks were somewhat similar with the remarks of Gil Green in the 1990s. According to Green, Hall used direct cash payments to party members to steer the party in the direction he wanted. "Envelopes go all over", Green described Hall's leadership style in an interview. See Stephanson 1993, 321.

was the Italian communist party “where since Togliatti’s time people with dissenting views have been included in the Party leadership as a matter of course”.<sup>1422</sup>

Healey’s picture of the CPI was not shattered when she visited Italy in the spring of 1967 – rather the opposite occurred:

Italy showed me just how open and innovative a Communist Party could be in a country where it was still contending for power. The thing that struck me in all my dealings with the Italian Communists was their absolute candor. There were no forbidden questions as far as they were concerned, and also none of this nonsense about protocol which I so disliked.<sup>1423</sup>

Healey asked the PCI leaders how the party was able to keep up the enthusiasm of its members year after year. This had always been a major problem in the CPUSA. In the 1930s and 1940s the U.S. party had tens of thousands of members but the turnover was very high, many new members leaving the party after just some months of membership.

“What we have tried to institute”, one of them [PCI leaders] replied, “is an emphasis on Party education so that Marxism stays alive within our ranks – combined, of course, with constant open debate about the issues which confront the Party”. And that was, in fact, exactly how they functioned. When the Central Committee had a debate they printed the details of it on the front page of the Party newspaper. The contrast with the American CP’s attitude toward such things could not have been starker. It meant that in Italy the Party members could actually learn to think for themselves. The Party’s line was not something created by demigod’s though some mysterious process that mere mortals could never understand: it was the product of argument and persuasion and choice by real live fallible and improvable human beings.

The leaders of the American CP frowned upon the PCI – which I don’t imagine caused Italian Communists too many sleepless nights. [...] But to me the PCI represented the essence of genuine Leninist tradition – the Leninism of the early days of the Bolshevik revolution when the Party openly debated its differences and even Lenin could be voted down after the issues had been debated. This was how democratic centralism was supposed to work.<sup>1424</sup>

Green and Healey were of course not the only CPI sympathizers in the CPUSA. Al Richmond, editor of *People’s World*, CPUSA’s West Coast newspaper, visited CPI’s party congress in Rome in January 1966 and wrote an admiring article about it for *Political Affairs*. In his article Richmond pointed out that the CPI was against what it called “monolithism”. Just like in the Soviet party during Lenin’s time, unity was to be reached “through lively comparison and clash of ideas and stands”.<sup>1425</sup> Richmond writes about his visit to Italy also in his autobiography *A Long View from the Left* in a highly positive manner:

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1422 Healey & Isserman 1993, 175.

1423 Healey & Isserman 1993, 227.

1424 Healey & Isserman 1993, 228. Healey seems to have been strongly influenced by the CPI already in 1964. When Gus Hall and Morris were in February 1964 discussing possible reactions of leading CPUSA members to CPSU’s letter concerning Sino-Soviet dispute, Hall remarked sarcastically that Healey might want to “hear from her Italian friends” before she committed herself. See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on February 18, 1964; OSD, part 58, page 4.

1425 Richmond 1966, 30.

I was deeply impressed by the maturity of the debate, by its sense of responsibility, by its level and, in the unique political vocabulary of Italian communists, its serenity. In these qualities, as well as in specific references, one felt the legacy of Gramsci and Togliatti, a heritage that stamped this party's character as an autonomous force, defining its relationship to the Italian and world environment.<sup>1426</sup>

Looking at the works of historians of Italian communism one gets the impression that Green's, Healey's and Richmond's views concerning the Italian party were perhaps correct. The Italian party seems to have been much more open to critical discussion and tolerant to differing views than its U.S. counterpart. According to Maud Bracke, for example, Italian capitalism was thoroughly analyzed and party strategy was widely discussed among the Italian communists:

A crucial impulse in this respect came from the communist-dominated trade union CGIL (Confederazione Generale Italiano del Lavoro), whose leaders in the mid-1950s initiated a self-critical reflection on general strategy. The trade union leadership developed innovative analyses regarding, for example, the modernizing aspects of Italian capitalism and the uneven development of the North and South. Furthermore, the party's study centre, the Istituto Gramsci, with its regular conferences and publications, pressured the party leaders into more doctrinal and theoretical flexibility. New analyses were developed, for example, on the technological revolution and on monopolies.<sup>1427</sup>

The Italian party seems to have interested also some former hardliners of the CPUSA. According to Dorothy Healey, also Robert Thompson became a CPI sympathizer during the 1960s. Thompson, a former close ally of William Z. Foster and thus a loyally Soviet-minded communist, had undergone "a profound transformation" – quite similar to what Gil Green had gone through – after he had been released from prison in 1960. After travelling to both the Soviet Union and Italy, Thompson was appalled by many things he saw in the first workers' state and was impressed by what saw of the CPI.<sup>1428</sup>

Interestingly, Hall considered both Thompson and Green as potential challengers for the leadership of the party. In October 1964, when Khrushchev was removed from the Soviet leadership, Hall pondered whether the removal affected his own position as general secretary – after all, he had been a sound supporter of Khrushchev. He was especially worried about Thompson and Green. According to Hall, they were "out for his blood" and they could "murder him" if things went badly.<sup>1429</sup> Hall did not have to worry about Thompson for very long. He died in October 1965 after suffering a heart attack.<sup>1430</sup> Green remained in the party until

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1426 Richmond 1972, 406.

1427 Bracke 2007, 68. Bracke also writes: "The discussions in the party leadership which had developed since 1960 on domestic strategy and reform on the one hand, and on Stalinism on the other, developed after Togliatti's death in 1964 into a debate that was remarkable for its openness and creativity." See Bracke 2007, 104.

1428 Healey & Isserman 1993, 176. The support for Italian-style communism among CPUSA members can also be seen Vivian Gornick's interview book *The Romance of American Communism*, in which two of his 42 interviewees express strong admiration for the Italian CP. According to them, "the rise of Italian Communist Party is the earth renewed" and "if there's hope in the world of Western Communism the Italians are it". See Gornick 1977, 242 & 254.

1429 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 29, 1964; OSD, part 72, page 99.

1430 For more information on Robert Thompson, see, for example, *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 385-387. Thompson was only 50 years old when he died in 1965. As an International

the early 1990s, being – unlike Hall – an ardent supporter of Soviet glasnost and perestroika policies in the late 1980s.<sup>1431</sup>

#### 4.4.2. Other Western CPs: Canada, Britain and France

Other Western CPs did not constitute similar source of headache to Gus Hall as the Italian party did. Not surprisingly, of all the Western CPs the CPUSA was most closely connected to the Canadian party with which it indeed had close relations. The parties established, for example, a joint party school for their members as neither party wanted to send students to the international party school in Moscow.<sup>1432</sup> However, the school had to be discontinued after only some weeks in February 1966 after it was discovered that there was an U.S. informer among the students.<sup>1433</sup>

Operation Solo material includes a large amount of correspondence and other documents related to the connections between the two North American CPs. In the light of these documents, the political line of the Canadian CP seems to have been slightly more distant from the Soviet Union than the line of the CPUSA. In March 1964, for example, Norman Freed, Canada's representative in the editorial board of *World Marxist Review*, told Gus Hall that the Canadian CP opposed organizing an international conference of the world's CPs. In addition to that, Freed said that the Canadian party opposed establishing a new international coordinating body to give guidance to CPs. Hall in turn told Freed that he supported both ideas, the international conference and a new international coordinating body.<sup>1434</sup>

The Canadian party was not wholly unified, however, when it comes to its relations to the Soviet Union and China. The party's ageing chairman Tim Buck had very different ideas about the Canadian approach to the Sino-Soviet split than its general secretaries Leslie Morris and William Kashtan.<sup>1435</sup> In Buck's opinion, the dispute between the two great communist powers had not been discussed thoroughly enough within the Canadian party. According to him, the party newspaper *Canadian Tribune* needed to cover the dispute thoroughly while the party needed to make clear its support for the Soviet Union. Others

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Lenin School graduate and a veteran of Spanish Civil War and WWII, Thompson could indeed have been a potential successor for Gus Hall.

1431 For more information on Green's criticism of Hall, see Stephanson 1993, 320-324.

1432 The 12-week Marxist training school for about 20 students – ten from both CPs – took place in Toronto. The students were studying political economy, philosophy, history, nationality questions and strategy and tactics 44 hours a week. For the details of the school curriculum, see report from FBI's New York office to the Director on December 1, 1965; OSD, part 97, pages 41-45.

1433 Canadian party leader William Kashtan received in mid-February an anonymous letter suggesting that there was an U.S. agent among the students. Following the letter, the school was disbanded. The U.S. students traveled to New York City and continued their studies there. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on February 21, 1966; OSD, part 100, pages 17-19.

1434 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 18, 1964; OSD, part 59, page 20.

1435 Tim Buck (1891-1973) had earlier served as the general secretary of the Canadian communist party from 1929 to 1962. Chairman's position was largely ceremonial. Leslie Morris served as general secretary from 1962 to 1964 and William Kashtan from 1965 to 1988. For more information on Buck, see, for example, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, 50.

in the party leadership did not agree. Buck kept insisting that the party changes its line and – according to William Kashtan – “made a nuisance of himself”. As a consequence, 73-year old Buck was removed from the party secretariat in June 1964.<sup>1436</sup> The measure was drastic considering the fact that Buck had earlier served as the party’s general secretary for 33 years. Not surprisingly, Buck later said that majority of the executive board of the Canadian CP was “pro-Italian and ‘no good’”.<sup>1437</sup>

In light of the Operation Solo documents, Canadian CP was by far the most important associate for the CPUSA among the Western CPs. With other Western CPs the connections were in the 1960s more or less occasional. Among the Western European CPs, the CPUSA seems to have had most contacts with the British CP which can of course be explained by linguistic factors.<sup>1438</sup>

The connections between the CPUSA and the CPGB were not particularly cordial, however, which may spring from ideological differences. In the mid-1960s the CPGB’s policy in relation to the Sino-Soviet split and the whole international communist movement seems to have been emphatically neutral, which was not the case with the CPUSA. When Canadian communist Norman Freed met with British general secretary John Gollan<sup>1439</sup> in the spring of 1964, Gollan told him that the CPGB “desires to be left alone and does not want to become involved in any way in the current ideological dispute between the CP of the Soviet Union and the CP of China”. “The CP of Great Britain wants no part in this dispute and it, therefore, does not support at this time any conference or meeting of Communist and Workers Parties to discuss this problem”, Gollan told Freed. Gollan was proud that his party had not been diverted by the Sino-Soviet dispute.<sup>1440</sup>

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1436 Report from J. Edgar Hoover to FBI’s legal attaché in Ottawa on July 22, 1964; OSD, part 66, pages 201-202. See also report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 19, 1964; OSD, part 65, pages 2-3.

1437 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on August 11, 1965; OSD, part 92, page 145. General secretary William Kashtan at least was more pro-Italian than Gus Hall. After Giuliano Pajetta and Luigi Conte – the two Italian communists who got into a heated argument with Hall during their New York visit – had visited Canada in September 1965, Kashtan wrote to Hall that he had had “a pleasant chat with two Italian lads over the weekend”. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on September 23, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 42.

1438 Another factor which linked the American and British CPs were the U.S. communists who had been deported from the U.S., namely John Williamson and Claudia Jones. Williamson had been one of Gus Hall’s co-defendants in the Smith Act trial of 1949. The CPUSA remained in contact with him and published his memoirs *Dangerous Scot* in 1969. Morris Childs met Williamson in London in October 1964 as he was returning to the U.S. from the Soviet Union. With Claudia Jones the CPUSA did not remain in touch, perhaps partly because she was in close contact with the Chinese and had in 1964 traveled to China where she met Mao Tse-tung. According to the British, Jones was in “constant squabbles” with the CPGB. See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 10, 1964; OSD, part 72, pages 113-114 and report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 10, 1964; OSD, part 72, page 139.

1439 John Gollan (1911-1977) led the CPGB from 1956 to 1976. For more information on Gollan, see, for example, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, 144.

1440 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on March 18, 1964; OSD, part 60, page 6. In 1963 Gollan had tried to conciliate between China and the Soviet Union by visiting both countries. This attempt did not, however, lead to any results. For more on CPGB’s policy concerning the Sino-Soviet split, see Callaghan 2003, 291-292.

Such “isolationist” thoughts were of course unacceptable to Gus Hall, the unflinching proponent of proletarian internationalism. According to him, the British party “had nothing to be proud of in avoiding the principled ideological fight of the CP of the Soviet Union against the Chinese”.<sup>1441</sup>

CPGB’s “isolationism” was not only words but also actions. In April 1964 when the editorial board of *World Marxist Review* asked the CPGB to arrange an international meeting in order to celebrate the centenary of the First International, the Brits declined and said that they will arrange only “celebrations of a domestic nature”.<sup>1442</sup> In the fall of 1965 the CPGB did not send a representative to the Prague symposium for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 7<sup>th</sup> congress of the Comintern and said that it did not welcome fraternal party delegations to attend its party congress in November. Among other CPs these actions were interpreted as signs that “the CPGB does not desire to associate itself with international communist meetings of any type which might be construed as signifying their approval of whatever line may be expressed by the meeting relative to the present split in the world communist movement”.<sup>1443</sup>

Despite its isolationist tendencies, the CPGB did not drop out completely from the international movement. John Gollan attended the 23<sup>rd</sup> congress of the CPSU in Moscow in March 1966. While in Moscow, Gollan met with Morris Childs with whom he discussed his meeting with top CPSU functionaries Mikhail Suslov and Boris Ponomarev.

If Gollan’s account of his discussions with Suslov and Ponomarev is accurate, he tightly held on to his independent line of thinking also in Moscow. Unlike some other communist leaders, Gollan did not mince his words when discussing the ills of the Soviet Union. For example, he criticized the CPSU congress for being “pre-set” because the discussion following Alexei Kosygin’s report had been so irrelevant and tame.<sup>1444</sup> Gollan also brought up the recent trial of the two Soviet writers, Andrei D. Sinyavsky and Yuli M. Daniel.<sup>1445</sup> In Gollan’s opinion they were sent to jail just for writing things that the CPSU did not like.<sup>1446</sup> If the writers would have committed some real crime, they would have had an

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1441 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on March 18, 1964; OSD, part 59, page 21.

1442 Report from FBI’s legal attaché in London to the Director on April 28, 1964; OSD, part 62, page 84.

1443 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 23, 1965; OSD, part 97, page 5. The CPGB was not the only party which had this kind of attitude towards the Sino-Soviet split. After Canadian party leader William Kashtan had visited a *World Marxist Review* seminar in Prague in 1964, he told Morris Childs that a “neutral feeling” was spreading among Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Dutch and Belgian CPs. According to Kashtan, many in these parties think that Soviets and the Chinese should solve their own problems. These parties preferred to hold back without endorsing one view or another. See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on July 8, 1964; OSD, part 66, page 86.

1444 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on May 12, 1966; OSD, part 103, page 173.

1445 In February 1966 Sinyavsky and Daniel were sentenced to hard labor for maligning the Soviet Union in books they had published abroad. Sinyavsky was given a seven-year sentence and Daniel a five-year sentence. The trial was considered “unprecedented in modern Soviet history”, as *The New York Times* put it. The writers of *The Black Book of Communism* consider the trial to be the first political trial of the post-Stalin era and, as such, a starting point for the new dissident movement in the Soviet Union. See *The New York Times*, February 15, 1966 and Courtois, Werth, Panné, Paczkowski, Bartosek & Margolin 1999, 292.

1446 CPGB was of course not the only party protesting against Sinyavsky’s and Daniel’s prison



open trial, but this was not the case, Gollan said.<sup>1447</sup> Apparently Suslov and Ponomarev were not happy to hear Gollan's comments, because the discussion turned into "a bloody row", as Gollan described it. In his opinion, the 23<sup>rd</sup> congress of the CPSU showed that "the CPSU had taken steps backward towards Stalinism, rather than forward in the direction of democracy and the liberalization of internal controls in the USSR".<sup>1448</sup>

If the political lines of the Italian and British CPs were unacceptable for Gus Hall, the policies of the French CP were easier to digest for the U.S. party leader. Unlike the Italian and British parties, the French party had remained an unwavering supporter on the Soviet Union from the 1940s. Much like Gus Hall, the French were critical of Togliatti's concept of polycentrism. According to PCF, the concept denied the universal validity of Marxist-Leninist theories. Instead of proclaiming polycentrism, the PCF said, one should rely on the "rich experiences of the Soviet Union".<sup>1449</sup>

The tense relations between the Italian and French parties can be seen clearly also in Operation Solo documents. For example, Norman Freed, the Canadian representative in the editorial board of *World Marxist Review*, told Morris Childs in April 1963 that "a terrible fight" was taking place at the journal's headquarters between the French and Italian representatives. The Italians, who were advocating flexible tactics in relation to the European Common Market, were calling the more rigid French a "bunch of stiff-necked Stalinists". Because of this conflict, the French were threatening to withdraw from *World Marxist Review*, which, according to Norman Freed, would have jeopardized the whole journal.<sup>1450</sup>

Operation Solo documents do not contain any comments on the PCF by Gus Hall, but most likely his approach would have been positive. At least the meeting between the representatives of the CPUSA and PCF in Moscow in February 1965 seems to have taken place in a cordial atmosphere. Both parties strongly supported organizing an international conference of all communist parties to discuss the ideological and political problems which had risen recently in the world communist movement. The French did not see that regional CP conferences – which Palmiro Togliatti had supported – could replace worldwide

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sentences. Also, for example, Italian and Swedish parties expressed their disagreement. Swedish party leader Carl Henrik Hermansson said that he was completely opposed to the sentences. "My conception of democracy does not include the right of political institutions or parties to decide which opinions are admissible and which are not", Hermansson declared. See Leonhard 1979, 100. 1447 In this connection, Gollan also criticized the speech of Mikhail Sholokhov about Sinyavsky and Daniel at the 23<sup>rd</sup> congress. Sholokhov had just been given the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1965. According to Gollan, the Nobel Prize laureate "spoke like a real Stalinist". Gollan did not see Soviet Union's development in a positive light: "I told them: If you want to go back to Stalinism, you go back alone!" See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 12, 1966; OSD, part 103, page 174.

1448 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 12, 1966; OSD, part 103, page 174.

1449 Leonhard 1979, 172.

1450 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on December 6, 1963; OSD, part 50, pages 40-41. The bitter fighting between the French and Italians continued in a *World Marxist Review* seminar in 1964, as Canadian CP leader William Kashtan told to Morris Childs in July 1964. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on July 8, 1964; OSD, part 66, page 87.

CP meetings. Such conferences should be utilized to prepare for larger international meetings.<sup>1451</sup>

Gus Hall would most likely have appreciated how the French utilized the concept of proletarian internationalism which was also an essential part of Hall's parlance:

The CPF believes an international conference at this time would be an expression of "proletarian internationalism". The CPF fears that if the principle of "proletarian internationalism" is dropped, the international communist movement "will go back to the days prior to the First International".<sup>1452</sup>

#### 4.4.3. Gus Hall and an Eastern European maverick CP

Although Romania is not a Western European country, it may be appropriate to discuss Hall's relationship with the Romanian CP in this context. After all the Romanian CP was a true maverick party among the Eastern European CPs and its line towards the CPSU was in some ways similar to the lines held by some of the Western European CPs. According to one expert on Romanian communism, the Romanian CP "endorsed the Italian communist leader Palmiro Togliatti's polycentric, anti-hegemonic vision of world communism".<sup>1453</sup> Also in the Operation Solo documents the Romanian CP is repeatedly paralleled with the Italian and British CPs.<sup>1454</sup>

Romania's problematic relationship with the Soviet Union in the 1960s has its roots in the CPSU's 20<sup>th</sup> congress in February 1956. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, who had since 1947 ruled Romania as the general secretary of the CP, had been a loyal follower of Stalin and was shocked when he heard Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech in Moscow at the CPSU congress – his "former idol had been vilified by his successors and the once celebrated Stalinist development of Leninism had been denounced as bogus". After the 20<sup>th</sup> congress, Gheorghiu-Dej could not trust the Soviet leader.<sup>1455</sup>

Stalin was of course not the only issue that caused friction in the Soviet-Romanian relations. In the early 1960s the Romanians could not accept the role that was given to them in Comecon's internal division of labor of the socialist countries. Together with Bulgaria, Romania was supposed to specialize in agriculture while other Eastern European socialist

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1451 Report from The Director to Department of State on May 14, 1965; OSD, part 88, page 186.

1452 Report from The Director to Department of State on May 14, 1965; OSD, part 88, page 187.

1453 Tismaneanu 2003, 178.

1454 See, for example, report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 18, 1964; OSD, part 58, page 239 and report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on July 8, 1964; OSD, part 66, page 86-87.

1455 Tismaneanu 2003, 143-144. Tismaneanu writes: "In short, after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, the Romanian communist leaders were confused, traumatized and outraged; their former idol had been attacked as a criminal, paranoid monster and a military nonentity: their entire world was falling apart. Whatever his sentiments about Khrushchev before February 1956, it is obvious that from that moment on, Gheorghiu-Dej deeply distrusted the Soviet first secretary. For him, as for Maurice Thorez, Antonin Novotny and Walter Ulbricht, the debunking of Stalin's myth was a major strategic and ideological blunder, a godsend for imperialist propaganda and a concession to Titoist 'rotten revisionism'."

countries would focus on industry. The Romanians had completely opposite plans for their country's future: they wanted to industrialize Romania, which now was considered possible only through an independent position in relation with the Soviet Union.<sup>1456</sup>

These two factors – the Soviet de-Stalinization policy and Comecon's internal division of labor – are essential when explaining Romania's political line in the 1960s. As a reaction to these external pressures Romania chose a political line which – in addition to industrialization – emphasized autonomy, sovereignty and national pride.<sup>1457</sup> Such a nationalistic version of communism was of course not happily received in Moscow. Instead the Soviets criticized the Romanians for their lack of communist internationalism. Romania's neutral stance in the Sino-Soviet split or its warm connections with Western countries did not improve the Soviet-Romanian relations.<sup>1458</sup> After Gheorghiu-Dej's death in March 1965 his successor Nicolae Ceausescu continued on the same political path.

Romania's eccentric line can well be seen in the Operation Solo documents. For many years Romania was, for example, opposed to arranging an international conference of world's CPs. This topic was discussed when Norman Freed, the Canadian representative in the *World Marxist Review*, in March 1964 visited New York City where he met Gus Hall and Morris Childs. Following the discussions with Freed, Childs described the Romanian line as follows:

Although the Rumanian Workers Party is not lined with the CP of China, they are using the ideological differences between the CP of the Soviet Union and the CP of China to apply more pressure on the Soviet Union in order that they can secure more autonomy in their internal as well as in their international affairs. Thus when the CP of the Soviet Union recently dispatched its confidential letters to the various Communist Parties suggesting the possibility of holding an international meeting to discuss differences existing between themselves and the CP of China on an ideological level as well as on a governmental level between the USSR and the Peoples Republic of China, the Rumanians indicated they did not favor such a meeting at that time.<sup>1459</sup>

By the summer of 1964, Romania had indeed become a dissenter among the Warsaw Pact countries. When Jack Childs visited Moscow in May 1964, Sergo Mikoyan, a member of the Soviet Institute of World Economy and International Affairs and the son of Soviet Union's deputy premier Anastas Mikoyan, briefed Childs on issues related to Romania. According to Mikoyan, Romania, "being a very wealthy country, rich in oil and gold", had begun to "assert itself nationally" and, as a result, had "recently become very difficult to deal with". "In matters where the Romanians can assert themselves or show independence, they are

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1456 Tismaneanu 2003, 178-179.

1457 Tismaneanu 2003, 168.

1458 Romania's vice-premier Gheorghe Gaston Marin visited the United States in 1963 and 1964 and prime minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer visited France in 1964. According to *The New York Times*, Gaston Marin's 1964 visit was closely connected to Romania's industrialization policy. One of the aims of the trip was to purchase modern petrochemical plants from the United States. See *The New York Times*, May 19, 1964 and Tismaneanu 2003, 182.

1459 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 17, 1964; OSD, part 58, page 243. According to Freed, also the Italian CP was opposed to organizing an international conference of CPs. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 18, 1964; OSD, part 58, page 239.

quick to grasp the opportunity to disagree and argue”, Mikoyan told Childs. “The Soviets are very much worried as to what Romania may do next, since there is every danger the Romanians may do what Tito did in 1948 when the Yugoslavs severed themselves from the Cominform”, Mikoyan pointed out.<sup>1460</sup>

According to Mikoyan, Romania’s relations with other Eastern European socialist countries had reached a critical stage. These countries had grown suspicious of Romania as it had not divulged its recent diplomatic talks and agreements with the United States to its socialist comrade countries.<sup>1461</sup> “The current fear of the Soviets, the Czechs and the Poles is that Romania may leave the Soviet bloc”, Mikoyan said.<sup>1462</sup>

Such views concerning Romania were shared also by the top leaders of the CPSU. According to Mikhail Suslov, the Romanians could be called “Neo-Titoists or more correctly nationalists”.<sup>1463</sup> As a consequence of this criticism, Morris Childs summarized the Soviet-Romanian relationship as follows in June 1965:

The Russians are extremely unhappy with the RWP’s “flirtation with the Communist Party of China” and with the position of the RWP in regard to certain problems in the international movement. In addition, RWP’s current display of nationalism and independence has caused considerable embarrassment to the CPSU.<sup>1464</sup>

Because of this discord, Childs warned Gus Hall that the CPUSA should not send a delegation to RWP’s congress in the summer of 1965. According to Childs, sending a delegation to the congress would be “inadvisable because it could affect ‘bigger things’ (future financial aid and future relations with the CPSU)”.<sup>1465</sup> Despite these warnings the CPUSA did send a delegation to Romania, consisting of party veterans Carl Winter and Anthony Krchmarek.<sup>1466</sup>

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1460 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 22, 1964; OSD, part 64, pages 126-127.

1461 Following the U.S. visit of Romanian vice-premier Gheorghe Gaston Marin in late May and early June 1964, the two countries agreed to promote their mutual trade in number of ways. The United States for example said it would grant Romania licenses to buy a number of industrial installations. The countries also agreed to raise their respective diplomatic missions from the level of legations to that of embassies. According to *The New York Times*, U.S. administration’s action was generally viewed as “encouragement to other Communist countries in Eastern Europe to imitate Rumania’s growing independence from the Soviet Union”. See *The New York Times*, June 2, 1964.

1462 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 22, 1964; OSD, part 64, page 127. Childs discussed Romanian issues also with Timur Timofeev, the deputy director of the Soviet Institute of World Economy and International Affairs, who pointed out that “there seems to be developing in Romania a national patriotism which will lead them to actions that no one can foretell”.

1463 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 6, 1965; OSD, part 74, page 186.

1464 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on June 16, 1965; OSD, part 91, page 58. RWP stands for the Romanian Workers’ Party. In July 1965 the party changed its name back to Romanian Communist Party which had been the name of the party before the 1948 merger with the Romanian Social Democratic Party.

1465 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on June 16, 1965; OSD, part 91, page 58.

1466 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on June 28, 1965; OSD, part 91, page 88. Carl Winter did not only visit Romania during his trip, but also the Soviet Union, Cuba and Mongolia. Anthony Krchmarek returned to the United States several weeks before Winter, bringing

During his grand tour of Eastern Europe in the fall of 1966, Gus Hall met personally with Nicolae Ceausescu in Bucharest on October 10. The lengthy meeting was carefully recorded by Morris Childs who was part of Hall's entourage. As the discussions between Hall and Ceausescu well reflect the ideological differences between the two leaders, I will have a detailed look at Childs's FBI report on the meeting.

The discussions between Hall and Ceausescu were intensive and they continued past midnight. During the first half of the discussions – before their mutual dinner – Ceausescu presented Hall his thoughts concerning the international communist movement. According to Ceausescu, not all CPs can have the same point of view because each Party arises from different kind of conditions and from different levels of economic development:

Problems cannot be solved in the same way in every country. [...] You cannot demand that all countries follow the same pattern; this approach widens the differences and contradictions and weakens the camp of socialism instead of uniting it. [...] The question of national sovereignty is very often overlooked.<sup>1467</sup>

Ceausescu continued by elaborating on Romania's relationship to China. As mentioned above, the Soviets were "extremely unhappy" with Romania's "flirtation with the Communist Party of China". Ceausescu saw Romania's line as something that should be followed internationally:

We are seeking to develop cooperation with China on problems where agreement is possible. [...] If all the socialist countries would behave in the same way we would be closer to agreement with each other, including China.

In regard to the cultural revolution in China, many CPs in the world published declarations condemning the activities in China. But we did not do so. Why? First of all, we do not know what is happening there. How can you define a situation when the only information you have is what you get from the press? [...] The developments in China are their own internal problems; they have to solve these themselves. We say let the CP of China and the working class of China find the solutions. We cannot prescribe solutions to Chinese problems from outside.<sup>1468</sup>

Hall responded by referring to his favorite concept: unity. Without unity it would be impossible to fight the treacherous U.S. capitalism:

The impression I have received during my tour is that there is no 'oneness' in the international movement. Each Party looks at the world from their own little window. While the independence of each Party is very important, at the same time there should also be and interrelation and interdependence among the Parties of the world. The socialist world will have to reach a higher stage of relations and interdependence.

The specialists in the State Department and in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and other departments are constantly working on how to use the split in the world communist movement for the advantage of imperialism. (...) We must

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with him a 92-page report by Nicolae Ceausescu. See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on August 24, 1965; OSD part 93, page 51.

1467 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 164-165.

1468 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 165-166.

resolve the differences in unity of the socialist camp against imperialism. No effort is too great for the accomplishment of this task.<sup>1469</sup>

Ceausescu did not disagree with Hall concerning the importance of unity but saw certain obstacles blocking the road to true unity:

The problem of unity in the world communist movement is the most burning item in the world today. In order to achieve this unity it is necessary to start from a position that would assure the cooperation of all socialist parties. The principles of non-interference are basic. Such interference is not supposed to exist. But while it does not exist in theory, it does exist in practice. This results from the effort to impose a certain point of view. No advance can be achieved in the world communist movement if we are reduced to receiving thesis elaborated by others. Every Party should judge and analyze and arrive at conclusions with its own head. We disagree with the interpretation that only certain people or certain Parties have the correct thesis. (...)

We agree that we can criticize anything going on in other countries, but this criticism must be in the form of analysis and not in the form of condemnation. There are two ways of approaching this situation. One is the way of intolerance and excommunication; this creates a climate which is not favorable to discussing principles. The other way is to discuss the situation on the basis of Marxism-Leninism in a principled manner. This way is without insults and without excommunications.<sup>1470</sup>

In order to achieve unity in the world socialist camp, there is a need to create “a true Marxist-Leninist climate”, Ceausescu pointed out. He did not see Romania as a country “flirting” with the Chinese but rather as a neutral observer in the conflict of the two great communist powers:

There should be no insults and no blame placed. We have held discussions with Comrade Brezhnev and with Comrade Chou En-lai. Each blamed the other. They were very suspicious of each other and accused each other of being the ‘ally of U.S. imperialism’. We need less suspicion and more confidence in each other. We need to have discussions without labeling others as ‘traitors’.<sup>1471</sup>

During the discussion Hall presented Ceausescu his idea of an international communist news agency. The Romanian leader considered it to be a good idea, but wondered whether it would become “an objective distributor of information” or whether it would be like the *World Marxist Review*. Ceausescu did not hold *World Marxist Review*, the theoretical journal of the international communist movement, in very high regard. According to Ceausescu, the journal had not fulfilled its task as it functioned “in a unilateral manner” and only gave out information which it liked. “It is not a free forum”, Ceausescu pointed out.<sup>1472</sup>

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1469 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 169.

1470 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 169-171.

1471 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 172.

1472 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 171-172. Ceausescu had been personally acquainted with the delicate editing process of *World Marxist Review*. According to Vladimir Tismaneanu, the Romanian-Soviet tensions intensified in the editorial board of *World Marxist Review* in 1963 after Ceausescu and Romanian prime minister

The two leaders continued their discussions after dinner. Although Hall and Ceausescu had clearly disagreed concerning matters related to the international communist movement, their discussion before dinner had remained calm and friendly. Now, however, the “agreeable atmosphere” that had prevailed earlier gave place to “a very heated and argumentative exchange”, as Morris Childs put it.<sup>1473</sup> The source of disagreement was, once again, the Sino-Soviet dispute but now in slightly different form.

It turned out that Hall and Ceausescu had differing views on the Vietnam War. The differences arose from contrasting views of the role currently being played by the Soviet Union in Vietnam. Ceausescu disagreed markedly with the Soviet position and strongly favored increased Soviet militancy.<sup>1474</sup> While Ceausescu strongly argued against the Soviet Union’s leading position within the international communist movement, he simultaneously demanded that Soviet Union used its military might to protect other socialist countries.

During the discussion, Ceausescu told Hall about the disagreements concerning Vietnam in a meeting of the leaders of Warsaw Treaty countries in Bucharest in July 1966. In this meeting, Romania and Poland had demanded that the Soviet Union would act in a more militant manner in the Vietnamese conflict.

Ceausescu insisted that the credibility and integrity of the international communist movement, the socialist camp and, in particular, of the Soviet Union were at stake here. If the United States can get away with an attack on a socialist country like North Vietnam then what is to stop them from doing the same to other socialist countries.<sup>1475</sup>

According to Ceausescu, Polish leader Wladyslaw Gomulka had asked in Bucharest: “If Poland is attacked by the United States, would the USSR merely send a note of protest also?” Romania and Poland also supported the proposal that the Soviet Union should withdraw from the Geneva disarmament conference because of the war in Vietnam. According to the Soviets, “this was not the tactical moment for such actions”.<sup>1476</sup>

Hall’s views concerning the war were somewhat less belligerent when compared with Ceausescu’s. In Hall’s opinion, a solely military victory by the Vietcong was impossible and therefore a settlement had to be achieved by negotiations. Hall’s viewpoint was summarized by Morris Childs as follows:

Hall stated that neither the Vietnamese nor the United States could win a complete military victory in Vietnam and that the solution lay in a struggle on two fronts,

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Ion Gheorghe Maurer had contributed articles to the journal advocating their party’s “autonomist” and “neutralist course”. See Tismaneanu 2003, 181.

1473 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 174.

1474 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 174.

1475 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 175. This was of course not the first time the socialist countries demanded that the Soviet Union should act more decisively in Vietnam. According to Operation Solo documents, Eastern European socialist countries had made such demands already in the spring of 1965. Demands were made calling for the dispatch of the Soviet naval fleet to South China Sea. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on April 29, 1965; OSD, part 84, page 240-242 and report from J. Edgar Hoover to the Director of National Indications Center on May 4, 1965; OSD, part 86, page 17.

1476 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 175.

political as well as military. Hall counseled flexible tactics and that the Vietnamese must eventually come to the conference table and negotiate a political settlement of the Vietnam conflict.<sup>1477</sup>

#### 4.4.4. Conclusions

In the late 1950s and in the 1960s the international communist movement was gradually moving towards disintegration after the more unified Comintern decades. The concept of polycentrism – coined by Italian CP leader Palmiro Togliatti – and the “isolationist” line of the British CP in regard to the international movement can be seen as early signs of what in the 1970s became known as eurocommunism. Meanwhile, the independent line of the Romanian CP undermined the unity of the Eastern European socialist countries from within.

After having studied Gus Hall’s relationships with the Soviet, Chinese and Cuban parties it is not surprising to see that his responses to the concept of polycentrism and to the line of the Romanian CP were not positive. Once again, Gus Hall opposed all lines of thinking that challenged the idea of Soviet-led proletarian internationalism. Instead of polycentrism and Romania’s “national communism” Hall supported and advocated tightening the cooperation between the world’s CPs by arranging an international conference of communist parties and by establishing a mutual news service for the parties.

Hall’s antipathy towards the Italian CP may have been strengthened by the fact that many of his opponents within the CPUSA were explicit admirers of the Italian party. For them, the Italian CP represented openness, intra-party democracy, lively discussion and genuine enthusiasm – qualities which according to Hall’s opponents were missing in the CPUSA.

One striking feature in Hall’s encounters with the Italians and the Romanians was his passionate attitude. In both discussions – with Italian communist senators Giuliano Pajetta and Luigi Conte and with the Romanian leader Nicolae Ceausescu – the exchange of ideas became “very heated”. Hall was indeed – from the bottom of his heart – a passionate defender of the unity of the socialist world. Unity in this case needed to be seen as unity under the leadership of the very first workers’ state and the homeland of V. I. Lenin.

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1477 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 24, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 161. Hall’s critical approach towards Romania continued after his 1966 visit to the country. Most visible sign of this approach was Hall’s article *What was all the cheering about?* in *Daily Worker* after Richard’s Nixon’s visit to Romania in August 1969. In his article Hall criticized the warm and enthusiastic welcome Nixon received in Romania. In Hall’s opinion, Romanian cheers for Nixon were badly misplaced because Nixon “represents the class that is the root cause of all the problems and difficulties facing American people”. “To cheer Nixon is to cheer a man in whose hands rests the power to continue or to call a halt to the mass murder of Vietnamese men, women and children”, Hall wrote. Hall considered the topic so important that the article was later published as an enlarged version in his 1972 book *Imperialism Today: An Evaluation of Major Issues and Events of Our Time*. In the enlarged article Hall also criticizes Yugoslavia’s leader Josip Broz Tito for receiving Nixon warmly in Yugoslavia in October 1970. See *Daily Worker*, August 6, 1969 and Hall 1972a, 228-235.



## 4.5. Gus Hall and the Occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968

### 4.5.1. A watershed for the international communist movement

Although the Operation Solo documents published by the FBI do not cover the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, I will in this subchapter study Hall's reaction to this incident.<sup>1478</sup> The occupation of Czechoslovakia was one of the most central watersheds for the international communist movement after WWII. If it would have been left outside the scope of this study, the picture of Gus Hall's political thinking in the 1960s would have remained deficient. As the Operations Solo documents are not available, this examination is mainly based on Hall's writings, newspaper reports and memoirs by Hall's comrades.

The occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 was an outcome of a long development. In January 1968 Alexander Dubcek had become the first secretary of the Czechoslovakian communist party. He started wide-ranging political and economic reforms in Czechoslovakia, decentralizing country's economy and loosening restrictions on the media, free speech and travel. Dubcek aimed at creating "socialism with a human face", as the famous phrase of the reformers put it.<sup>1479</sup> The Soviet Union and four other Warsaw Pact countries – Bulgaria, GDR, Hungary and Poland – viewed the development of Czechoslovakia with alarm, worrying that the Czechoslovakian reforms would create political instability in other socialist countries. They feared that Czechoslovakia could eventually leave the socialist bloc. This, in turn, could lead to the eventual collapse of the entire bloc.

During the summer of 1968, the Soviet Union applied relentless pressure on Czechoslovakia to reverse its liberalization program. This pressure, however, did not lead to the desired outcome, and, as a result, the so-called Prague Spring ended abruptly when thousands of soldiers from the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary rolled into Czechoslovakia during the night between August 20 and 21. Notably Romania was not involved.

The occupation of Czechoslovakia was a great disappointment and a turning point for many western communists. Many of them had supported the Czechoslovak reformers as they considered Soviet-style socialism too rigid and bureaucratic. Czechoslovakia's "socialism with a human face" had been an alternative to the Soviet model and, as such, much more attractive to the western voters.<sup>1480</sup> For example Luigi Longo, the general

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1478 The most recent of the published Operation Solo documents is dated on August 20, 1968 whereas the occupation of Czechoslovakia started on August 21, 1968. This may of course be a coincidence but it also raises questions whether the unpublished Operation Solo documents contain some sensitive information concerning the occupation. In my letter and in my e-mail to the FBI I have inquired – among other things – reasons for limiting the publication of Operation Solo documents to the documents dated before August 21, 1968 but the FBI has not answered my inquiries.

1479 The slogan "socialism with a human face" was originally invented by the reformist sociologist Radovan Richta. Not surprisingly, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev was not delighted by the slogan. In May 1968 Brezhnev asked Dubcek: "What's with this human face? What kind of faces do you think we have in Moscow?" See McDermott 2015, 123.

1480 As political analyst Kevin Devlin wrote in *Problems of Communism* journal in November

secretary of Italian communist party, declared in April 1968 that “the realization of a more advanced socialist democracy is not only a great contribution to the struggle of the working class and left-wing forces in capitalist countries, but also represents a stimulus for all socialist countries to overcome more boldly the obstacles standing in the way of full development of socialist democracy”. Longo promised the Czechoslovakian CP “the full support and solidarity of the Italian communists”.<sup>1481</sup> Also for example the Spanish communists commented positively on the developments in Czechoslovakia. The Spanish communist leader Santiago Alvarez described the development in Czechoslovakia as a model for the future of Spain.<sup>1482</sup>

Not surprisingly most western communist parties condemned the August occupation. The Italian CP, the biggest communist party in the capitalist countries, declared that the decision to occupy Czechoslovakia was unjustified because “it is not compatible either with the principle of autonomy and independence of all communist parties and each socialist state or with the requirements for the defense of the unity of the international communist and workers’ movement”.<sup>1483</sup> In addition to the Italian party, the French, Spanish, British, Irish, Dutch, Belgian, Swiss, Austrian, Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, Japanese and Australian parties also criticized the Soviet-led operation.<sup>1484</sup> The harshness of criticism varied greatly among the parties. The French party, for example, took a “centrist” course, expressing its “disagreement” with the occupation<sup>1485</sup> whereas the Swedish party leader Carl-Henrik Hermansson took more extreme course, suggesting that diplomatic relations between Sweden and the Soviet Union should be suspended until the occupation ended.<sup>1486</sup> Some parties – like the Finnish CP – were internally somewhat split when it came to the Czechoslovakian question.<sup>1487</sup> In addition to the numerous western CPs, three ruling communist parties – Romanian, Yugoslavian and Albanian – denounced the action.<sup>1488</sup>

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1968: “For the West European communist parties [...] the changes in Czechoslovakia opened up exciting new prospects: here, at last, was the promise of a socialist society to which Western communists could point as a relevant example, without endlessly insisting that their own pluralistic, democratic paths would not be patterned after existing communist regimes.” See Devlin 1968, 58.

1481 Leonhard 1979, 113 and Bracke 2007, 168-169. When visiting Prague in May 1968 Longo said that “what is happening in Czechoslovakia today in an experiment which will also help certain socialist countries, and in particular the communist parties of the capitalist countries, in the struggle to create a new socialist society – young, open and modern”. Somewhat similarly Franz Muhri, the Austrian communist leader, saw the developments in Czechoslovakia as the “best help in the struggle for democracy and socialism in Austria”. See Devlin 1968, 59.

1482 Leonhard 1979, 113-114.

1483 Leonhard 1979, 121.

1484 Leonhard 1979, 120-122 and Bracke 2007, 209.

1485 For detailed information on the reaction of the French CP see Bracke 2007, 217-223.

1486 Devlin 1968, 61. The harsh reaction of the Swedish CP can be at least partially explained by the fact that the occupation took place less than a month before Swedish parliamentary elections. The Swedish CP lost more than one half of its seats in the parliament in the September 1968 elections.

1487 For more on Finnish communist reactions to the Czechoslovakian occupation, see Leppänen 1999, 240-254.

1488 Leonhard 1979, 120-122. Interestingly the Albanian CP had been highly critical of the Prague Spring before the occupation but after the Warsaw Pact operation the Albanians urged the Czechoslovaks to engage in active resistance against the occupying forces. See Leonhard 1979, 122.

Only a handful of western communist parties – CPs of West Germany, Luxembourg, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus and Portugal – approved the occupation. Most of these parties were small – like the West German and Luxembourgish CPs – or were operating in illegality – like the Greek, Turkish and Portuguese parties – and were thus dependent on the international communist movement.<sup>1489</sup> The CPUSA – legal, but small – joined this group in early September after it had been able to finalize its stance concerning the occupation.

#### **4.5.2. The development of Czechoslovakia in light of Operation Solo documents**

The development of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s is well documented in the Operation Solo documents which contain several reports on the country's situation. Morris Childs visited Prague often as he mostly travelled to Moscow via the Czechoslovakian capital. Also the fact that Prague hosted the editorial premises of *World Marxist Review* – the most concrete embodiment of the co-operation of the international communist movement in the 1960s – made it an important destination for individuals like Morris Childs.

Already in November 1963 Jack Childs reported – after discussing with an American communist returning from Czechoslovakia – that opposition against the long-time leader Antonin Novotny was increasing daily and that it could only be a matter of months before Novotny would be deposed.<sup>1490</sup> In December 1963 Morris Childs reported – after discussing with a high-ranking Czechoslovakian party official – that the political situation in the country was “a mess” and bureaucracy within the government “gigantic”. According to the official, president Novotny was “on probation” and his position was “not too secure”. “As you see, we have now satisfied our population and we have no lines or queues. We have purchased millions of dollars of consumer goods and have filled our shops and stores”, the official told Childs.<sup>1491</sup>

Czechoslovakia's complicated situation was also discussed when Gus Hall met Novotny in Prague during his European tour in September 1966. When one reads Morris Childs's report concerning the discussion, Novotny sounds like a reformist liberal, not like a communist hardliner as he is often considered.<sup>1492</sup> Novotny admitted that his country was going through a very difficult stage and said he felt like being in a ship which buffeted

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1489 Devlin 1968, 60; Leonhard 1979, 120 and Bracke 2007, 209. In West Germany the communist party – which closely followed the policies of GDR's ruling communist party – remained minuscule after it was allowed to operate again in 1968 after a 12-year ban, never being able to win any seats in the Bundestag. Just like the West German CP, the Luxembourgish party was strongly influenced by the East German SED. The Greek and Cypriot parties were divided by the Czechoslovakian occupation. In the Greek CP the exile part of the party supported the occupation but the clandestine part operating in Greece condemned it.

1490 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on November 7, 1963; OSD, part 49, page 141.

1491 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on December 17, 1963; OSD, part 52, pages 78-79 and report from J. Edgar Hoover to the attorney general on December 24, 1963; OSD, part 52, page 59.

1492 See, for example, Service 2007, 383 and Brown 2009, 373.

around in a rough sea. According to Novotny, if the socialist states were to progress, they could not remain in isolation. “We must take everything new and good in the capitalist world and use it within the framework of our social system”, Novotny said. He denied the Chinese claims concerning the revisionism of the Czechoslovakian CP. “We just seek to keep up with the contemporary world while holding onto our socialist principles”, Novotny said. According to him, the Czechoslovakians were not afraid to have people speak up. “We do not want a conformist society – a uniform, monotonous society”, Novotny pointed out.<sup>1493</sup>

In the spring and summer of 1968, Czechoslovakia’s situation was one of the main topics in the Operation Solo documents. Morris Childs was well informed about the situation in Czechoslovakia as he visited the country three times during the first half of 1968.<sup>1494</sup> After his first visit Childs produced a six-page report in which he pointed out that the Czechoslovakian working class and the clear majority of members of CPCZ were backing the policies of the new leader Alexander Dubcek. According to Childs, Czechoslovakia was not going to change its alliances with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, but it was not going to follow blindly the path of the Soviet Union. “At this time there are hardly any secrets at all in Czechoslovakia; they are publishing practically everything. There is virtually no censorship now”, Childs reported.<sup>1495</sup>

After his second visit in April and May, Childs produced another detailed report based on his meetings with high-ranking CPCZ officials, in which he discussed the numerous political and economic problems of Czechoslovakia. The reforms in the country were not proceeding without glitches. According to Childs, not all of the 1.6 million members of the CPCZ were eagerly carrying out the new policies, but the youth and the intelligentsia were very active. “Life in Czechoslovakia today is not characterized by unity; rather, one could say philosophically, it is characterized by contradictions”, Childs’s Czechoslovakian contacts told him. They emphasized that the cornerstone of Czechoslovakia’s policy was alliance and friendship with the Soviet Union, as Alexander Dubcek had pointed out in his speeches and writings. “It is understandable that communists on the outside would have fears, but they should not have fears about the relationship of Czechoslovakia with the Soviet Union”, Childs’s contacts said.<sup>1496</sup>

In June Childs travelled again to Eastern Europe. On June 24 Morris Childs discussed the Czechoslovakian situation with Aleksey Belyakov, the vice deputy of Boris Ponomarev, the head of the international department of the CCCPSU. Belyakov told Childs that “in the present world situation, the USSR just cannot afford to let Czechoslovakia slip back into the capitalist camp”:

The USSR has no objection to some experimentation in social democracy on the part of Czechoslovakia. [...] Nor does the USSR object to the Czechs allowing some

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1493 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on October 22, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 215.

1494 1968 was one of the busiest Solo years for Morris Childs as he travelled to socialist countries altogether six times, spending more than one hundred days in the socialist world. For a comprehensive list of Childs brothers’ Solo missions, see Barron 1995, 335-337.

1495 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on March 25, 1968; OSD, part 122, pages 54-59.

1496 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on May 14, 1968; OSD, part 124, pages 5-11.

opposition to the ruling party. [...] But the fear of the USSR is that the Czechs may allow the organization of opposition parties which have ties with foreign powers.<sup>1497</sup>

Four days later, on June 28, Childs again met several high-ranking officials in Prague. The timing of the meeting was interesting as on the previous day the so-called Two Thousand Words manifesto – calling for more openness in the society, signed by dozens of prominent intellectuals and artists – had been published in three Czechoslovakian newspapers. According to Childs's contacts, Dubcek thought the manifesto and its timing were stupid as the Czechoslovakian party was walking on a tightrope and could not afford to antagonize the Soviets and East Germans:

All of this plays into the hands of the conservative element in positions of influence in the Czech Party and government, who are waiting in the background for the right moment to lead a movement to overthrow the liberal Dubcek regime, with at least tacit support from the Russians and the East Germans.<sup>1498</sup>

After Morris Childs's June trip to Moscow and Prague the Soviets communicated with the CPUSA through Jack Childs in New York. On July 12 Jack Childs met KGB agent Vladimir Chuchukin in a restaurant in Queens. Chuchukin presented Childs a "confidential message" from the CCCPSU explaining the situation in Czechoslovakia. Childs was supposed to deliver the information immediately to Gus Hall. According to Chuchukin, "counterrevolutionary and reactionary forces represented by former members of the social democrats, catholic party and former property owners" had succeeded in "penetrating and influencing organizations, trade unions and the news media under the guise of false slogans of 'liberation'". The CCCPSU "will take all possible means to help the communist party of Czechoslovakia and the working people of Czechoslovakia to defend the achievements of socialism in this country."<sup>1499</sup>

On July 23 Jack Childs again met with Chuchukin, this time at a Brooklyn subway station. Chuchukin delivered Childs an oral report from the CCCPSU on the Czechoslovakian situation. Again Childs was supposed to deliver the same information to Gus Hall as soon as possible.<sup>1500</sup> According to the CCCPSU, the situation in Czechoslovakia was deteriorating. Because of this, five Warsaw Pact countries had sent a letter to the Czechoslovakian CP condemning the developments in the country. "The countries which approved the letter sent to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia did so with the realization of the historic responsibility involved in preventing the loss of the revolutionary achievements attained

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1497 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on July 2, 1968; OSD, part 124, page 251. Interestingly, when Belyakov discussed the possibility of allowing opposition to the ruling party, he told that Lenin had actually supported having an opposition party within the Soviet system: "Although never published anywhere, it is a fact that in 1921 V.I. Lenin engaged in a fight in the CC of the CPSU because he insisted that the Mensheviks be allowed to run in soviet elections. Lenin took the position that a small opposition in the governing body is necessary in order to keep the ruling party on the alert."

1498 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on July 2, 1968; OSD, part 124, page 255.

1499 Teletype message from FBI's New York office to the Director and FBI's Chicago office on July 13, 1968; OSD, part 124, pages 23-24. The CCCPSU sent the same confidential message to all heads of communist parties throughout the world.

1500 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on July 25, 1968; OSD, part 125, page 156.

in Czechoslovakia”, Childs reported. The CPSU requested the CPUSA to endorse the letter, which had been printed in *Pravda* on July 18.<sup>1501</sup>

Jack Childs met with Gus Hall on July 24. According to Childs, Hall became “extremely angry” when he learned that the CPSU requested the CPUSA to endorse the letter of the five Warsaw Pact countries. “They want us to endorse the letter. It is a poor letter. It is a difficult letter for us to endorse”, Hall berated. Hall felt that he was not informed well enough of what was happening in Czechoslovakia. “Neither the Soviets nor the Czechs bother to give us any details about what is going on”, he said.<sup>1502</sup>

On July 30 Jack Childs met with Vladimir Chuchukin for the third time in little more than two weeks. Once again, Childs was instructed to pass on the information immediately to Gus Hall. According to Chuchukin, the Soviets felt the Czechoslovakian government was doing nothing to prevent the tendency of “going to the right”. The Soviets also criticized the lax security on Czechoslovakian borders “which they feel is responsible for couriers from capitalist countries linking right-wing counterrevolutionary forces with similar organizations abroad”. According to Chuchukin, the Soviets were ready “to help Czechoslovakia and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in every way possible to repulse reaction”.

Childs delivered the most recent information to Hall on July 31. This time Hall did not react in such a dramatic fashion, but he still was hoping to receive more information on the situation in Czechoslovakia as the CPUSA leadership was divided when it came to this topic. “Hall stated he would like to support the Soviet position but other CPUSA functionaries are against the endorsement until further information is made available. Hall hoped that with the new information, he might convince the other CPUSA functionaries to support the Soviet position.”<sup>1503</sup>

#### **4.5.3. “An upsurge of anti-socialist elements, supported by the forces of subversion”**

While the CPUSA’s leadership was divided when it came to Czechoslovakia, Gus Hall’s personal stance on the occupation was clear from the very beginning of the operation. Hall published his view on the issue on August 21, 1968 as a personal statement after the CPUSA’s secretariat had been unable to agree on a collective statement.<sup>1504</sup> In his statement Hall saw the military action as regrettable because “military solutions are never the best solutions for any problems”. While being regrettable, the military action was, however, justified:

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1501 Teletype message from J. Edgar Hoover to the White House situation room on July 25, 1968; OSD, part 125, pages 166-167.

1502 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on July 25, 1968; OSD, part 125, page 156.

1503 Report from C.D. Brennan to W.C. Sullivan on August 1, 1968; OSD, part 125, pages 193-194.

1504 Healey & Isserman 1993, 230. Hall’s one-page statement was published on the first page of *Daily World* on August 22, 1968. It was also published as an editorial in the September issue of *Political Affairs*.

The central issue in Czechoslovakia is the defense of socialism against the threat of counter-revolution. It seems clear that what has happened, in the course of a process of vital democratic reform, is an upsurge of anti-socialist elements, supported by the forces of subversion of U.S. and West German imperialism. At the same time, because of divisions and weaknesses within the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, there developed a paralysis which gravely increased the danger of anti-socialist takeover.

We do not yet have all the facts necessary to make clear whether or not there was any other alternative to the action taken. However, from the vantage point of a party existing within the world center of imperialism, it seems to us the most fatal error would be to underestimate the subversive powers of imperialism or the dangers of an anti-socialist take-over in Czechoslovakia for the entire socialist world.

We are for the defense of socialism. We are for the development of a democratic structure that is in keeping with the advancement of socialism. We are for freedom. But we are not for the freedom of those who endanger socialism.<sup>1505</sup>

While Hall had quickly released a statement on Czechoslovakia, he eagerly wanted to have more detailed information concerning the Soviet line. Because of this, Hall sent Morris Childs to Moscow just two days after the occupation, on August 23, 1968. According to John Barron, “he [Hall] needed to know what to say and how to defend what in the eyes of many in the West, including many Western communists, was indefensible.”<sup>1506</sup>

The members of the CPUSA were by no means solidly behind Hall’s statement. The strongest grouping of opposition could be found in Southern California, where the local CPUSA district leader Dorothy Healey was a prominent critic of the occupation. Healey had for years been critical of the Soviet Union and its application of socialist ideas. She had followed the events in Czechoslovakia with a growing excitement. “I was tremendously enthusiastic about the Prague Spring, because for the first time I could see all the issues I was concerned about being tackled by those who lived inside a socialist country”, she wrote later.<sup>1507</sup> Healey was not alone in her criticism. According to Healey, she was after the occupation barraged by telephone calls from younger comrades like Charlene Mitchell, Don Hammerquist, Michael Myerson and Carl Bloice, who were outraged by the invasion.<sup>1508</sup>

The CPUSA’s national office in New York City was following a different line. According to Healey, the party leaders and party’s New York-based newspaper *Daily World* followed obediently the anti-Dubcek propaganda campaign launched by the Soviets. “The newspaper’s coverage of Czechoslovakia was designed to create an atmosphere of hysteria, spreading wild and nonsensical stories that the West German army was waiting for a signal

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1505 Hall 1968a, 1. According to J. Edgar Hoover, Hall “parroted” the Soviet justification for the military action in his personal statement. See Hoover 1969, 84.

1506 Barron 1995, 165. Hall seems to have been in a hurry to hear Childs’s report, because Childs’s trip to Moscow was exceptionally short, lasting only six days. In Barron’s opinion, Hall followed Soviet policies very closely. “If the Soviets had outlawed the baking of bread or sexual relations between husband and wife, Hall would have supported them”, Barron writes.

1507 Healey & Isserman 1993, 229.

1508 Healey & Isserman 1993, 232. Later Healey was disappointed by Charlene Mitchell who abstained on the final national committee vote concerning Czechoslovakia after having initially been upset by the occupation. See Healey & Isserman 1993, 233.

from Dubcek to cross the border to Czechoslovakia”, Healey described.<sup>1509</sup> The CPUSA’s Southern California district – which was supporting Dubcek – had demanded that the party’s national board would get together to discuss the situation in Czechoslovakia, but such meeting never took place before the occupation.<sup>1510</sup>

Following Gus Hall’s statement concerning Czechoslovakia, the CPUSA’s Southern California district also published on August 21 their own press statement in which they referred to the CPUSA program and its passages concerning the independence and autonomy of all parties in the communist movement.<sup>1511</sup> The occupation of Czechoslovakia was seen as a violation of these principles. As the CPUSA had not published its official position concerning the Czechoslovakian situation – only Hall’s personal statement – the Southern California district considered that they could release their own statement without violating the principles of the CPUSA’s democratic centralism. According to the party leadership, this was not the case – the press statement was later presented as an example of Southern California’s “continued disregard for democratic centralism”.<sup>1512</sup>

Not only was the Southern California CP critical of the occupation but also the San Francisco -based communist newspaper *People’s World* denounced the military action – just like most of the Western European communist party newspapers. *People’s World* had closely followed the events in Czechoslovakia during the spring and in early September Al Richmond, the dedicated editor of the paper, travelled to Czechoslovakia to personally witness the situation in the country.<sup>1513</sup>

Dorothy Healey and Al Richmond were not the only California communists who opposed the occupation as their views were widely shared among the membership. On August 25 the district committee of the Southern California CP passed with a clear majority a motion demanding the withdrawal of all occupying troops and the release of all confined CP members and state officials. At the same meeting the district committee reaffirmed – again with a clear majority – the position that no communist party has a right to interfere with the functioning of another communist party.<sup>1514</sup> The opinion of the Southern California CP was not wholly irrelevant since the Los Angeles area was the second largest concentration of communists in the United States after New York City.<sup>1515</sup>

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1509 Healey & Isserman 1993, 229.

1510 Healey & Isserman 1993, 229.

1511 According to the CPUSA’s 1966 program draft, the U.S. party supported “complete independence and autonomy of each party” and resolutely opposed intervention by any party in the affairs of other parties. In addition to that, the party emphasized the equality of all fraternal parties. See *New Program of the Communist Party U.S.A. (a draft)*, 121.

1512 Healey & Isserman 1993, 230-231. According to the principles of democratic centralism, all party members should firmly follow the party decisions after they had been made. Before the decision-making, however, critical discussion was allowed and sometimes even encouraged. See, for example, Wilczynski 1981, 129-141.

1513 Richmond 1972, 411-413 and Healey & Isserman 1993, 232.

1514 Healey & Isserman 1993, 232.

1515 According to the FBI statistics, there were 571 CPUSA members in the Los Angeles area in 1965 whereas there were 1 103 CP members in the New York City area. Chicago area was the third biggest concentration of communists with 308 members and San Francisco the fourth biggest with 258 members. See Ernie Lazar’s collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 1).



In addition to California, there was also opposition to the Czechoslovakian occupation in other parts of the country. The most prominent critic of the occupation outside California was Gil Green, the head of the New York communist party. Two days after the occupation, Green called the operation in a *The New York Times* interview “a very serious blunder” and “completely unwarranted”. Green said he associated himself with the criticism that has come from the French, British and Italian communist parties.<sup>1516</sup> Green was by no means a small player in the party as the New York district was by far the biggest in the party – according to FBI statistics almost one third of the party membership lived in the state of New York.<sup>1517</sup>

In addition to Green, other New York communists like Mike Stein and Michael Myerson also openly criticized the military action of the five Warsaw Pact countries. Stein, who was the executive secretary of the New York district CP, requested Gus Hall to call for an immediate party meeting after the occupation but Hall ignored his request.<sup>1518</sup> In a debate arranged by the CPUSA’s youth organization Du Bois Clubs in New York, Myerson criticized the Soviet Union for failing “to produce any evidence of a request from the Czech people that Warsaw Pact armies invade their country, of a threat of counterrevolution or of a threat of foreign intervention”.<sup>1519</sup> According to Daniel Rosenberg, discord surfaced also at the *Daily World*, where “younger staffers” criticized the military action.<sup>1520</sup>

#### 4.5.4. “Czechoslovakia’s house was on fire!”

Although the occupation of Czechoslovakia had prominent opponents like Healey and Green, a clear majority of the members of the CPUSA’s national committee still agreed with Gus Hall. The national committee met during the Labor Day weekend – ten days after the Warsaw Pact troops had entered Czechoslovakia – and voted by a five-to-one margin to endorse Hall’s report concerning the occupation.<sup>1521</sup>

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1516 *The New York Times*, August 23, 1968. In a 1992 interview Green says that he also opposed the Soviet occupation of Hungary in 1956 because “no party has a right, no country has a right to intervene in another”. During the Hungarian uprising Green was in prison and could make his opinion heard within the party. See Stephanson 1993, 312.

1517 According to FBI statistics, the CPUSA had 3 665 members in 1965. 1 131 of them lived in the state of New York. Second biggest membership state was California with 852 members. Illinois, the third biggest membership state, had 308 members. More than 62 percent of all CPUSA members lived in these three states. See Ernie Lazar’s collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 1).

1518 *New York Post*, September 2, 1968.

1519 *The Militant*, September 13, 1968. *The Militant* is the publication of the CPUSA’s Trotskyist rival Socialist Workers’ Party. The Trotskyists – who traditionally had opposed the policies of the Soviet Union – unequivocally condemned the occupation of Czechoslovakia. During the fall of 1968 *The Militant* published several news stories of the internal division within the CPUSA caused by the occupation. See, for example, *The Militant*, September 6, 1968 and December 13, 1968.

1520 Rosenberg 2019, 10.

1521 Richmond 1972, 413 and Healey & Isserman 1993, 233. Mike Stein criticized the national committee decision because it damaged party unity. In his opinion the decision was “vindictive” because it “censured party leaders who did not back the Moscow line”. See *New York Post*, September 2, 1968.

The CPUSA leaders knew in advance that some party members would oppose Hall's report, but that the majority of the national committee would agree with the general secretary. Morris Childs discussed the situation within the CPUSA with Boris Ponomarev, the head of the international department of CPSU's central committee, during his visit in Moscow in late August:

Ponomarev acknowledged that the invasion had 'created tensions with some parties' in Western Europe and asked if the Soviets could count on the 'solidarity' of the American party. Morris assured him that they could; under the leadership of Hall, the party was disciplined and reliable. A few dilettantes and poseurs might defect, but they did not matter.<sup>1522</sup>

Hall's report concerning the occupation of Czechoslovakia became probably his most widely distributed piece of work as it was soon published in full as a special supplement of *Pravda*. In addition to Russian, the report was also translated into numerous other languages and distributed all around the world.<sup>1523</sup>

In his report – which the CPUSA also published as a pamphlet – Hall admitted that Czechoslovakia needed democratic and economic reforms. However, because of the “ideological weakness” of country's new leadership, things went awfully wrong:

The new leadership should have opened up the path for a planned, orderly transition of economic and democratic reforms. Instead it opened up the flood gates for a tide that created anarchy – a tide that swept in with it the forces of counter-revolution.<sup>1524</sup>

In Hall's opinion, the intervention by five Warsaw Pact countries did not threaten Czechoslovakia's independence as the operation would only be a temporary one and would in the end leave Czechoslovakia's sovereignty intact. If needed, Warsaw Pact countries could cross each other's borders:

Communists have always stood for the self-determination of nations. But they never viewed this right *unconditionally* and *in all circumstances*. Communists have always placed this on class basis. Because the basic solutions to full right of nations will be solved by Socialism. Does it serve the interests of the working class and Socialism or hurt it?<sup>1525</sup>

Here Hall cites Lenin, according to whom the principle of proletarian internationalism demands that “interests of the proletarian struggle in any one country should be subordinated to the interests of the struggle on a world-wide scale”.<sup>1526</sup> Hall exemplifies this principle with a small story:

You know that no one has the right to enter another man's house without his permission. Suppose, however, that a fire has broken out at night in your neighbor's house, endangering his house and yours and others. You knock on the door to

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1522 Barron 1995, 166.

1523 Healey & Isserman 1993, 233. Lengthy excerpts of Hall's report were also published in *Daily World* on September 11, September 12 and September 13, 1968.

1524 Hall 1968b, 7.

1525 Hall 1968b, 24. Italics by Gus Hall.

1526 Lenin 1963c, 144. For more on Hall's views concerning proletarian internationalism, see Hall 1972a, 288-303.

awaken him. No answer, you knock louder. No answer! You break in and help put the fire out. You will agree that it is all right because that is a recognized necessity.<sup>1527</sup>

According to Hall, “necessity demanded the Five Powers to enter temporarily” because Czechoslovakia’s leadership was “dead asleep” and did not see that a fire was beginning in their house.

Hall pointed out in his report that “socialism can be developed only by applying the general laws of social development laid down by Marx and Lenin, by maintaining essential features of the dictatorship of the proletariat, by insisting on the leading role of the Communist Party and the Communist ideology in general”.<sup>1528</sup> In his opinion, the new leaders of Czechoslovakia “forgot the limitations of democracy under conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat”:

What are these limitations? That democracy, the rights of free speech, press etc. do not mean the right to undermine the leading role of the Party, nor to undermine socialism. Democracy cannot be developed that way.<sup>1529</sup>

Hall pays attention in his report to the fact that many Western European CPs had dissented from the Warsaw Pact operation. At the same time however, Hall points out, CPs in Central and South America, Africa and Asia have understood the necessity of the operation.

It is interesting to note that parties which are directly in struggle with imperialism or living in its midst, particularly U.S. and West German imperialism, have resolutely supported the action as unavoidable and necessary. That is the case of North Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba, the West German Communist Party, the CPUSA and a number of Latin American Parties.<sup>1530</sup>

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1527 Hall 1968b, 25.

1528 Hall 1968b, 26.

1529 Hall 1968b, 27. In this connection Hall also elaborates his views concerning press freedom. In his opinion, socialist countries do not need press censorship. This, however, does not mean having “an open-ended and a free for all mass media”. “Instead of censorship they need a system of responsible editors and editorial boards who are given a wide area of flexibility of political judgment; but editors and editorial boards who are not political neutrals”, Hall writes. See Hall 1968b, 28.

1530 Hall 1968b, 30. The discussion concerning the occupation of Czechoslovakia within the CPUSA did not, of course, end after the national board meeting during the Labor Day weekend. For example, one half of the contents of the October issue of *Political Affairs* was dedicated to justifying the Warsaw Pact action. The issue contained, in addition to a lengthy Czechoslovakia-related editorial, a Czechoslovakia-related article by an old-school party veteran William Weinstone and a 15-page *Pravda* article on the same topic. All these texts justified the occupation in more or less the same manner. Weinstone pointed out that “the Warsaw Pact countries do not seek to violate its [Czechoslovakia’s] integrity”, but “they seek to secure the integrity of the socialist community, including that of Czechoslovakia”. *Pravda’s* formulation was slightly more sophisticated: “By rendering fraternal internationalist support to our Czechoslovak comrades, to the Communists and entire Czechoslovak people, we are discharging our internationalist obligation and duty to them and to international Communist, working class and national liberation movement. For us this duty comes before everything else.” See Weinstone 1968, 14-15 and *Defense of Socialism: Supreme Internationalist Duty*, 31.

#### 4.5.5. The long shadow of Czechoslovakia

Although a clear majority supported Gus Hall in the national committee meeting during the Labor Day weekend, the occupation of Czechoslovakia left deep scars in the CPUSA. As an aftermath, several members left the party.<sup>1531</sup> The consequences of the occupation of Czechoslovakia were discussed still in 1991 in the heated atmosphere before the Cleveland national convention in which the party's dramatic split-up took place.<sup>1532</sup>

Both Dorothy Healey and Peggy Dennis, the widow of the former general secretary Eugene Dennis, saw the occupation as a negative turning point in the CPUSA's development. Dennis writes:

The 1968 crisis in Czechoslovakia, triggered by the Soviet military invasion of that socialist country, led to a re-examination of many theoretical concepts by the Italian, Spanish, Australian, British and Japanese Parties; and, to some extent, by the French Communist Party. In the U.S., however, the Czechoslovak events froze the Communist Party leadership into a new decade of dogmatism and sectarianism.<sup>1533</sup>

According to Healey, the events in Czechoslovakia ended a trend within the CPUSA in which young party members were pressing forward and forcing orthodox party leaders like Gus Hall, Carl and Helen Winter, James Jackson and Hy Lumer to retreat. In Healey's opinion, the nomination of Charlene Mitchell as the CPUSA's presidential candidate in 1968 was a symbol of this discontent among the young party members. Originally Hall had wanted to become the candidate but the nominating convention in July 1968 decided otherwise. "If that 1968 convention would have been a regular Party convention, charged with electing a new leadership, I suspect that most of those around Gus would have been in danger of losing their seats on the National Board", Healey writes.<sup>1534</sup> The occupation of Czechoslovakia ended this development as Hall showed that he was ruling the party with a tight grip. "Once again, as in the past, an international issue arose which cemented the power of the old guards", Healey points out.<sup>1535</sup>

Healey and Dennis were also highly critical of the CPUSA's attempts to justify the Warsaw Pact occupation. In Healey's opinion, Gus Hall's report to the national committee was

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1531 There are no official figures available on how many members left the CPUSA following the occupation of Czechoslovakia, but by no means Dorothy Healey and Al Richmond were the only ones. CPUSA veteran Steve Nelson writes in his autobiography that "in the United States, the crisis caused many of the best people who were still in the Party to rethink their positions and lend their support to the democratic socialist movement". According Northern California communist Jack Kurzweil, "a lot of young people especially in Northern California left the party at that time because of Czechoslovakia". Based on Vivian Gornick's interview book *The Romance of American Communism*, leaving the party because of the occupation of Czechoslovakia was indeed an existing phenomenon. Two out of the 42 former or current communists interviewed by Gornick ("Larry Dougherty" and "Carl Peters") tell us that they left the party because of Czechoslovakia. As the interviewees are presented in the book only with pseudonyms, it is not possible to identify them. See Gornick 1977, 184 & 222-224; Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 417 and Interview with Jack Kurzweil in Berkeley, California in August 2010.

1532 *Dialog – Pre-convention Discussion Bulletin*, November-December 1991.

1533 Dennis 1977, 278.

1534 Healey & Isserman 1993, 228.

1535 Healey & Isserman 1993, 228.

“filled with lurid nonsense”.<sup>1536</sup> Dennis was even more critical. “In no other Communist Party in the western capitalist world were the facts so deliberately misrepresented as in our country. And nowhere else was discussion of this event so deliberately falsified and restricted”, she wrote.<sup>1537</sup>

In Healey’s opinion, Hall’s reaction to the occupation of Czechoslovakia was just another example of the political line the CPUSA had adopted after 1959:

Under Gus’s leadership the American CP had picked up the dubious distinction of being the ideological sheepdog in the international Communist movement, barking on command when any of the other lambs threaten to stray away from the fold. The Soviet leaders would contact Gus and tell him what they wanted to say, he would say it, and then *Pravda* could run a story declaring that embattled American Communists speaking from the heartland of world imperialism had thus-and-thus to say about whatever issue was of particular concern to the Soviets at the moment.<sup>1538</sup>

Although a large part of California communists had supported Healey’s and Richmond’s line in the Czechoslovakian question, they both soon resigned from their positions and eventually also from the CPUSA. Richmond continued his work as the editor of *People’s World*, but not for long. As mentioned above, he had travelled to Czechoslovakia soon after the occupation and written a series of first-hand reports for his paper. *People’s World* had since January consistently supported the Czechoslovakian reformers and after the occupation criticized the five occupying countries. When Gus Hall later in the fall visited California, he straightforwardly attacked Richmond, his reports and *People’s World*. According to Hall, Richmond’s reports from Czechoslovakia were only the last straw, because *People’s World* had been for some time already “waging guerrilla war against party policies in number of areas”. In Hall’s opinion, “the critical clash had come and the outer limits of autonomy [of *People’s World*] had been breached”.<sup>1539</sup> Richmond continued his work as the editor, however, thinking that perhaps the CPUSA’s line in relation to the occupation of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union could change in the 19<sup>th</sup> national convention in the spring of 1969. This never took place, and some months after the convention, Richmond resigned from *People’s World*, after having served the paper for more than 30 years.<sup>1540</sup>

Richmond’s departure apparently deeply wounded the CPUSA’s Northern California district. In 1991 – no less than 22 years after Richmond’s resignation – the district published a resolution in the party’s pre-convention discussion bulletin in which the district regretted

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1536 Healey & Isserman 1993, 233. Healey referred to Hall’s claims that gallows had been set up in Czechoslovakian town squares in order to hang communist leaders. Hall indeed made such claims in his report. Hall also claimed, for example, that illegal weapons – heavy machine-guns, hand-grenades, anti-tank guns – had been found in basements of 11 Czechoslovakian ministries. In addition to that, tens of thousands of automatic weapons – made in West Germany and the United States – had been found in Czechoslovakia, as well as powerful mobile radio broadcasting stations and secret printing shops. See Hall 1968b, 17-18.

1537 Dennis 1977, 278.

1538 Healey & Isserman 1993, 233.

1539 Richmond 1972, 429-430.

1540 Richmond 1972, 430-433.

the expulsion of Richmond and recognized his “tremendous contribution” to the party’s history. The district extolled Richmond’s “prescience of current developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union” and his “integrity and devotion to the working class”.<sup>1541</sup>

Dorothy Healey also quit her CPUSA career in 1969. She had grown tired of the internal bickering within the party and, just like Al Richmond, she was “despondent about the possibility of ever making any real change in the Party’s outlook”. According to Healey, the party’s national office worked hard to turn the Southern California membership against her, sending experienced leaders like Carl Winter to Southern California to organize the membership against her position. Healey was accused of being anti-Soviet and of having violated democratic centralism by issuing her own statement about the Czechoslovakian invasion. When visiting California in November 1968 Gus Hall also denounced Healey for making a public statement to the capitalist press when the Warsaw Pact tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia. The efforts of the national office were successful. The April 1969 convention of Southern California communists became the last to which Healey gave her report as the district organizer.<sup>1542</sup>

Although Healey gave up her leadership position she did not leave the party immediately. That took place four years later following a controversy caused by Al Richmond’s autobiography *A Long View from the Left*. The book was published in late 1972. In May 1973 Hyman Lumer reviewed the book in *Political Affairs*. Dorothy Healey writes:

He [Hyman Lumer] characterized the book as ‘anti-Party’ and ‘racist’. As evidence for the latter, Lumer cited the fact that several leading Black Communists were ‘merely mentioned in passing’ in the book and Henry Winston, William Patterson and Benjamin Davis were not mentioned at all. Al noted in his response, never published by *Political Affairs*, that William Z. Foster had failed to mention single Black Communist by name in his autobiography *Pages from a Worker’s Life*, but no one accused him of racism for the omission. What was really at issue was, first, Al’s outspoken sympathy for the Czech reformers, particularly his conclusion that “workers overwhelmingly supported the Dubcek leadership” and second, his insistence throughout the book that the cause of American revolutionaries could only prosper through “an independent confrontation with American reality in the spirit of Marx and Lenin, without borrowed spectacles or dogmatic preconceptions”.<sup>1543</sup>

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1541 *Dialog – Pre-convention Discussion Bulletin*, November-December 1991. It is unclear whether the Richmond resolution by the Northern California district was discussed at the Cleveland national convention in December 1991. It is possible that the resolution may have been left without attention at the convention because only a half of the Northern California district delegation could take part in the convention due to belated submissions of membership dues. See Rosenberg 2019, 44.

1542 Healey & Isserman 1993, 234-235. The departure of Dorothy Healey was a major loss for the CPUSA at least if one looks at election figures. In 1966 Healey campaigned for the office of tax assessor of Los Angeles County. She was unsuccessful but obtained 86 000 votes which was six percent of the total. Healey’s success was exceptional – seldom had communist candidates obtained such amounts of votes. Gus Hall, for example, never obtained such amounts when he ran for U.S. president in the 1970s and 1980s. Hall’s best achievement was 59 000 votes in the 1976 presidential election. See *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs 1966*, 171.

1543 Healey & Isserman 1993, 241. According to Lumer, Richmond paints almost a “lily-white” picture of the CPUSA as “practically none of the close associates he writes about are Black”. In Lumer’s opinion, the book was “a shocking expression of racism”. See Lumer 1973, 53.

Richmond's book was by no means a minor issue for the CPUSA. Following the *Political Affairs* review, the book was discussed in the national committee meeting in June. In his report Gus Hall reiterated Lumer's charges and labeled the book "a weapon in the hands of the class enemy". Around the same time, the Southern California district committee adopted a resolution endorsing the national office's characterization of Richmond's book and requiring "each comrade to reflect the Party's position when speaking and writing among masses". Any member of the district who publicly disagreed with the charges against Richmond would be subject to disciplinary action up to and including expulsion.<sup>1544</sup> "It was a provision tailor-made for me because I was the only Party member who regularly and openly spoke in public forum as a Communist through my program on KPFK", Healey wrote referring to her radio program on a Los Angeles radio station.<sup>1545</sup>

Such a resolution meant that Dorothy Healey would have to end her decades-long CPUSA membership. "There was no question that I would go along with the denunciation of Al's book. I had the choice of either ignoring the directive and being expelled or simply resigning", Healey wrote. She ended up choosing the latter alternative and resigned in July 1973. In her resignation statement Healey wrote:

The specific question of Richmond's book is secondary in my decision to resign. The primary question is the lack of party democracy and the use of distorted version of democratic centralism to compel approval of decisions made without prior discussion among the membership. And it is precisely on the question of how decisions are made, how policy is decided, that I have been in such long and frequently public disagreements with the national leadership of the Communist Party.<sup>1546</sup>

The CPUSA was not yet, however, done with Healey. In December 1973 the CPUSA published a statement announcing that both Dorothy Healey and Al Richmond were expelled from the party. Healey quotes the CPUSA statement in length in her autobiography. Five years after the occupation of Czechoslovakia, the Warsaw Pact action was still affecting the everyday life of the CPUSA:

Dorothy Healey and Al Richmond have engaged in struggle against the Marxist-Leninist of the Party's political policies, organizational principles and such fundamental ideological concepts as proletarian internationalism over a long period of time. [...] Well known is Richmond's persistent championship of the threatened counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia. [...] His writing also contains slurs and slanders of the experience and role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. [...] Healey's opposition to the Party's position on Czechoslovakia and in other Party decisions is also well known. [...] Thus, the challenge of Healey and Richmond to basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism has taken on a more openly anti-working class, anti-Soviet and anti-Party course. [...] Therefore, the Central Committee of the Communist Party, USA characterizes the position and role of Dorothy Healey and Al Richmond as anti-Party and adopts this resolution for their expulsion.<sup>1547</sup>

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1544 Healey & Isserman 1993, 241-242.

1545 Healey & Isserman 1993, 242.

1546 Healey & Isserman 1993, 243.

1547 Healey & Isserman 1993, 243-244.

Interestingly, not only Healey but also Richmond had by then resigned from the party.<sup>1548</sup> “Whether one can be expelled from an organization one no longer belongs to is an interesting metaphysical question”, Healey quips in her autobiography. According to her, there was a clear logic in the actions of the party leadership:

If someone simply resigns from the Party there is nothing in the Party constitution to prevent Communists from associating with them. But if someone is expelled, then it’s a very different story. Then it becomes a breach of discipline to consort with the “class enemy”. So when the Party expelled Al and me in December, there was a perverted rationale involved: they could then expel anyone who continued to be seen in our company. [...] I had to be turned into some kind of monster, the latest in a long line of bogey-men, from Browder to Gates to Healey, in order to frighten the faithful of the consequences of the slightest dissent from the gospel according to Gus.<sup>1549</sup>

Bettina Aptheker, who along with Dorothy Healey and Al Richmond had voted against Gus Hall’s Czechoslovakia report, also eventually left the CPUSA. For her it took longer, more than ten years. The occupation of Czechoslovakia remained a bone of contention between Aptheker and the party leadership until the very end of her membership.

Much like Dorothy Healey, Aptheker paints a somewhat unflattering picture of Gus Hall in her autobiography. According to Aptheker, many communist men of the older generation, including Gus Hall, publicly believed in social justice and equality but privately they could be sexist and racist. Aptheker writes:

Indeed, my father and other Communist men passionately believed in social justice and racial and class equality. But in their homes it could be a very different story. Sexism, racism and often even abuse were alive and well. Certainly this isn’t confined to men on one end of the spectrum or the other. But this chasm between political acts and personal beliefs must be acknowledged.<sup>1550</sup>

Hall’s disrespectful attitudes towards women were revealed during the discussions concerning Czechoslovakia, Aptheker writes.

When I condemned the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia at a National Committee meeting, Gus Hall, the general secretary of the party, told me I should always listen to “my pop”, who endorsed it. I never forgave Gus his patronizing homilies – this was one of the many. On the same occasion, I overheard Gus talking in loud, hearty tones to another comrade. Deriding Dorothy Healey’s opposition to the same invasion he said, “What she needs is a good lay”. I was revolted by Gus’s sentiments

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1548 *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 335. In her autobiography, Charlene Mitchell says that she opposed the party’s decision to expel Healey, because she had already left the party. “It didn’t make sense to add fuel to the fire”, Mitchell writes. See Charlene Mitchell’s unpublished autobiography, 65.

1549 Healey & Isserman 1993, 244. Healey refers to Earl Browder, CPUSA’s general secretary of the 1930s and early 1940s who was displaced in 1945 due to his flawed political line, and to John Gates, who was the most prominent reform-minded CPUSA leader of the late 1950s.

1550 Aptheker 2006, 4-5. In another context Aptheker writes: “Party men were not immune to engaging in sexual abuse, sexual harassment and domestic violence, although they considered themselves progressives and sympathetic to those subjugated on the basis of race and class. Many committed adultery, with society’s sexual double standard allowing men’s indiscretions far more readily than women’s. Several of the older men in the national office were notorious among us younger women for their sexual advances.” See Aptheker 2006, 104.



even at the time which I considered vulgar and mean spirited. Later, as a feminist, I saw his comment as profoundly demeaning to women, as if Dorothy's opposition to an invasion was a matter of personal moodiness that a "good lay" could cure.<sup>1551</sup>

Czechoslovakia was of course not the only issue that caused problems between Aptheker and the party leaders. She was one of the most prominent representatives of the New Left generation in the CPUSA and, as such, an unreliable party member. Aptheker writes:

Although many of my older comrades welcomed the change in the political climate since the 1950s, wrought at least in part by the New Left, most of the elders in the U.S. Communist Party remained deeply suspicious of it. Intellectuals were seen as unreliable allies to the working class, with the potential to corrupt Marxism. As I began to publish, Gus Hall, the party's general secretary, asked me to submit my work for prior approval. I refused. The whole struggle for a democratic socialism was about precisely this – the freedom to express oneself with no fear of censure.<sup>1552</sup>

The rift between Aptheker and the party leadership did not heal during the 1970s but it rather widened. During the very first years of the 1970s Aptheker had major disagreements with Gus Hall and other party leaders concerning the legal defense strategy in the trial of Angela Davis.<sup>1553</sup> Later during the decade – as she became increasingly interested in feminism – Aptheker differed with the party on issues related to gender equality.<sup>1554</sup> Finally in 1981 Aptheker resigned from the CPUSA after the party would not publish her book *Woman's Legacy – Essays on Race, Sex and Class in American History*. Aptheker believed that her public affirmation of her lesbian identity sealed the fate of her book with the party. "It was 1981, and the party was not to deal with the issues of sexuality and gay and lesbian rights for another decade", Aptheker wrote.<sup>1555</sup>

Not all critics of the occupation of Czechoslovakia resigned from the CPUSA in the 1970s or early 1980s like Aptheker, Healey and Richmond. Gil Green, who in a *The New York Times* interview had called the operation "a very serious blunder" and "completely unwarranted", remained in the party until its dramatic split in 1991.<sup>1556</sup> At the time Green was the head of the New York CP, the largest state organization of the CPUSA, and a member of CPUSA's executive body, its political bureau. He resigned from these positions as a protest against the occupation. He was, however, re-elected to the CPUSA's national committee in 1969.<sup>1557</sup>

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1551 Aptheker 2006, 104-105.

1552 Aptheker 2006, 216.

1553 Aptheker 2006, 254 & 282.

1554 Aptheker 2006, 392.

1555 Aptheker 2006, 403. Aptheker believed that "someone very high in the party leadership had ordered that this book not to be published under any circumstances". The book was shortly afterwards published by Massachusetts University Press and it received favorable reviews. According to Aptheker, the party's refusal to publish the book later turned out to be a gift as the book was in 1983 accepted as her doctoral dissertation. See Aptheker 2006, 402-404.

1556 Interestingly, the most vocal critics of the occupation of Czechoslovakia within the CPUSA – Aptheker, Green, Healey and Richmond – were all persons with a Jewish family background. Many African American party members seemed to be somewhat unmoved by the events in Czechoslovakia as their focus was so strongly in domestic issues like racial equality. According to Richmond, some young black militants were amazed by the strong feelings caused by the events in Czechoslovakia and asked: "How come you older people get more worked up about Czechoslovakia than you do about anything that happens in the ghetto?" See Richmond 1972, 430.

1557 For more on Green's party career, see, for example, *Biographical Dictionary of the American*

Despite his decades-long party experience, Green did not serve in any significant leadership positions during the 1970s and 1980s. During his last two decades in the CPUSA Green was more or less ostracized and isolated from the party leadership due to his views concerning Czechoslovakia and other contentious issues. One example of such ostracism was seen in the mid-1980s when the CPUSA prevented Green from taking part in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the historic 7<sup>th</sup> congress of the Comintern in which Green had participated in 1935.<sup>1558</sup> Among the supporters of Gus Hall, Green was considered “tainted” and “*persona non grata*” and he was not socialized with.<sup>1559</sup>

Green was a stern critic of what he called the sectarianism of the CPUSA. In his opinion the CPUSA should have co-operated much more actively with other left-wing and other groups in the United States in order to achieve common goals. Green had supported such united front policies ever since the 1930s when he, as the leader of Young Communist League, had taken part in activities of the American Youth Congress which mainly comprised of representatives of non-communist organizations. He wanted to build bridges to other organizations in the peace movement, the civil rights movement and the labor movement. Green’s friends included intellectuals, academicians, pacifists and trade unionists who did not always share his political convictions. This was not the case with all communists, many of whom tended to socialize only with other CPUSA members. “You can’t have a united front with yourself”, Green used to point out.<sup>1560</sup>

In his letters to Gus Hall Green frankly criticized the CPUSA leaders for not connecting with other progressive forces in the United States:

There is too much absorption with inner-Party work, with meetings with each other, and little time is left to meet with non-party people and also learn from them.

The main problem we still face in our ranks is that of sectarianism. [...] The struggle against sectarianism also requires the conscious seeking out and nurturing of allies.

Our Party apparatuses are too cumbersome, too tied with explicitly “inner” affairs, leaders are too “exhausted” by meetings with other Party leaders, and too many have no time to meet with non-party people, never speak at non-party gatherings, and answer most questions in general cliches.<sup>1561</sup>

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*Left*, 169-171 and Michael Myerson’s press release on Gil Green’s death in May 1997, Jay Schaffner Papers (TAM 526), box 16.

1558 Michael Myerson’s eulogy at Gil Green commemoration in June 1997, Jay Schaffner Papers (TAM 526), box 16.

1559 Jay Schaffner’s eulogy at Gil Green commemoration in June 1997, Jay Schaffner Papers (TAM 526), box 16. Also Daniel Rosenberg points out that Green held a “pariah status” within the party as he was isolated by Hall. See Rosenberg 2019, 9 & 28.

1560 Michael Myerson’s eulogy at Gil Green commemoration in June 1997, Jay Schaffner Papers (TAM 526), box 16. Green’s exceptionally large number of friends could also be seen in the commemorations which were arranged in New York and Chicago after his death. Approximately 300 people took part in the commemoration in New York and more than 100 people took part in a similar event in Chicago. Individuals from different left-wing organizations participated, including CPUSA members like Michael Myerson and Jay Schaffner and socialists like David McReynolds.

1561 Green’s letters – written in the 1960s and 1970s – are quoted in Rosenberg 2019, 9. Green criticized the party also in his letters to Henry Winston with whom he had a much better relationship. “The Party is structured like an inverse pyramid: top heavy and bottom weak. [...] All thinking is supposed to go from the top, down, and never the other way around”, Green wrote.

Such an approach brought Green in conflict with Gus Hall who viewed non-communists with suspicion. Green was, for example, in 1966 reproached by the party leadership after he had been arrested in an anti-Vietnam War demonstration together with non-communist pacifists.<sup>1562</sup> The criticism was not unilateral. Green considered Hall to be “an undemocratic bureaucrat” who was “more responsive to the Soviet leadership than to the American working class”.<sup>1563</sup> Jokingly Green also called Hall “one of the most brilliant Marxists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century”.<sup>1564</sup> In 1968 when the CPUSA nominated its first presidential candidate for almost thirty years, Green explicitly supported Charlene Mitchell’s candidacy instead of Hall’s. This was a clear vote of no-confidence for Hall, who had originally wanted to become the candidate.<sup>1565</sup>

According to Operation Solo documents, in 1964 Gus Hall considered it possible that Gil Green could challenge his position as CPUSA’s general secretary.<sup>1566</sup> Such thoughts were not wholly unfounded. Some influential party members like the CPUSA lawyer John J. Abt considered Green to be “the most innovative and thoughtful leader of the Party” and quite likely would have preferred having Green as the general secretary instead of Hall.<sup>1567</sup> Former party member and *Daily Worker* reporter Joseph R. Starobin – who later became a professor in political science – considered Green to be “the most talented figure” in the CPUSA leadership.<sup>1568</sup> Long-time party activist and CPUSA’s 1968 presidential candidate Charlene Mitchell called Green “one of the clearest and most creative thinkers in the Party”.<sup>1569</sup>

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Green took part in the party discussions for decades to come. In July 1989, for example, he pointed out that since “decisions are still handed down from top to bottom”, “there can be no [...] vibrant and creative political-ideological life” in the party. In Green’s opinion, the party should stop keeping a person “in a position of leadership just because he/she is there now” as this bred “the notion of indispensability, self-adulation and on the part of some subordinates, toadyism”. See Rosenberg 2019, 13 & 19.

1562 David McReynolds’s eulogy of Gil Green in June 1997, Jay Schaffner Papers (TAM 526), box 16.

1563 Michael Myerson’s press release on Gil Green’s death in May 1997, Jay Schaffner Papers (TAM 526), box 16.

1564 Jay Schaffner’s eulogy at Gil Green commemoration in June 1997, Jay Schaffner Papers (TAM 526), box 16.

1565 Charlene Mitchell’s unpublished autobiography, 66. A central unifying feature in Mitchell’s and Green’s thinking was the idea that the CPUSA should actively be involved in civil rights movement, student organizations and anti-war movement. See Charlene Mitchell’s unpublished autobiography, 60.

1566 When Khrushchev was removed from CPSU’s top position in October 1964, Hall was worried that the Soviets would get closer to the Chinese. Hall had prominently supported Khrushchev’s position in the ideological dispute with Mao. If the Soviets would start to “play ball” with the Chinese, Hall thought that Gil Green and Robert Thompson would “murder him” because they were “out for his blood”. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 29, 1964; OSD, part 72, page 99.

1567 Abt & Myerson 1993, 220. Abt did not hold Gus Hall in very high regard. According to him, Hall was “far too bureaucratic for a post that [...] required a keen ear and respect for others’ thoughts”. See Abt & Myerson 1993, 237.

1568 Starobin 1972, 119.

1569 Charlene Mitchell’s unpublished autobiography, 29.

Left-wing activist and journalist Ethan Young estimated in 1997 that the history of the U.S. left would have been very different after the 1950s if Gil Green would have become CPUSA's general secretary instead of Gus Hall. In his opinion, Gil Green "always stood head and shoulders above Gus Hall". "In terms of combining political brilliance, independence of mind and sensitivity to both groups and individuals" Green would have "outshone the other top leaders" like Browder, Foster and Dennis, Young wrote. According to Young, Green's thinking developed in parallel to the eurocommunists such as Enrico Berlinguer of Italy or Santiago Carillo of Spain. "Gil conceivably could have been a leader on a par with Togliatti", Young summarized by referring to Green's great Italian role model who led the biggest non-ruling CP in the world.<sup>1570</sup>

#### **4.5.6. Difficult times for Matthew Hallinan and Charlene Mitchell**

Some party members were put into difficult positions following the occupation of Czechoslovakia. Two such persons were Matthew Hallinan, one of CPUSA's young rising stars in the 1960s, and Charlene Mitchell, who had just been nominated as the party's presidential candidate six weeks before the occupation. They both discuss their experiences in their unpublished autobiographical writings. As many other CPUSA members may have gone through similar kind of processes, it may be worthwhile to have a closer look at these experiences.

Matthew Hallinan had to go through a difficult adjustment process after the occupation. The news about the intervention came as a "total shock" to him and at first he opposed the occupation, but soon, after an excruciating internal wrestle, he ended up accepting the military maneuver of the Warsaw Pact countries. Hallinan describes this mental process closely in his autobiographical recollections.

Matthew Hallinan, son of a well-known lawyer and progressive politician Vincent Hallinan, joined the CPUSA after the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. To him the gruesome Bay of Pigs invasion was a turning point in life "when you must decide who you really are and what life is truly about".<sup>1571</sup> Hallinan studied in Berkeley, California and served as the chairman of the Berkeley Campus Party Club. In June 1966 at CPUSA's 18<sup>th</sup> national convention Hallinan was elected to the party's national committee as a new member together with Bettina Aptheker, Don Hammerquist, Jarvis Tyner and Michael Zagarell.<sup>1572</sup>

Hallinan had visited Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1968 and had witnessed the efforts of Alexander Dubcek, the general secretary of the Czechoslovakian CP, in creating a new kind of socialism.

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1570 Ethan Young's eulogy of Gil Green in July 1997, Jay Schaffner Papers (TAM 526), box 16.

1571 Matthew Hallinan's unpublished autobiographical text *From the Ashes of Communism*, 2-3. The Bay of Pigs invasion affected Hallinan strongly partly because he had visited Cuba together with his parents in December 1959 when the country was celebrating the first anniversary of its revolution. Such a visit made a strong impression to Hallinan who was then a teenager.

1572 *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs 1966*, 172.

I was excited about the efforts of the Czechs to create a “socialism with a human face”. I always believed that the socialist countries would eventually evolve into more open democratic societies. Czechoslovakia seemed as good a place as any to begin this process.<sup>1573</sup>

According to Hallinan, the Czechoslovakians were “tremendously excited about the opportunity to take socialism that had been imposed upon them and make it humane and truly their own”. After his return to the United States, Hallinan received several invitations to talk about what he had witnessed in Czechoslovakia. “I found these talks very exhilarating. The prospect of a democratic and humane socialism growing out of communism was exciting to both me and my audiences”, Hallinan remembers.<sup>1574</sup>

Hallinan believed that the Czechoslovakians “had the right to build whatever kind of socialism they wanted”. In addition to that, he believed that the Soviets would not intervene in the developments in Czechoslovakia because “as Leninists, they recognized the right of nations to self-determination and acknowledged that the Czechs had a right to choose their own path to socialism”.<sup>1575</sup>

The massive Soviet military intervention came as a total shock to me. There had been no dramatic change in the situation in Czechoslovakia that could possibly have warranted such a response from the USSR. Why would they have taken such a drastic measure? My head was spinning with doubts and confusion.

An emergency meeting was called by the top officials of the U.S. Communist Party. Gus Hall, the General Secretary, presented a package of “evidence” he had received from the Soviets about imperialist machinations in Czechoslovakia. The Party had lost control of the situation, he said, and U.S. and West German agents were operating freely in the country. Organized counter-revolutionaries were preparing to make a bid for power. Another “Hungary” was in the making. And, he noted in closing, the Party itself invited the USSR to intervene. It was deeply upsetting to hear all of this. While I was no expert and had only been there a week, this “evidence” was clearly fraudulent nonsense. As for the invitation of the Party, Dubcek and a number of other Party leaders had been placed under arrest. The issue of what the Czech people wanted was never even addressed.<sup>1576</sup>

According to Hallinan, the majority of the members of CPUSA’s political committee were behind the Soviets. “The main argument was that they wouldn’t have done it if they didn’t have to”, Hallinan writes. According to him, the Soviets were clearly pressuring the party for an immediate endorsement of the invasion, and a vote supporting that position was pushed through the committee.<sup>1577</sup>

When I got back to my apartment that night, I was a complete wreck. I knew I had reached another one of those existential turning points. For communists in the West, and particularly in the USA, the Soviet intervention was an unmitigated disaster. Here we were, opposing U.S. intervention in Vietnam as a violation of

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1573 Matthew Hallinan’s unpublished autobiographical text *From the Ashes of Communism*, 5.

1574 Matthew Hallinan’s unpublished autobiographical text *From the Ashes of Communism*, 5.

1575 Matthew Hallinan’s unpublished autobiographical text *From the Ashes of Communism*, 6.

1576 Matthew Hallinan’s unpublished autobiographical text *From the Ashes of Communism*, 6-7.

1577 Matthew Hallinan’s unpublished autobiographical text *From the Ashes of Communism*, 7.

the sacred principle of self-determination, and the center of the world communist movement had just shown what it thought of that principle.<sup>1578</sup>

After a lengthy and thorough reflection Hallinan finally ended up supporting the Soviets and their military action:

By morning I had figured out why the Soviets were right, and how they had no choice but to intervene. The issue here was not the freedom of the Czechs. They had a wonderful little socialist system to begin with. The issue here was the freedom of the Vietnamese and all other peoples under the heel of imperialism. The world communist movement could not risk another split at this crucial juncture. The interests of the movement as a whole took precedence over the rights of any particular part of it.<sup>1579</sup>

Hallinan had become a supporter of what became later known as the Brezhnev Doctrine: Socialist countries do not have the right to self-determination if that threatens the strength of the socialist community as a whole.<sup>1580</sup>

I had made my choice. [...] I might not always know what was right; but I would always know who was right. This did not appear to me as some kind of compromise to my earlier ideals. I believed I had gone through a maturing experience in which I had dispelled certain liberal illusions, and faced the fact that the forces of good do not always have perfect options. I had not become cynical or hypocritical, nor ever argued for anything I didn't believe. I would just plug in the "we vs. them" program and it would always place me on the side of whatever the USSR did.<sup>1581</sup>

Following his pro-Soviet decision, Hallinan became the "darling" of the party leadership and his star rose rapidly within the party. He was taken to international meetings and was introduced to leaders of other parties. "I was being groomed to be one of the next generation of top party leaders", Hallinan writes. Sometimes he was called upon by the party leadership to give a "Marxist-Leninist rebuff" to some dissident voices that might speak out against party policies.<sup>1582</sup>

Hallinan's relationship with the party soured, however, after 1972 when he disagreed with Hall about the extent of Hall's presidential campaign. Hallinan, who belonged to the so-called activist wing of the CP and who was involved in a tenants' movement in New York City fighting the efforts to repeal rent control, did not accept Hall's demand that all CPUSA members should put their other activities on hold and make the 1972 elections their main priority. Hallinan continued his criticism after the November elections – in which Hall gathered mere 26 000 votes – which led to the final break between him and Hall. Hallinan left the party in 1976 after he had failed to build a base in the San Francisco Bay Area from which he could have reformed the party.<sup>1583</sup>

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1578 Matthew Hallinan's unpublished autobiographical text *From the Ashes of Communism*, 7.

1579 Matthew Hallinan's unpublished autobiographical text *From the Ashes of Communism*, 8.

1580 Matthew Hallinan's unpublished autobiographical text *From the Ashes of Communism*, 8.

1581 Matthew Hallinan's unpublished autobiographical text *From the Ashes of Communism*, 8-9. Emphasis in the original.

1582 Matthew Hallinan's unpublished autobiographical text *From the Ashes of Communism*, 9.

1583 Matthew Hallinan's unpublished autobiographical text *From the Ashes of Communism*, 9-18.

As mentioned earlier, Charlene Mitchell was nominated as CPUSA's presidential candidate in July 1968, which made her position complicated in relation to the Czechoslovakian question. In her heart, Mitchell opposed the occupation because "nobody had a right to determine for the Czech people whether they were going to go backward or forward".<sup>1584</sup> She could not, however, express her opinion, because of her candidacy. "I couldn't be a legitimate candidate on the Party's ticket and take a position opposite of the Party's position", Mitchell writes.<sup>1585</sup>

Not to take the position that I thought it was a wrong decision was fairly opportunistic on my part. It was opportunistic because if I wanted to say I disagreed, I should have said so. But I was riding the fence.<sup>1586</sup>

As the party's presidential candidate, Mitchell crisscrossed the country in the late summer and fall of 1968, speaking publicly and giving interviews. Not surprisingly, she had to answer numerous questions related to the occupation of Czechoslovakia. "My standard response was that the Soviet response 'regrettable, but necessary' to save socialism", Mitchell writes.<sup>1587</sup>

In a call-in interview in Washington State I had the opportunity to speak at length on the issue of Czechoslovakia. I said, "The liberalization process going on in Czechoslovakia has to continue, but it has to continue based on the maintenance of socialism and not under any counterrevolutionary measures".<sup>1588</sup>

Mitchell's attitude towards the Czechoslovakian events may have been affected by her background. As an African American, Mitchell looked at the Czechoslovak situation from a slightly different viewpoint than for example white Americans:

I often challenged the questioner to show as much concern for the black community as they showed for the Czechs. The year before Soviet tanks rolled into Prague, the tanks of the National Guard rolled into Detroit. It was interesting that many people, including many in the progressive movement, could show such concern for a country in Europe, yet ignore what their own government was doing right here.<sup>1589</sup>

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1584 Charlene Mitchell's unpublished autobiography, 64. When CPUSA's national committee voted on supporting the Soviet intervention, Mitchell abstained because she thought the party needed to discuss the topic more thoroughly. As mentioned earlier, Dorothy Healey was disappointed with Mitchell's decision, as Mitchell had initially been outraged by the occupation. See Healey & Isserman 1993, 232-233.

1585 Charlene Mitchell's unpublished autobiography, 65.

1586 Charlene Mitchell's unpublished autobiography, 64-65.

1587 Charlene Mitchell's unpublished autobiography, 67.

1588 Charlene Mitchell's unpublished autobiography, 67.

1589 Charlene Mitchell's unpublished autobiography, 67. According to Sara Rzeszutek, this kind of attitude was typical of African American party members. In her opinion, African American party members "were less influenced by the tumultuous shifts in international communism than were their white counterparts". "Blacks felt more strongly about what happened in this country. [...] Black communists cared more about domestic questions that related directly to black interests", Rzeszutek writes. See Rzeszutek 2015, 5.

#### 4.5.7. George Wheeler's close view of Czechoslovakia

In addition to Dorothy Healey and Al Richmond in California and Gil Green in New York, the occupation of Czechoslovakia was also criticized by two CPUSA members who lived in the very heart of the events, in Prague. As George and Eleanor Wheeler had exceptionally interesting viewpoint to the developments in Czechoslovakia, I will take a closer look on their views concerning the incident.<sup>1590</sup>

When the Warsaw Pact troops occupied Czechoslovakia, George and Eleanor Wheeler had lived in the country for more than twenty years. Before moving to Czechoslovakia in 1947, George Wheeler had worked as an economist for Roosevelt's New Deal administration in Washington D.C. and during and after the WWII for the denazification program of Germany in London and Berlin. In October 1947 Wheeler was fired from his work in Berlin because of his leftist background. He had been a member of the Socialist Party in the 1930s but had left the party around 1940 as the party introduced a steeply progressive membership fee.<sup>1591</sup> In the end of the 1930s Wheeler's views seem to have been closer to the line of the CPUSA than to the Socialist Party. In 1939 he, for example, supported the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.<sup>1592</sup> In his unpublished autobiography Wheeler does not mention being a member of the CPUSA, but according to the Operation Solo documents he and his wife were members of the American party at least in the 1960s.<sup>1593</sup> In addition to documents related to Wheeler's party membership payments, Operation Solo documents tell us that in September 1966 they met with Gus Hall who was visiting Czechoslovakia as a part of his European tour in September 1966.<sup>1594</sup>

In Czechoslovakia George Wheeler first lectured on economics and worked as a freelance writer but in 1954 he was appointed in the newly formed Economic Institute of the Czechoslovakian Academy of Sciences. Eleanor Wheeler at the same time worked as a translator for the country's ministry of culture. Work at the Economic Institute gave George Wheeler an excellent possibility to follow the development of Czechoslovakian economy and society from a close distance especially after Ota Sik, the economist who later turned out to be one of the leading figures during the so-called Prague Spring in 1968, became the director of the institute in 1963.<sup>1595</sup>

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1590 Wheeler's views on Czechoslovakian economy and its shortcomings are presented in his 1973 book *The Human Face of Socialism – The Political Economy of Change in Czechoslovakia*. The book also contains a compact autobiography of Wheeler. See Wheeler 1973, xii-xiv.

1591 George Wheeler's unpublished autobiography *Memoirs of a "Premature Anti-Fascist"*, 123 & 128.

1592 George Wheeler's unpublished autobiography *Memoirs of a "Premature Anti-Fascist"*, 128-129.

1593 Operation Solo documents contain two documents concerning the payments of the CPUSA membership dues of George and Eleanor Wheeler. As the Wheelers met Morris Childs during his visits in Prague, they took care of their dues payments. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on June 6, 1966; OSD, part 106, page 190 and report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 16, 1968; OSD, part 124, page 37.

1594 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 25, 1968; OSD, part 109, page 63.

1595 According to Jozef Wilczynski, Ota Sik was "the main driving force behind the proposed



George Wheeler made his views well-known within the CPUSA well before the actual occupation of Czechoslovakia. In March 1968 he wrote an article on the development of Czechoslovakia for *Political Affairs*, the CPUSA's theoretical journal. In his article – titled *A New Stage in Development of Socialism* – Wheeler drew an optimistic picture of Czechoslovakia and its development towards a more democratic form of socialism. In his opinion, Czechoslovakia was in the spring of 1968 “one of the most exhilarating places in the world”:

The Czechoslovak people have come a long way in what is essentially the transition from the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat to full political democracy. Radio and television have come to life with exciting debates and newspapers are sold out by 7.00 in the morning. For the most part it is high-level discussion of past deficiencies and future programs. The people are fully aware and proud of what they are doing. Tempers sometimes flare, but there is a deliberate attempt to avoid violence, to reinforce legality.<sup>1596</sup>

In Wheeler's opinion, Czechoslovakia's highly developed economy had outgrown the centralized, directive system of government. “Too many directives and lack of competition” had “killed local initiative”, Wheeler pointed out. It was not at all accidental that this kind of pioneering effort was taking place in Czechoslovakia, Wheeler wrote, because the Czechoslovak people were “certainly among the most politically mature in the world”.<sup>1597</sup>

Wheeler sent the article to *Political Affairs* in mid-March. More than a month later the editors wrote back to him with a response that the article would not be published in the journal as it would “not be understood by our readers since it deals with individuals and events with which they are not sufficiently familiar”. The journal had published Wheeler's earlier reform-minded article on Czechoslovakia in March 1966, but this time there was no room for such a text.<sup>1598</sup>

In early May Wheeler gave a copy of the article to Morris Childs who was visiting Prague. Back in New York Childs discussed the article with Betty Gannett, the editor of *Political Affairs*. Gannett told Childs that she “could not use the article because she was afraid to print it”.<sup>1599</sup>

At the same time Eleanor Wheeler worked as the Prague correspondent of the CPUSA's *Daily World* newspaper. She had written several articles for the paper – including biographical articles on Alexander Dubcek – but *Daily World* had not published them. As the Wheelers could not make their voices heard within the party, in the beginning of August they wrote

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liberal economic reforms in Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s”. “He was the most outstanding advocate of combining planning with the market mechanism, which he believed could usefully supplement each other in peaceful coexistence within a socialist framework”, Wilczynski writes. Sik went into exile after the occupation of Czechoslovakia and settled in Switzerland. He was deprived of his Czechoslovakian citizenship in 1970. During the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, Sik spent three years in Mauthausen concentration camp. See Wheeler 1973, 20 and Wilczynski 1981, 518.

1596 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 14, 1968; OSD, part 123, page 201.

1597 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 14, 1968; OSD, part 123, page 201.

1598 *Intercontinental Press*, September 23, 1968. According to George Wheeler, his article was “good Marxism and simple to read”.

1599 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 14, 1968; OSD, part 123, page 198.

an open letter to Gus Hall, Henry Winston, the editors of *Daily World* and *Political Affairs* and others responsible for the CPUSA policy. In their letter the Wheelers expressed their disappointment with the CPUSA's line concerning Czechoslovakia. They pointed out that all Western CPs – except the parties of Luxembourg and West Germany and the Moscow-based fraction of the Greek CP – had supported the democratization process in Czechoslovakia. “This has had a sad effect on the prestige of the U.S. Party in Europe, and we wonder what effect it will have in the United States”, the Wheelers wrote.<sup>1600</sup>

According to the Wheelers, “the movement in Czechoslovakia for a new and higher form of socialism is not anti-Soviet”. They sharply criticized the Czechoslovakia coverage and journalistic practices of CPUSA publications and those of *Pravda*. *Daily World*, for example, should have checked their facts from the Czechoslovakian embassy in Washington D.C. before publishing false news stories. “In our opinion these arbitrary methods, giving only one, distorted side of the argument harm the Communist movement deeply”, the Wheelers wrote. According to them, *Daily World's* coverage of Czechoslovakia was “completely undocumented and inconsistent, a wild collection of assertions of the McCarthy-Beria type”. As a consequence, the Wheelers concluded, the CPUSA owed an apology to the CP of Czechoslovakia.<sup>1601</sup>

The criticism of George and Eleanor Wheeler fell on deaf ears. Unlike almost all other Western CPs, the CPUSA supported the occupation of Czechoslovakia. The military action came as a surprise to George Wheeler who looked at the situation from an economist's viewpoint. “The Soviet economy was suffering from the same problems as the Czech and I hoped that that would lead Brezhnev and others to consider just a bit what the Dubcek people were proposing as reforms”, Wheeler writes in his autobiography. In his opinion Dubcek's and his government's policies “were not only fully compatible with socialism but essential to its development”. “I was slow in learning that militarists, particularly of superpowers, do not behave rationally”, Wheeler admits.<sup>1602</sup>

The Wheelers' open letter to Gus Hall and his associates undoubtedly had already weakened their future prospects in the party. Those prospects surely did not get any better when George Wheeler after the occupation gave a telephone interview to *People's World*, the CPUSA's West Coast paper which did not agree with the party's Czechoslovakia policy. “There was no counter-revolution here. Only plans for better socialism, for democratic

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1600 *Intercontinental Press*, September 23, 1968. *Intercontinental Press* was a publication of the Fourth International, the international organization of the Trotskyists, who apparently were delighted to publish news concerning the internal disagreements within the international communist movement following the occupation of Czechoslovakia. Also *The Militant*, the weekly journal of the U.S. Trotskyists wrote a lengthy story on the Wheelers' open letter. See *The Militant*, September 27, 1968.

1601 *Intercontinental Press*, September 23, 1968. The Wheelers also eagerly defended the abolition of censorship in Czechoslovakia which other Warsaw Pact countries had opposed. In their opinion, censorship was “incompatible with the needs of a modern socialist society”. “The sooner the socialist countries have confidence in their people and get rid of it [censorship], the stronger they will be. Czechoslovakia has already demonstrated this”, the Wheelers wrote.

1602 George Wheeler's unpublished autobiography *Memoirs of a “Premature Anti-Fascist”*, 225.

socialism. [...] The intervention is a tragic mistake – one of the most tragic in history”, Wheeler said.<sup>1603</sup>

Soon after the occupation the Wheelers started to think about leaving Czechoslovakia. According to George Wheeler, his work at the Academy of Sciences had become “sterile”. “Not only had censorship cut off the flow of essential information that my work depended on, but there was no chance that anything I produced would be considered for publication”, Wheeler writes.<sup>1604</sup>

In 1971 the Wheelers were able to return to the United States as George Wheeler was hired by Washington State University to teach comparative economics. By that time he had apparently quit paying membership dues to the CPUSA. As FBI agents visited him after his return to the U.S. and asked whether he was again active in the party, Wheeler answered “I do not like to waste my time”.<sup>1605</sup>

If Wheeler did not hold the CPUSA in high regard, the party was even more hostile towards him. Wheeler learned that as he started speaking publicly about his experiences in Czechoslovakia:

Just how frightened the U.S. Communist Party was of the truth about Prague Spring and the invasion was clear when they found out that I was going to speak in L.A. They immediately set up a counter meeting with their prize attraction Angela Davis as the speaker. Not content with that, they told all members that if they attended my meeting, it would be regarded as a breach of Party discipline.<sup>1606</sup>

#### 4.5.8. Conclusions

CPUSA veteran Steve Nelson, who had left the party in the late 1950s, considered the occupation of Czechoslovakia as a turning point in the development of the international communist movement. “Perhaps more than any other single event, the invasion encouraged the growth of more autonomous and democratic Communist parties in Western Europe and elsewhere”, Nelson wrote in his autobiography.<sup>1607</sup>

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1603 *People’s World*, August 31, 1968.

1604 George Wheeler’s unpublished autobiography *Memoirs of a “Premature Anti-Fascist”*, 273.

1605 George Wheeler’s unpublished autobiography *Memoirs of a “Premature Anti-Fascist”*, 278. According to Wheeler, the FBI agents opened the discussion by asking what Wheeler’s debriefing had been by the secret police in Prague. Wheeler answered by telling the agents that his contempt for the secret police was so well known that they never came near him.

1606 George Wheeler’s unpublished autobiography *Memoirs of a “Premature Anti-Fascist”*, 279. The CPUSA was known for treating disagreeing ex-members harshly, as Dorothy Healey points out in her autobiography. They were turned into monsters with whom party members were not allowed to socialize. Wheeler’s story is supported also by the memoirs of CPUSA veteran Peggy Dennis: “Sometime later [in the early 1970s], long-time Party members Ethel and Angelo Bertolini were expelled because they participated in a public non-Party meeting to hear George Wheeler (American economist for twenty-five years with the Czechoslovak government) and again to hear two visiting comrades from the fraternal Italian Communist Party.” See Dennis 1977, 292-293 and Healey & Isserman 1993, 244.

1607 Nelson, Barrett & Ruck 1981, 417.

Such development took place in many Western European CPs but not in the U.S. party which staunchly clung to its traditional line. The CPUSA had always warmly supported Soviet policies and did so also now. While a vast majority of Western communist parties condemned the occupation, the CPUSA stood out as one of the few Western supporters of the military operation.

When one compares the Czechoslovakia-related writings of Gus Hall and the Soviets, one quickly sees that the U.S. communist leader and the CPSU justified the Warsaw Pact action in a very similar way. Both of them saw the operation as the defense of socialism against the threat of counter-revolution. Both emphasized, that “interests of the proletarian struggle in any one country should be subordinated to the interests of the struggle on a world-wide scale”, as Lenin put it. Therefore it was justified that the Warsaw Pact countries’ fire brigade rushed to put out the fire in one house before it would spread to other buildings. Internationalism was once again the key concept – the idea that communist parties together build socialism and while doing so, they do not back out from the common front. If a party for one reason or another has difficulties toeing the line, other parties can give fraternal assistance to it.

While Gus Hall straightforwardly accepted the occupation of Czechoslovakia, many CPUSA members found it difficult. Some members – like Michael Hallinan – could accept the military action only after thorough and painful deliberation. Charlene Mitchell, the CPUSA’s presidential candidate in the 1968 election, later admitted opportunistic “riding the fence” in the Czechoslovakian question because of her candidacy. Many party members criticized the occupation and some – like Dorothy Healey, Al Richmond and George and Eleanor Wheeler – left the party because of it. At least one critic of the occupation – CPUSA veteran Gil Green – was ostracized within the party for decades following his criticism. The CPUSA leadership had never easily tolerated dissenting voices, and this seemed to be the case also in 1968. The freewheeling 1960s had not affected the CPUSA in a liberalizing way. Quite to the contrary: the occupation of Czechoslovakia launched “a renewed era of ideological purity” in the CPUSA, as Peggy Dennis put it.<sup>1608</sup>

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<sup>1608</sup> Dennis 1977, 279. In a 1970 interview with Soviet magazine *Kommunist* Gus Hall admitted that “Czechoslovak events” had been “a subject of very sharp discussion” in the party. The CPUSA had “inflicted a defeat on rightwing opportunism in its ranks”, Hall said. See *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs 1971*, 346.

## 4.6. Gus Hall and the American New Left

### 4.6.1. Replacing the Old Left

The New Left is a concept that has been used to describe the new left-oriented organizations that sprouted in non-communist countries in the late 1950s and 1960s after the so-called Old Left had experienced serious setbacks in 1956 as Stalin's crimes were revealed by Nikita Khrushchev and – some months later – Soviet troops crushed a popular uprising in Hungary. The term was originally coined in Britain where a strong nuclear disarmament campaign was emerging in the late 1950s. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament – formed in 1958 – was one of the central organizations of the early British New Left. Another embodiment of the new thinking was the journal *New Left Review* which was launched by the leading left-wing intellectuals in 1960.<sup>1609</sup>

In the United States nuclear disarmament also played a role as the New Left progressed, but even more strongly the roots of the American New Left were in the civil rights movement which had surfaced already in the mid-1950s. According to Michael Kazin, the New Left was being born during the very same weeks as the Old Left was dying: “As Red army tanks blasted through the streets of Budapest, black people were again riding buses in Montgomery, Alabama; their yearlong boycott against segregated seating had ended in triumph”, Kazin writes in his history of the American Left.<sup>1610</sup>

As in most other countries, the American New Left was largely an academic movement of the youth. University campuses were its principal scenes of action and student organizations like Students for Democratic Society (SDS) and the Free Speech Movement (FSM) were its main actors. Especially in the beginning the New Left was not pronouncedly an ideological phenomenon – the students were more inspired by philosophers and sociologists like Herbert Marcuse and C. Wright Mills<sup>1611</sup> than by Marx and Lenin. The SDS advocated “participatory democracy” – as it proclaimed in its famous Port Huron Statement of 1962 – and carried out community programs in order to empower the poor in American cities, but at this point the SDS actions were not based explicitly on Marxist thinking.

Things changed rapidly, however, in the mid-1960s. As the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War grew deeper from 1965 onward, the tone and the target of New Left protests shifted. Young Americans – many of whom risked being drafted to fight in Vietnam – eagerly took part in the antiwar demonstrations which constantly grew larger. The SDS – which until now had been mainly concentrated on its community projects – joined other New

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<sup>1609</sup> A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism, 578.

<sup>1610</sup> Kazin 2011, 210. John Patrick Diggins puts it in a somewhat similar way: “The Old Left died when communist Russia failed to fulfill its prophecies; the New Left was born when democratic America failed to keep its promises.” See Diggins 1992, 238.

<sup>1611</sup> Mills – the professor of sociology at the Columbia University who shook the nation with his 1956 book *The Power Elite* – was among the first to use the term New Left in the United States as he in 1960 published a *Letter to the New Left*. In his open letter Mills argued for a new leftist ideology, moving away from the traditional Old Left focus on labor issues, towards issues such as opposing alienation and authoritarianism. See Mills 1960 or Mills 1963, 247-259.

Left organizations in arranging antiwar demonstrations and other protests against the war. Meanwhile, the Vietnam War made the academic youth more responsive to Marxist-Leninist theories concerning imperialism and imperialist wars.

With its hundreds of chapters and tens of thousands of members the SDS was in the late 1960s by far the most important actor within the New Left. While it was growing rapidly, it faced an ideological crisis:

Many SDS members and leaders were confused about the organization's direction, unsure about the usefulness of peaceful protest and the likelihood of stopping the war or the draft, and increasingly intoxicated by apocalyptic rhetoric. They were looking for an all-embracing ideology to explain both what was happening in America and what to do about it. Marxism-Leninism was available as a tried and tested philosophy of revolution.<sup>1612</sup>

One version of Marxism-Leninism was put forth by the Progressive Labor Party (PLP), a Maoist grouping which had been founded in 1962 by former CPUSA members Milton Rosen and Mortimer Scheer who were – along with some others – expelled from the CPUSA in late 1961 for their “adventurism”, “cowardice” and “pro-Albanian” views. Pro-Albanian meant also pro-Chinese as China had been supporting Enver Hoxha, the Albanian leader. Milton Rosen had been the labor secretary for the New York State CP, whereas Scheer worked as a CP organizer in Buffalo, New York. They had both been candidates for the party's national committee in 1959 but were not elected. According to Rosen and Scheer, the CPUSA was “thoroughly revisionist” and it should have been liquidated to make room for a new, truly Marxist-Leninist party. The new grouping was not, however, an immediate success as during the three first years of its operation PLP gathered only little more than one thousand members.<sup>1613</sup>

In the mid-1960s Progressive Labor activists started entering the ranks of the SDS, accusing its members of student elitism and middle-class condescension toward American workers. Radical Maoism appealed to the students, frustrated by the Vietnam War and the difficulty of achieving change in American society. In addition to Mao, the young radicals admired three prominent opponents of U.S. imperialism: the North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh and Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, who had led a successful revolution in the very neighborhood of the world's leading imperialist power.

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1612 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 158.

1613 *The New York Times*, Jan 6, 1962; *The New York Times*, July 31, 1964; Luce 1966, 81-102; Divale 1970, 217-221 and Klehr & Haynes 1992, 153-154. Other leading figures in the PLP were Fred Jerome and William Epton, who were deeply involved in the Harlem ghetto riots in 1964. Epton and Harlem PLP members favored direct revolutionary action printing and distributing instructions for making Molotov cocktails. Epton proclaimed in a speech that “we're going to have to kill a lot of cops, a lot of these judges, and we'll have to go up against their army”. He was arrested during the riots and was sentenced to prison for one year for criminal anarchy. Following the Harlem riots, the CPUSA leaders called PLP “parasites on the body of the Negro freedom movement”. PLP founders were not the only ultra-leftists who were kicked out from the CPUSA in the early 1960s. The same thing happened to Boston communist Homer B. Chase who was expelled in January 1961. He then founded a grouping called Hammer and Steel, which based its line on the teachings of Lenin, Stalin and Mao. As mentioned earlier, the founders of Provisional Organizing Committee for Communist Party – who also were followers of Mao – were expelled already in the late 1950s.

With the ideological turn of the SDS came also fierce ideological disputes. The confrontation between the pro- and anti-PL sections culminated finally in the SDS's 1969 convention where the organization was split into two irreconcilable parts. The pro-PL part of the SDS tried to create Worker-Student Alliances – for example by trying to organize university janitors – but the efforts were not successful and soon the whole organization disappeared. The other half of the SDS did not die out as modestly as some of its members formed a terrorist group known as the Weathermen.

Meanwhile, the civil rights movement also gradually radicalized. After the mid-1960s civil rights organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) started supporting Black Nationalism. The radicalization was boosted by massive race riots – such as the Watts riots in Los Angeles in August 1965 – and other violent incidents like the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968. In some cases former ideas of nonviolence were forgotten. Due to such a change in its basic thinking, the SNCC changed its name in 1969 to Student National Coordinating Committee. Another advocate for Black Nationalism was the Black Panther Party (BPP) which was founded in Oakland, California in 1966. In addition to Black Nationalism, the Black Panthers subscribed to Mao's interpretation of Marxism-Leninism.

In the end of the 1960s the New Left had indeed come a long way from the days of early civil rights movement and the Port Huron Statement:

Although the New Left started out as an open, democratic and non-ideological movement by the end of the sixties much of the New Left had reverted to the clichés of economic Marxism; it succumbed to the fury of sectarianism and even to the “cult of personality”. Like the Old Left, it would find itself isolated from the political arena.<sup>1614</sup>

#### **4.6.2. “College students moving toward nonconformity”**

Already in the late 1950s, Gus Hall was aware of the political potential that lay in the American youth. In a press conference related to the CPUSA's 17<sup>th</sup> national convention, Hall mentioned that he had noticed “a change in the thinking of college students toward nonconformity”. He justified this claim by referring to the number of speaker requests the CPUSA had received from American colleges. Not surprisingly, such a comment caught the attention of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, who mentions Hall's remark in his report concerning the 17<sup>th</sup> national convention.<sup>1615</sup> The FBI followed closely the CPUSA's actions among American youth. In December 1960 J. Edgar Hoover warned that the party – “the largest subversive organization in the United States” – was a planning to launch a new youth group.<sup>1616</sup>

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1614 Diggins 1992, 238. William Divale saw a similar development taking place: “In a single decade the campus rebellion had evolved from social democracy to revolution. It had moved from a quiet reaction of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus to a violent embrace of Marx, Mao Tse-tung, [Regis] Debray and Ho [Chi Minh].” See Divale 1970, xv.

1615 *Statement by J. Edgar Hoover*, 9.

1616 *The New York Times*, Dec 23, 1960.

Gus Hall did not leave the opportunities to speak to student audiences unused. Soon after becoming the general secretary, Hall started visiting colleges and universities around the country. During his visits, Hall discussed the basic features of the CPUSA politics emphasizing that “the construction of socialism in the United States will necessarily have stamped on it ‘Made in U.S.A.’”. The new social structure would not be a transplant:

Socialism, when it comes to our country will reflect our experience, our history, our traditions. It will reflect the fact that we are a highly industrialized nation, that we have generations of democratic experience, that there are democratic institutions, including the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, that we have generations of experience of a multiple party system and many other such factors.<sup>1617</sup>

Hall naturally also used speaking events to attack the McCarran Act. According to Hall, there was a great interest in the Communist Party among the young Americans. Young Americans wanted to meet a genuine communist because they were “sick and tired of hearing the so-called Communist viewpoint from anti-Communists” who have “falsely presented the Communist movement as a conspiracy which seeks to forcibly impose a social system upon the American people”.<sup>1618</sup> Hall was of course not the only CPUSA leader speaking to students. According to the FBI, Herbert Aptheker, Ben Davis, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, James Jackson, Hyman Lumer, Danny Rubin and Carl Winter also spoke on campuses.<sup>1619</sup>

In many schools – like in Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey – Hall was banned from speaking, but in others – like in Yale and University of Virginia – he was permitted after a lengthy debate.<sup>1620</sup> Some institutions like University of Hawaii and Hunter College in New York City wanted to maintain an ideological equilibrium and invited both Gus Hall and American Nazi leader George Lincoln Rockwell to speak separately to the students.<sup>1621</sup>

In early 1962, Hall went on a speaking tour to the West Coast which raised both attention and criticism in the area. In the state of Washington, Hall was not allowed to speak at the state-supported schools. Some schools in Oregon permitted Hall to speak, but had to carry out large security measures after Hall’s visit had caused fury among some citizens. Right-wing organizations implemented a Stop Gus Hall campaign producing leaflets, calling university administrators and sending them loads of mail, some of it slanderous. Hall’s effigy was hung and bomb threats were made. Partly because of the debacle, Hall gathered large crowds during his visit. In the University of Oregon Hall spoke to 12 000 people at the local football stadium, which was one of the biggest live audiences of his

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1617 Hall 1962, 15. J. Edgar Hoover quotes a similar part of Hall’s speech for a North Dakota university audience in his book *On Communism*. See Hoover 1969, 13.

1618 Hall 1962, 14.

1619 Hoover 1969, 15-16.

1620 *The New York Times*, Oct 19, 1962.

1621 *The New York Times*, Mar 12, 1962; *The Worker*, Nov 1, 1964. Hunter College was criticized of giving a platform to Rockwell and Hall, but the college president John J. Meng saw the visits as “a test to our institutional sincerity in espousing academic freedom”. Meng was convinced that “neither the staff nor the students of Hunter College will permit the foul mouthings of a pipsqueak Hitler or the delusive dialectic of a Khrushchev in knee pants to persuade them to abandon their intellectual integrity”. See *The New York Times*, Apr 11, 1962.



life.<sup>1622</sup> According to Tony Pecinovsky, “Hall spoke in front of a cumulative 19 000 students on five campuses between February 10 and 15, 1962” on his West Coast speaking tour.<sup>1623</sup>

Hall’s visits indeed caused a lot of controversy in universities and colleges. In a mid-1960s survey of American university presidents they named Gus Hall as the speaker whose invitation or appearance was most likely to cause criticism. Gus Hall was the overwhelming number one name in the survey, leaving other controversial names like Martin Luther King and George Lincoln Rockwell far behind.<sup>1624</sup>

To Gus Hall these large audiences were a sign of a greater change in American society. In June 1962 Hall declared that he had spoken to some 50 000 students and young people during the past six months. “The tide has turned”, Hall said.<sup>1625</sup> To him these speaking engagements were “victories for free speech and democratic rights, won in the face of a powerful campaign organized by the Ultra-Right”.<sup>1626</sup>

Hall’s frequent visits in the seats of learning were not left unnoticed by the FBI. According to the Bureau, the CPUSA was implementing “a nation-wide campaign to influence students”.<sup>1627</sup> According to J. Edgar Hoover, with such a campaign the CPUSA wanted to update its image and wash away “the brutal stains of Stalinism with its concentration camps, anti-Semitism and abuse of human rights, later compounded by the ugliness of Soviet intervention in Hungary”. In addition to that, the party wanted to represent itself as an indigenously American organization, committed to non-violent and constitutional transition to socialism.<sup>1628</sup>

In order to carry out this campaign, the party established in 1962 the so-called Lecture and Information Bureau to provide speakers for student groups. The bureau was led by Arnold Johnson, the CPUSA’s public relations director. He sent advertisement letters to student groups throughout the country, offering communist speakers to them.<sup>1629</sup> As a consequence, the party leaders did talk to a significant amount of students in the early 1960s. According to the CPUSA’s educational secretary Hyman Lumer, the party leaders had spoken before 100 000 students on a hundred campuses between 1962 and 1965.<sup>1630</sup>

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1622 Hall’s West Coast speaking tour is studied carefully in *The Oregonian*, Feb 13, 1962; *The Christian Century*, Mar 21, 1962; Hall 1962, 8-10 and Huxford 1969, passim. In May Hall made similar speaking tour in the Midwest, speaking at the universities of Chicago and Wisconsin. See *Time*, May 18, 1962.

1623 Pecinovsky 2019, 121.

1624 Williamson & Cowan 1966, 79-80. CPUSA was well represented on the list of the most controversial guest speakers. Party activists like Herbert Aptheker, Benjamin Davis, Dorothy Healey and Danny Rubin were also among the 15 most criticized speakers.

1625 *The Worker*, June 17, 1962.

1626 *The Worker*, February 18, 1962.

1627 *The New York Times*, Jan 27, 1962. The CPUSA programs were carried out deceitfully as they were not announced as pro-communist, FBI’s assistant director Cartha D. De Loach pointed out. In his opinion, academic freedom was being carried too far when communists were knowingly booked as campus speakers.

1628 Hoover 1969, 12-13.

1629 Hoover 1969, 16.

1630 *Saturday Evening Post*, May 8, 1965. According to J. Edgar Hoover, the CPUSA leaders made over 360 public appearances before campus groups between 1961 and 1969 with audiences ranging from a few to over 12 000. See Hoover 1969, 16.

### 4.6.3. The rise and fall of the Du Bois Clubs

The CPUSA indeed needed connections with the youth. Following the McCarthyist witch-hunts in the early 1950s and party's internal turmoil in the latter half of the 1950s, the party's meager membership was aged and tired.<sup>1631</sup> The CPUSA's youth organization Labor Youth League had been disbanded in 1957 in the midst of party's internal crisis, and it was difficult to erect a nation-wide successor organization. A couple of attempts were made, but organizations like Progressive Youth Organizing Committee and Advance never flourished.<sup>1632</sup> In 1964 the party decided to try another approach and launch a new organization based on the San Francisco Bay Area. The W.E.B. Du Bois Clubs of America were named after the African American historian and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois who had joined the CPUSA in 1961 at the respectable age of 93, after he had finally become assured of the self-destructive nature of capitalism.<sup>1633</sup> With such a choice of name the CPUSA apparently tried to attract radical African Americans to join the party instead of joining the numerous other alternatives available for young African Americans.

Aiming to create a broad organization of the young left, the founders of the Du Bois Clubs invited also representatives from other communist youth organizations – including Progressive Labor and Trotskyists – to the founding convention in San Francisco in June 1964.<sup>1634</sup> However, the non-CPUSA participants of the convention soon became dissatisfied with the arrangements as the CPUSA-related participants seemed to have set up a weighted voting system to give themselves control over the convention. Finally, after the convention failed to adopt a resolution condemning attorney general Robert Kennedy, the Progressive Labor delegates and the Trotskyists walked out.<sup>1635</sup>

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1631 According to Nathan Glazer, in the late 1950s especially the younger party members left the CPUSA whereas the older communists remained. See Glazer 1961, 165.

1632 Luce 1966, 120-127. In 1960 the Party also started a new publication for the young Americans called *New Horizons for Youth*. It was edited by CPUSA's national youth director Danny Rubin. See *The New York Times*, Dec 23, 1960.

1633 Du Bois's membership in the CPUSA was indeed a major triumph for the party as he was one of the leading African American intellectuals. Du Bois had been – among other things – one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. Du Bois's application to join the Party and Gus Hall's reply were published in *Political Affairs* in December 1961. Du Bois died in Ghana – where he had moved following the invitation of its president Kwame Nkrumah – in 1963 at the age of 95. See *Dr. Du Bois Joins the Communist Party* and *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois, Volume III*, 438-440.

1634 According to one Operation Solo document, the decision of establishing a new national Marxist-oriented youth organization was made originally in a CPUSA meeting in Chicago in October 1963. The new organization would advocate for “the most peaceful transition to socialism”. According to the document, it was “reasonable to assume that the young socialists attracted into this new organization would eventually pass into the CP itself”. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 22, 1968; OSD, part 122, page 6.

1635 *The New York Times*, Sep 26, 1964; *Saturday Evening Post*, May 8, 1965 and Luce 1966, 133-134. Du Bois Clubs' reluctance to adopt a resolution condemning general attorney Kennedy may be explained by the fact that in 1964 the CPUSA was more or less directly supporting Lyndon B. Johnson's regime. According to Gus Hall, “the vigorous statements and actions of President Johnson on civil rights and his proposals to end the cold war” were “encouraging and helpful”. Before the 1964 presidential election the party attacked severely Republican candidate Barry Goldwater who was considered to be a fascist. See *The New York Times*, Jan 3, 1964 and *The New York Times*, Oct 25, 1964.

Gus Hall had great expectations for the Du Bois Clubs. In September 1965 the CPUSA arranged a national youth encampment in Culver, Indiana. During his lengthy speech to the party youth, Hall also discussed the Du Bois Clubs. He wanted to turn it into a mass organization. "It is very possible to build a membership of 50 000 youth if we develop it as an action organization based upon issues. Later these youth can be developed into Marxists", Hall pointed out.<sup>1636</sup>

Hall had a number of ideas for developing the Du Bois Clubs. According to him, the organization had been "pushed into a too narrow position". In his opinion, it was a mistake to have called it a "Marxist" organization.

There is the danger that the DuBois Clubs turn into a narrow Communist organization if we pursue the present course. In our opinion there are too many Communists in the DuBois Clubs and some of the will have to leave and go into other mass organizations. The DuBois Clubs should be described rather as an organization that generally believes in Socialism and that a person does not have to be a Marxist to join. We don't want to turn the DuBois Clubs into a carbon copy of the Young Communist League. [...]

In order to build the DuBois Clubs to a membership of 50 000 [...] we need to loosen up first so it is not a tight organization, a carbon of the CP. [...]

I want to close with the note that the 50 000 membership is possible and achievable.<sup>1637</sup>

Developing Du Bois Clubs into a significant organization within the American New Left was important for Hall as he needed to show the Soviets that the CPUSA was a central player in the leftist movement which had emerged in the United States. Hall emphasized this to Morris Childs who was about to leave for another Solo mission to Moscow in October 1965. Childs was going to discuss the CPUSA's annual Soviet subsidies for the year 1966 and because of this the party's activities had to be shown in a very positive light. Childs reported to the FBI:

On the question of youth, the Russians are to be told that the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America have today taken a prominent role and they are the largest single youth organization of the left in this country. The youth today are publishing *The Insurgent* with financial aid of the Party and in addition, will any day be issuing a new theoretical publication for the youth.<sup>1638</sup>

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1636 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on September 15, 1965; OSD, part 93, page 194.

1637 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on September 15, 1965; OSD, part 93, page 194. Philip Abbott Luce also mentions Gus Hall's membership aim for Du Bois Clubs in his book *The New Left*. Luce did not consider such an aim realistic: "Speaking as if he suffered from delusions of grandeur, Hall proposed that the DuBois Clubs expand their membership in dramatic fashion and set as a target a membership of 50 000. Hall did not give specifics regarding the means to be used to gain this preposterous upsurge in membership, and it can only be assumed that the Indiana summer nights had produced some kind of hallucinatory effect on the head of the CPUSA". See Luce 1966, 137.

1638 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 21, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 125. In August 1966 as Hall visited the Soviet Union for the first time since the 1930s, Hall gave an interview to *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the newspaper of the Soviet youth organization Komsomol. In the interview Hall lavishly praised the Du Bois Clubs: "The DuBois Clubs have become a very influential youth organization. Their founders have adopted a concise position in regard to

The Du Bois Clubs did not, however, prove to be the success story Gus Hall was hoping for. It did not make the CPUSA a principal actor among the radical youth hungry for societal change. Far from it, actually. Compared to the SDS, for example, which had hundreds of chapters and tens of thousands of members, the Du Bois Clubs remained minuscule and could set up chapters only in limited number of locations.<sup>1639</sup> In 1966 the Du Bois Clubs claimed to have 3 800 members and in 1967 3 000 members.<sup>1640</sup> The U.S. Department of Justice estimated in the spring of 1966 that the organization had 2 500 members.<sup>1641</sup> Some writers considered the organization to be significantly smaller. According to Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, the Du Bois Clubs “managed to grow to some 1 500 members”.<sup>1642</sup> John Patrick Diggins estimates that the organization had “roughly one thousand members concentrated in Berkeley, San Francisco and New York”.<sup>1643</sup>

The Du Bois Clubs faced adversity especially in March 1966 after the Department of Justice had labeled the organization a communist front. According to general attorney Nicholas Katzenbach, the Du Bois Clubs was created and controlled by the Communist Party. The Du Bois Clubs strongly denied such claims, declaring that the organization “is not controlled by anyone but its members”.<sup>1644</sup> Two days after the Justice Department statement a bomb destroyed the national headquarters of the Du Bois Clubs in San Francisco. The two-story building was unoccupied at the time of the explosion and no injuries were reported. The powerful explosion blew out a large section of the front of the building, blew down trolley lines and shattered windows over a one-block area. The Du Bois Clubs did not have problems only on the West Coast, but during the very same day a brawl broke out outside the Du Bois Clubs’ office in Brooklyn in New York and six members of the organization were arrested.<sup>1645</sup> While the San Francisco bombing had a devastating impact on the youth group’s physical offices, it actually bolstered the organization’s recruitment. According to Tony Pecinovsky, in the weeks following the explosion more than 1 500 young people joined the Du Bois Clubs.<sup>1646</sup>

The status of the Du Bois Clubs and its relationship to the CPUSA was always somewhat obscure. In public the CPUSA always emphasized the independence to the organization,

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Marxism-Leninism. They knew where they were going, as opposed to other youth organizations who could not determine their own path.” See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on October 7, 1966; OSD, part 108, page 120.

1639 Gitlin 1987, 179-180. According to Guenter Lewy, SDS “had chapters on 350 to 400 campuses and perhaps as many as 100 000 members”. According to Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, SDS grew rapidly in the late 1960s. Before mid-1960s the organization had only about 5 000 members but in 1967 the figure was already 1967 and in 1969 “perhaps a hundred thousand loosely affiliated members”. See Lewy 1990, 261 and Isserman & Kazin 2000, 171, 183 & 266.

1640 *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs 1966*, 172 and *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs 1968*, 610. According to Tony Pecinovsky, Mike Zagarell declared at CPUSA’s national youth conference in 1967 that Du Bois Clubs’ membership was “some four thousand”. See Pecinovsky 2019, 149.

1641 *The New York Times*, March 7, 1966.

1642 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 172.

1643 Diggins 1992, 257.

1644 *The New York Times*, March 5, 1966.

1645 *The New York Times*, March 7, 1966.

1646 Pecinovsky 2019, 147.

but in private – as in the September 1965 youth encampment in Indiana – the Du Bois Clubs was treated as an integral part of the party.<sup>1647</sup> Other players within the New Left saw the true nature of the organization and treated it – despite disavowals – as the youth wing of the CPUSA.<sup>1648</sup> Also J. Edgar Hoover paid attention to the peculiar relationship between the CPUSA and the Du Bois Clubs in his 1969 book *On Communism*:

This organization, which has set up clubs on various college campuses, is purportedly designed to provide a forum for youth interested in socialism. Behind the scenes, the Communist Party, USA, directs its format and looks on it as a device for recruiting new members into the Communist fold.<sup>1649</sup>

According to Dorothy Healey, it was Gus Hall's idea to create a youth organization which would be "controlled by the party but not explicitly communist in its politics".<sup>1650</sup> William Divale – a California student who became an infiltrator for the FBI – thought that the Du Bois Clubs were doomed from the beginning because of this strange set-up:

On dozens of campuses New Left kids joined DuBois, hopefully to make it the instrument of the changes they sought for America. Soon enough they discovered that no matter what their suggestions from the floor or how diligently they might work in one direction, the club seemed – as though helmed by a phantom captain – to be steering a preset course of its own.

Many campus kids dropped out, disgusted. But many of those who remained, and others who joined to fill the ranks of the drop-outs, never once suspected the truth. Somewhere, behind every DuBois club, was an unseen, unmentioned "sponsor". The "sponsor's" policies, political actions and even nominations for elective offices were prefabricated and carried whole to the DuBois clubs, and only occasionally were the DuBois rank and file so much as consulted.<sup>1651</sup>

According to *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs*, membership in the Du Bois Clubs dropped drastically in 1968. By the end of 1968 the organization was estimated to have no more than one hundred members.<sup>1652</sup> In 1969 the W.E.B. Du Bois Clubs was gradually dissolved and preparations were made for the founding of a new, official CPUSA youth group.<sup>1653</sup> In February 1970 a new organization called the Young Workers' Liberation League was founded in Chicago.<sup>1654</sup>

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1647 In order to maintain this image of Du Bois Clubs as an independent organization Gus Hall sometimes had to resort to outright lies. In a 1968 television interview with Tom Snyder he repeatedly stated that the CPUSA had not supported Du Bois Clubs financially. According to Hall, Du Bois Clubs was an independent non-party organization. Operation Solo documents, however, contain several references to CPUSA's financial support to Du Bois Clubs. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 21, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 125 and report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on January 4, 1967; OSD, part 111, page 54. A transcript of the Tom Snyder interview can be found in CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 261, folder 28.

1648 Brick & Phelps 2015, 107. Interestingly Tony Pecinovsky admits in his recent, "unapologetically partisan" study on Gus Hall and the 1960s that Du Bois Clubs was a "party-led" organization. See Pecinovsky 2019, 123.

1649 Hoover 1969, 136.

1650 Healey & Isserman 1993, 185.

1651 Divale 1970, 33. Divale later became a noted anthropologist and a professor at the City University of New York.

1652 *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs* 1969, 835.

1653 *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs* 1970, 480.

1654 *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs* 1971, 345. Jarvis Tyner, who had served

In William Divale's opinion, Gus Hall personally dealt a fatal blow to the Du Bois Clubs as he ordered the organization headquarters to be moved away from Berkeley, away from "radical influences".<sup>1655</sup> At the same time, the Du Bois Clubs' publications and its recruiting efforts were turned away from campuses toward working-class youth. Divale felt he was "an eyewitness to genocide". "Bludgeoned by the Party's own bureaucratic hand, the Du Bois Clubs had been dealt a fatal blow, one from which they would never recover", he wrote.<sup>1656</sup>

According to Divale, the party's "top-down dogmatism" killed Du Bois chapters one after another. After 1967 Du Bois Clubs existed only in New York City. "And even these few clubs were politically toothless as toads, and not even within jumping distance of the mainstream of campus politics", Divale wrote.<sup>1657</sup> In his opinion, the gap between the New Left youth and CPUSA leadership was not only a generational gap but also an intellectual one. Hall and other "mossbacks" in the party headquarters were "anti-intellectuals":

The Party's leaders were suspicious of intellectuals and intellectualism. Moreover, they vastly misjudged – because they could not comprehend it – the different youth grown up in the sixties.<sup>1658</sup>

Some communist leaders, like Dorothy Healey in Los Angeles, would have preferred that young communists would have entered the SDS and would have tried to affect its policies from within. Because the party decided to set up its own clubs, "in most places young Communists found their time and energy drained by the burden of staffing and maintaining their separate 'mass' organization", Healey writes. In her opinion, such a strategy kept the CPUSA "isolated from the most significant outbreak of youthful radicalism in thirty years".<sup>1659</sup>

The DuBois Clubs had all the disadvantages of a group clearly tied to the Communist Party, yet it wasn't free to act as though it were a Communist youth

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as the last chairman of the Du Bois Clubs since 1967, was elected as the chairman of the new organization. According to the new organization, the YWLL would have "a more explicit commitment to the working class, to socialism and to Marxism-Leninism than the DuBois Clubs had". YWLL functioned longer than most of its predecessors but it never had more than a few thousand members. It was dissolved in 1984. Soon afterwards the CPUSA founded a new youth organization under the name Young Communist League. The youth wing of the party had operated under this name from the early 1920s to the mid-1940s. During Hall's term as general secretary, the CPUSA indeed had difficulty finding a sustainable form of youth work as the party founded no less than three youth organizations during his reign. See *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 920-923 and Pecinovsky 2019, 163.

1655 According to Divale, Du Bois Clubs headquarters was moved to Chicago, to the "working-class heart" of America. This information is apparently incorrect. According to Mike Myerson, the headquarters was moved to New York City. Also according to an Operation Solo document, the Du Bois Clubs headquarters was in September 1967 located in New York City. Divale's mistake may be explained by the fact that Du Bois Clubs' successor organization Young Workers' Liberation League was founded in Chicago in 1970, as mentioned above. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 22, 1968; OSD, part 122, page 6 and Pecinovsky 2019, 150.

1656 Divale 1970, 74.

1657 Divale 1970, 101. Mike Myerson's view of the end of the DuBois Clubs is very similar with Divale's version. According to Myerson, the party headquarters never trusted the new organization. After the national office was moved to New York City, the more "mature" and "responsible" leadership could "embrace it like a fist and smother all life out of it". See Pecinovsky 2019, 150.

1658 Divale 1970, 98.

1659 Healey & Isserman 1993, 185.

organization. It was supposed to be a mass organization but it never found any masses interested in joining. If the DuBois Clubs ever grew to be much more than a thousand members nationally, I would be very surprised. [...] In Northern California the DuBois Clubs played a modest role in civil liberties struggles, but in the rest of the country they served very little purpose, except perhaps as the temporary organizational home for some 'red-diaper babies.'<sup>1660</sup>

#### 4.6.4. The CPUSA's role in peace and civil rights movements

As the peace and civil rights movements were an essential part of the American New Left of the 1960s, it is therefore appropriate to have a look at the CPUSA's role in these movements during the first decade of Gus Hall's general secretaryship.

In the 1950s and early 1960s communists had major difficulties taking part in the peace movement as large peace groups, such as Turn Towards Peace and Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), excluded communists. These organizations saw that communist support for peace was based primarily on support for Soviet foreign policy. They were also concerned about the communist tendency to infiltrate and take over other organizations. In addition to these, the peace organizations were afraid of losing their reputations and effectiveness if they were tainted by the presence of communists.<sup>1661</sup> Because of such attitudes, the socialists, whose party was even smaller than the CPUSA but who were decidedly anticommunist, played a much more significant role in the peace movement and other non-governmental organizations in the early 1960s.<sup>1662</sup>

Such exclusionary politics disturbed, however, many people in the peace movement. The Communist Party was seen as too weak to take over any other organizations. In addition to that, openness to everyone was seen as a central value in the movement.<sup>1663</sup> The question of non-exclusion was discussed in the founding convention of the SDS in Port Huron, Michigan in June 1962. The new organization decided to reject the traditional anticommunism which had dominated American politics ever since the WWII. According

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1660 Healey & Isserman 1993, 186. Also Peggy Dennis criticized founding a separate youth organization in her autobiography largely on similar grounds. See Dennis 1977, 267.

1661 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 150-151. SANE's measures against communist infiltration in the late 1950s and early 1960s is studied in Lewy 1990, 227-235.

1662 In the beginning of the 1960s the Socialist Party had about one thousand members which was only about one fifth of the CPUSA's membership figure. At the same time, the socialists were much more influential than the communists, as Maurice Isserman points out: "They were playing leading roles in the peace movement as part of such recently organized and fast growing groups as the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) and the Student Peace Union (SPU). They had footholds of influence within the labor movement, at least within the union staff, from the old needle trades to the New York teachers' union to the United Auto Workers. Most importantly, they had friends in high places in the civil rights movement, like [A. Philip] Randolph and [Bayard] Rustin." See Isserman 2000, 223 & 225.

1663 Brick and Phelps write: "Most of the New Left [...] tended to believe that Communist Party had suffered so great a collapse, organizationally and morally, that it no longer posed a real threat. Exclusion therefore struck them as needless and unfair, partly because their own ranks included red-diaper babies." See Brick & Phelps 2015, 105.

to the famous Port Huron Statement of the SDS, anticommunism was not the defense of individual freedom as it tended to represent itself. Instead, it was “an umbrella by which to protest liberalism, internationalism, welfareism, the active civil rights and labor movements”.<sup>1664</sup> Anticommunist socialist activist Michael Harrington took part in the Port Huron meeting and argued for a more strongly anticommunist platform.<sup>1665</sup> His views were not shared by the majority in the meeting:

My notion of a progressive, Leftist anti-Communist made as much existential sense to them as a purple cow. For them anti-Communism was simply the excuse American reactionaries used whenever they wanted to masquerade their own viciousness in some noble rhetoric.<sup>1666</sup>

Non-exclusion became a major question also in early 1965 when the SDS decided to arrange a large demonstration against the war in Vietnam in April. In addition to the so-called adult peace organizations, the SDS invited also the Du Bois Clubs, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) and the May 2 Movement (M2M) to join the demonstration. The YSA was the youth arm of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers’ Party and the M2M was close to the Maoist Progressive Labor Party. The Du Bois Clubs and the YSA immediately endorsed the march and promised active participation. All major peace organizations – SANE, War Resisters League, Turn Towards Peace, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Student Peace Union, Fellowship of Reconciliation – ignored the invitation. SANE wanted to keep “kooks, Communists and draft-dodgers out of the Washington demonstration”.<sup>1667</sup>

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<sup>1664</sup> Quoted in Lewy 1990, 251.

<sup>1665</sup> In Port Huron meeting Michael Harrington and other members of Young People’s Socialist League (YPSL) members opposed the participation of the representative of CPUSA’s youth organization Progressive Youth Organizing Committee (PYOC). The PYOC representative was taking part in the meeting as an observer. The SDS members thought that YPSL’s objection was bizarre. “Ironically, by the time the dispute was resolved in favor of seating the communist teenager, he had gone home”, Maurice Isserman writes. See Isserman 2000, 238.

<sup>1666</sup> Quoted in Lewy 1990, 252. According to Lewy, the non-exclusionary line of the SDS eventually proved to be fatal for the organization. “Ironically, it was the commitment of SDS to a policy of non-exclusion, openness and participatory democracy that some years later enabled a Maoist faction of Marxist-Leninists to infiltrate and ultimately destroy SDS”, Lewy writes referring to Progressive Labor Party which took over the SDS in the end of the 1960s. See Lewy 1990, 251.

<sup>1667</sup> Weinstein 1975, 135-136 and Lieberman 2000, 185. According to Lieberman, SANE wanted to maintain its image as a “respectable” middle-class organization and therefore was not willing to co-operate closely with long-haired, counterculture-oriented radicals. While doing this, SANE was closer to the CPUSA than its members understood. Lieberman writes. “The irony was that in this particular division, Sane and the CP were on the same side. Both had a preference for a more conservative style that included nonconfrontational tactics, nonoffensive slogans, an emphasis on patriotism and playing down the impact of the counterculture on the antiwar movement. Young radicals lumped Communists and SANE together as ‘liberals’, too willing to compromise and cooperate with the establishment. SDS leaders in particular found the CP far too mild, especially the latter’s concern with ‘respectable’ tactics.” Isserman makes the same remark in his Michael Harrington biography: “Communists consistently proved among the more conservative voices within the movement, in terms of the tactics and slogans they advocated. They did not believe in civil disobedience, let alone violence; they did not wave Viet Cong flags or burn American flags. And – like the socialists – they believed that the peace movement should call for negotiations to end the war, instead of the more radical demand for immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Vietnam.” See Isserman 2000, 262 and Lieberman 2000, 187.



The situation changed, however, when President Johnson in February announced the beginning of massive bombings of North Vietnam.<sup>1668</sup> As a consequence, many old-line peace group leaders began to change their minds about cooperating with the SDS. Although the cooperation between the SDS and the old-line peace organizations turned out to be problematic, the end result was a success. The march in Washington, D.C. on April 17, 1965 drew 25 000 participants which was a record-sized crowd for a peace demonstration. Despite the success, the process led to the official separation of the SDS and its anticommunist parent organization, the League for Industrial Democracy (LID).<sup>1669</sup>

During the latter half of the 1960s the CPUSA and the Du Bois Clubs members were regularly involved in the anti-Vietnam war activities. In August 1965, for example, the National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam (NCC) was founded. It chose Frank Emspak, a leader of the Du Bois Clubs, as its national coordinator. Later the NCC added Arnold Johnson, a long-time CPUSA veteran, to its steering committee.<sup>1670</sup> At the same time another CPUSA veteran Robert Thompson was involved in the activities of New York's Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade Committee, the largest local antiwar group in the United States.<sup>1671</sup>

A conflict between the communist and Trotskyist members of the NCC hampered its operations and soon plunged it into disarray. As a consequence, the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam – colloquially known as “the Mobe” – was formed in 1966. It became the leading national antiwar group.<sup>1672</sup> Arnold Johnson, who served as the CPUSA's public relations director at the time, was included in the sponsor list of the Mobe. This was criticized by the liberal peace activists who were critical of the Soviet Union. Radical peace activist Dave Dellinger found this criticism amusing because Johnson always advocated the most conservative, cautious and law-abiding positions in discussions and debates. Dellinger remembers:

Ironically, both the Communists and the anti-Communist liberals tried to influence the anti-Vietnam War movement to adopt the same moderate stance. They had opposing views of both the Soviet Union and the United States and mostly they

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1668 On February 13, President Johnson authorized the start of Operation Rolling Thunder, a sustained bombing campaign that lasted for almost three years. Later President Nixon resumed where Johnson had left off. As a result, during the Vietnam War the United States dropped triple the amount of bombs on North Vietnam than were dropped by all sides in Europe, Asia and Africa in the Second World War. See Isserman & Kazin 2000, 130-131.

1669 Weinstein 1975, 136-138; Lieberman 2000, 185-186 and Brick & Phelps 2015, 128-129. Like the leaders of LID, prominent socialist writer and activist Michael Harrington remained a staunch opponent of the policy of non-exclusion. In his opinion “the only effective peace movement” was the one that disassociated itself from “any hint of being an apologist for the Viet Cong”. See Isserman 2000, 257-263.

1670 Lewy 1990, 265-266 and Klehr & Haynes 1992, 156. According to Tom Pecinovsky, Johnson – who had been active in peace and civil rights issues already in the very beginning of the 1960s – became the chairman of the party's peace commission in the mid-1960s. In that capacity, he joined the steering committee of the NCC. After the NCC began to fracture, Johnson joined to steering committee of the Spring Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam (also known as “the New Mobe”). See Pecinovsky 2019, 52-55.

1671 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 156.

1672 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 157.

despised each other. But they were united in trying to keep the antiwar movement law-abiding and respectable.<sup>1673</sup>

According to Robbie Lieberman, sectarian arguments between the members of the CPUSA and the Trotskyist SWP “sapped a lot of energy from the early antiwar movement”. The fights meant “nasty discussions, agonizingly long meetings, frayed nerves, stalled planning and disillusionment with antiwar organizing”.<sup>1674</sup> The movement was hurt badly by these arguments, topics of which ranged from antiwar slogans to broader tactical questions. As Tom Wells puts it in his history of the antiwar movement, “most activists found it distasteful to work with people more intent on pummeling each other than on stopping the war”.<sup>1675</sup>

While the sectarian arguments of communists and Trotskyists hurt the antiwar movement, many peace group leaders were happy to have CPUSA members working for antiwar campaigns. This was not always the case with Trotskyists and Maoists. David McReynolds, a well-known anti-communist socialist pacifist, for example, thought that old-line communists had much to contribute to the antiwar movement because of their contacts in the labor movement and black community and because they were good, determined organizers. In his opinion, communist organizers were “invaluable”.<sup>1676</sup> According to Robbie Lieberman, the communists “brought an enormous amount of energy and commitment to whatever issue they were working on” as they had done already in the 1930s and 1940s. While communists had the ability to build organizations, they also had the capability to destroy them. “One could not make use of their talent and zeal without also taking the risk of having organizations self-destruct over sectarian battles about the correct line”, Lieberman writes.<sup>1677</sup>

If the CPUSA had problems in its co-operation with the antiwar organizations, it was even less successful in its attempts to co-operate with civil rights organizations. Anticommunist tendencies were strong within the civil rights organizations in the 1950s and, as a consequence, the party “was unsuccessful in rebuilding itself as part of the civil

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1673 Quoted in Lieberman 2000, 187. According to Dellinger, Johnson’s role in the Committee was marginal as he had no influence in the discussions and debates. *The New York Times* described Johnson in somewhat similar terms. According to the newspaper, Johnson, the “C.P. warhorse”, was “as ineffectual as he is sweet”. The newspaper described the CPUSA’s work in the New Mobe as “relatively sedate”. See *The New York Times*, November 30, 1969 and Pecinovsky 2019, 60.

1674 Lieberman 2000, 187.

1675 Wells 1994, 54.

1676 Lieberman 2000, 188. Despite their ideological differences, David McReynolds was in regular contact with CPUSA veteran Gil Green concerning issues related to the antiwar movement.

1677 Lieberman 2000, 188. In Guenter Lewy’s opinion, the non-exclusionary line of the antiwar movement became counterproductive as the movement became dominated by the most radical elements. Because of this, Lewy claims, “the standing in the polls of presidents Johnson and Nixon went up after each major large-scale demonstration in Washington”. According to him, there is “reason to think that the antiwar movement contributed to the lengthening of the war not only because it encouraged Hanoi but also because it frightened away ‘respectable’ would-be opponents from joining the cause”. Lewy writes: “The increasingly wild antics of the antiwar movement, its attacks upon the basic values of American society, the expressions of solidarity with the Vietnamese Communists in the form of Viet Cong flags and slogans admiring Ho Chi Minh, as well as the trappings of the counterculture which accompanied all of this agitation – long hair, the widespread use of drugs and the casual resort to obscenities – sharply antagonized the average American.” See Lewy 1990, 273-275.

rights vanguard” and “it failed to take tangible steps toward getting involved in grassroots struggles”.<sup>1678</sup> The same situation continued in the 1960s. “The CPUSA failed to make a tangible impact on the growing black freedom movement. Its connection – both real and perceived – to the Soviet Union [...] led black freedom organizations of varying political positions to turn a cold shoulder toward it”, Sara Rzeszutek writes in her James Jackson biography.<sup>1679</sup> These organizations included the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which had purged communists and communist-sympathizers – including W.E.B. Du Bois, one of its founders<sup>1680</sup> – from its ranks already in the late 1940s.<sup>1681</sup>

Communist ideas were not, however, completely ignored among the civil rights activists. Most radical activists adopted some of the basic ideas of Marxism but not in a way that the CPUSA would have wanted:

Sectors of the black freedom movement embraced communism and Communist-influenced ideas, especially the Black Panther Party. But, rather than following strict Party line, such leftist groups cherry-picked ideas from Marxism-Leninism, Trotskyism, Maoism and other philosophical influences. Jack and the CPUSA expressed frustration that the acceptance of pieces of Communist doctrine diluted their deliberate, specific program of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>1682</sup>

How did the FBI see the CPUSA’s role in the peace and civil rights movements? There seems to have been diverging views within the Bureau. FBI’s director J. Edgar Hoover told President Johnson in April 1965 that the SDS was “largely infiltrated by communists” and the civil rights movement had a “large communist influence”.<sup>1683</sup> In February 1970 Hoover told President Nixon that the FBI suspects “that the Panthers and the Students for a Democratic Society get millions of dollars from the Soviet Union via the Communist Party of the United States”.<sup>1684</sup> Hoover’s subordinate William C. Sullivan had a different perception of the CPUSA’s role. In August 1963 Sullivan’s Domestic Intelligence Division

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1678 Rzeszutek 2015, 157-158. According to Rzeszutek, “significant reality for the Party in its civil rights efforts was that the open participation of Communists was unwelcome among many of the top organizations involved in the movement”.

1679 Rzeszutek 2015, 219.

1680 Du Bois was not a CPUSA member in the late 1940s but he fraternized with prominent leftists like Paul Robeson and expressed his sympathy for Karl Marx’s ideas. He joined the party in 1961. For more on Du Bois, see, for example, *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 117-121.

1681 Schrecker 1998, 393. James Jackson tried to get the civil rights organizations to open themselves to communists. In a 1956 letter to NAACP leader Roy Wilkins he wrote that suggestions the CPUSA “had some diabolical interest [...] and some Machiavellian intrigue afoot to ‘infiltrate, subvert and take over’” the NAACP were pure nonsense. Apparently Jackson’s letter did not lead to warmer relationships between the CPUSA and the NAACP. See Rzeszutek 2015, 178.

1682 Rzeszutek 2015, 232. “Jack” mentioned in the excerpt is James Jackson.

1683 Gentry 1991, 604.

1684 Gentry 1991, 646. According to Hoover biographer Curt Gentry, the director’s comments were ludicrous. Gentry writes: “This was ridiculous, and no one knew it better than J. Edgar Hoover. The moribund American Communist Party was so thoroughly infiltrated that the FBI knew where almost every cent of its funding came from and what it was used for. And it knew exactly how much support Russia was supplying to the CPUSA, since the two couriers, Jack and Morris Childs (the two brothers who shared the code name Solo), had been FBI informants since the early 1950s.” See Gentry 1991, 646-647.

gave Hoover a report on the CPUSA's success in subverting blacks in general and in the civil rights movement in particular. There hadn't been any success, Sullivan said.<sup>1685</sup>

In October 1970 Hoover's and Sullivan's perceptions clashed when Sullivan met with a group of editors of *United Press International* journalists in Williamsburg, Virginia. Sullivan was asked about the CPUSA's role in the racial riots and academic upheaval in the United States. He considered the CPUSA a long-extinct menace and was tired of exaggerating its significance and wasting badly needed manpower and funds on CPUSA surveillance.<sup>1686</sup> Sullivan decided to answer honestly:

There is no evidence that any one group of people or any single nationwide conspiracy is behind the disorders on the campus or in the ghettos, he said. As for the CPUSA, it is not nearly as extensive or effective as it used to be, and it is 'not in any way causing or directing or controlling the unrest we suffer today'. There would still be problems with student dissent and racial tension even if the Communist Party no longer existed, Sullivan declared.<sup>1687</sup>

Questioning the significance of the CPUSA was – according to Hoover biographer Curt Gentry – a “major heresy” within the FBI as countering the communist threat was a central *raison d'être* for the Bureau. Hoover responded furiously to Sullivan. “How do you expect me to get my appropriations if you keep downgrading the Party”, the director screamed to his subordinate. This incident was one of the factors that led to Sullivan's forced retirement from the FBI in 1971.<sup>1688</sup>

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1685 Gentry 1991, 510.

1686 Gentry 1991, 659. For example, Sullivan was irritated by the fact that FBI's Washington field office had a whole squad assigned to nothing else but CPUSA members although there were only four members in the Washington D.C. area.

1687 Gentry 1991, 659-660. John Barron had a similar view on CPUSA's role in the antiwar movement. According to Barron, the Soviets saw the CPUSA as a primary instigator in the antiwar movement in the United States, but this was not the case. Barron writes about the Soviet leaders: “They ludicrously overestimated the influence of the American party and credited it with causing phenomena, such as the anti-Vietnam War movement, in which it played only a peripheral part.” See Barron 1995, 11 & 300.

1688 Gentry 1991, 660. Sullivan writes about the incident in his memoirs: “During the question-and-answer session that followed I assured the group that it was nonsense to link antiwar radicals with any Communist plot, and I went further by telling them that the American Communist Party no longer posed any kind threat to the United States. When I got back to headquarters, Hoover had already seen the wire service report on my comments about the CPUSA. He called me in his office and berated me for ‘downgrading’ the Communist Party even though he knew as well as I did that everything I had said was true.” See Sullivan & Brown 1979, 203-204.

#### 4.6.5. “Petty-bourgeois radicals!”

Although the CPUSA had lost a vast majority of its members during the 1950s it was still the leading representative of the so-called Old Left in the 1960s. The Socialist Party – which had flourished during the very first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – had never recovered from its own factional battles.<sup>1689</sup> Nor could the Trotskyists challenge the Communist Party.<sup>1690</sup> How did the CPUSA’s leader see the New Left that developed and grew stronger during the 1960s?

Gus Hall’s opinion of the New Left can well be summarized with a description which he incessantly used when he was discussing the new movement: “Petty-bourgeois radicalism”. According to Hall, some representatives of the New Left had totally forgotten the sole source from which a true Marxist movement could draw its power: the working class. Questioning the role of the working class and claiming that intellectuals and students had taken the place of the proletariat as the vanguard of the revolution – as German-American philosopher Herbert Marcuse did, for example – was a sign of irredeemably petty-bourgeois mentality. Universities were not the right address for CPUSA membership recruitment, but rather the Party should intensify its efforts in factories:

Hall emphasized that CPUSA was first and foremost a working class party. He said that the party rejects all theories that are not based on class struggle. CPUSA should therefore concentrate on workers and basic industries in its member recruitment.

“More than anything else the working class movement, our Party and the revolutionary movement need ‘doctorates’ based on first-hand exploitation in a steel mill. We need communists with masters’ degrees in first-hand experience in the speed-up in an automobile factory. We need experts on how to fight racism at the point of production.”<sup>1691</sup>

Hall repeatedly attacked Marcuse who has often been seen as the intellectual who had the strongest influence on the American New Left.<sup>1692</sup> The Frankfurt School philosopher was

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1689 As Brick and Phelps point out, “the Socialist Party, dominated by moderate and right-wing social democrats, declined to oppose the Vietnam War categorically in the 1960s, which rendered it mostly irrelevant to young sixties radicals”. See Brick & Phelps 2015, 140.

1690 Socialist Workers’ Party was estimated to have around one thousand members in 1968. However, while being significantly smaller than the CPUSA, the SWP did remarkably well in the 1968 presidential elections when compared to the CPUSA. SWP’s candidate Fred Halstead received more than 41 000 votes in the election whereas CPUSA’s candidate Charlene Mitchell gathered only little more than one thousand votes. See *Yearbook in International Communist Affairs 1969*, 843.

1691 *The Worker*, July 14, 1968.

1692 According to Paul Hollander, Marcuse was “the main spokesman and theorist of the spiritual horrors of the combined effects of mass production, mass culture, high technology, capitalism and Western-style political institutions”. In Hollander’s opinion, Marcuse’s “association of abundance with waste, corruption and inauthenticity became the most influential theme of social criticism of the period”. Marcuse’s legacy is somewhat polarized as some – like Douglas Kellner – consider him a “highly relevant” thinker also in today’s world whereas for example Leszek Kolakowski sees him as “the ideologist of obscurantism”. Kolakowski could not agree with Marcuse’s contempt for technology and exact sciences and his political radicalism: “In this respect Marcuse is typical of the mentality of those who have never had to trouble themselves to obtain food, clothing, housing, electricity and so on, as all these necessities of life were available ready-made. This accounts for the popularity of his philosophy among those who have never had anything to do with material and economic production.” See Hollander 1981, 206-207; Kellner 2005, 3 and Kolakowski 2005, 1122-1123.

originally a specialist on Marx and Hegel, but after his emigration to the United States in 1934 he broadened his scope and wrote also on more contemporary issues. In his 1964 book *One-Dimensional Man* Marcuse studied – among other things – the decline of revolutionary potential in modern capitalist societies. According to Marcuse, there no longer existed a revolutionary proletariat in modern capitalism as the working class had been integrated into the balanced system of production and consumption. Instead of the working class, the revolutionary potential lies in the “outsiders” who have not been integrated in the system.<sup>1693</sup>

Hall saw Marcuse as “a present-day variation of a hundred and fifty years of anti-working-class, petty-bourgeois radicalism”.<sup>1694</sup> According to Hall, Marcuse’s concept of “neo-capitalism” – in which the working class was no longer a revolutionary force – was “nonsense”:

It is an anti-working-class, reactionary concept, sugar-coated by Left phrases. [...] No amount of verbal gyrations can erase the fact that the root of capitalist relations and the propellant for a socialist revolution and the mold of the revolutionary force is the “productive process” of capitalism.<sup>1695</sup>

In Hall’s opinion, Marcuse’s theories were an example of how the anticommunists had used the recent wave of American radicalism to spread anti-Soviet ideas under a seemingly leftist cover. Saying this, Hall referred to Marcuse’s “long-standing ties with the CIA” which recently had been exposed. Such ties, Hall said, had “punctured holes in Marcuse’s ‘radical’ reputation”.<sup>1696</sup> In another context Hall called Marcuse a “‘radical’ Pied Piper of capitalism” after he had commented positively on partnership schemes between employers and employees. Not surprisingly, Hall’s view of such partnership schemes was very negative:

When trade-union representatives take positions on corporate boards of directors under these conditions, they end up merely as rubber stamps for the owners, helping them to enforce their will on their workers to increase their profits at the workers’ expense.<sup>1697</sup>

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1693 Marcuse 1968, 253-257. Marcuse’s writing style is – as often is the case with the so-called continental philosophers – opaque and obscure. For interpretation aid, see for example Kellner 2005, 8-9.

1694 Hall 1968c, 11.

1695 Hall 1968c, 16. In Hall’s opinion “neo-capitalism” should rather be called “Christmas goose capitalism” because according to the theoreticians of neo-capitalism, people are force-fed by the capitalist system just like Christmas geese. See Hall 1968c, 13-14.

1696 *Daily World*, June 10, 1969. Marcuse’s “long-standing ties with the CIA” referred to the fact that during the WWII Marcuse worked as a research analyst for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) which was a predecessor of the CIA. He returned to the academic world in the early 1950s after having served OSS and the State Department for almost a decade. When calling Marcuse an anticommunist, Hall may also have thought of Marcuse’s 1958 book *Soviet Marxism* in which he criticized the Soviet interpretation of Marx’s theories. Interestingly, Hall’s subsequent close associate and vice-presidential candidate Angela Davis was Marcuse’s long-time student at Brandeis and San Diego universities. In a 2005 text Davis calls the rumors of Marcuse being a CIA agent “absurd”. See Davis 2005, ix.

1697 Hall 1969, 50. Interestingly, also J. Edgar Hoover pays attention on Hall’s criticism of Marcuse in his book *On Communism*. According to Hoover, Hall was following the lead of *Pravda* in his criticism of Marcuse. Hoover writes: “According to Marcuse’s teaching, the working class – the proletariat – which is the class Marx said it would bring about the revolution, has lost its

In addition to Marcuse, Hall also publicly attacked the theories of Régis Debray, the famous French intellectual who during his extensive travels to Latin America had become a great admirer of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. Debray – who became very popular among the “Fidelist” elements in the New Left – emphasized the importance of rural guerilla warfare in a revolutionary process. In such a process there would be no need for a bureaucratic Communist Party, but the revolutionary organization would grow out of a guerilla movement as had happened in Cuba.<sup>1698</sup> In Hall’s opinion, Debray’s thoughts were “without realism” and again an example of petty-bourgeois radicalism.<sup>1699</sup>

In a 1970 article Hall commented on the development of the SDS which – along with all other petty-bourgeois radical organizations – had run into a crisis. According to Hall, one could clearly see the consequences of the fact that SDS’s roots were in the Socialist Party.<sup>1700</sup> Because of this the SDS had never understood the role of the masses – i.e. the working class – as the key factor in the struggle. The radical students – many of whom came from middle-class or even upper-class families – were missing a decisive component which also explained the failure of their movement: the working-class consciousness.

Working-class consciousness leads to concepts of class unity. It leads to rejecting tactics that lead to disunity. Petty-bourgeois radicalism does not see the concept of class or mass struggles. From this it follows that it does not see the need for class unity. It reflects the individualism of its class nature.<sup>1701</sup>

Hall did not accept the violence and terrorism which some former SDS members resorted to after being frustrated with the difficulty of achieving changes in American society. According to Hall, acts of terror were “in the service of reaction” at a moment when “mass actions and movements” were possible and necessary. Hall saw terrorist acts as “damaging

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revolutionary fervor. [...] Majority of workers, especially those in the United States, have been bought off with a measure of prosperity, kept pacified by television and mass media, and have become a prop of the Establishment. Hence the working class is not revolutionary. These concepts strike a strong blow at the theory of Marxism – and rile the Party.” See Hoover 1969, 33-34.

1698 Debray’s admirers appreciated especially the fact that he did not remain a mere university professor but actually took part in the revolutionary struggle alongside Che Guevara in Bolivia in the late 1960s. While in Bolivia, Debray was arrested and sentenced to prison for thirty years for being a member of Guevara’s guerilla group. He was released three years later after a massive international campaign. In the early 1970s he lived in Chile and wrote a book based on his interviews with the Marxist president Salvador Allende. Later he has created a career as a prolific writer and prominent intellectual in his home country. In the 1980s he worked as a Latin American affairs advisor for president Francois Mitterrand. For more on Debray see, for example, *Biographical Dictionary of Neo-Marxism*, 107-109.

1699 *The New York Times*, July 5, 1968 and Hall 1970b, 5.

1700 As mentioned earlier, the SDS had originally been the student branch of the League for Industrial Democracy which had been founded already in 1905 by famous socialist writers like Jack London and Upton Sinclair.

1701 Hall 1970b, 10. Hall indeed attacks the New Left heretics furiously in his article: the word “petty-bourgeois” is mentioned 57 times during his eight-page article. In Hall’s thinking petty bourgeoisie seems to be a highly despicable group. Interestingly Hall’s understanding of petty bourgeoisie seems to differ from his great mentors Marx and Engels who saw petty bourgeoisie as a potential ally for the working class in a revolutionary situation. According to Marx and Engels, petty bourgeoisie (i.e. lower middle class) was capable of becoming revolutionary, unlike the actual bourgeoisie and the so-called big bourgeoisie. See Wilczynski 1981, 432-433.

to the revolutionary movement”<sup>1702</sup> Instead of terrorist acts the young radicals should align themselves with the American working class, Hall advised as he commented on bombs planted in public toilets:

An old-line, home-grown Communist had some advice for violent young radicals on Friday: Take your bombs and get out of the toilet.

“The power of capitalism is not in the toilets of big buildings”, said Gus Hall, general secretary of the Communist Party of the United States.

He made the statement in reference to bombings of large buildings that authorities have linked to various organizations of young revolutionaries. [...]

He called on the discontented young to forge an alliance with the “workers” for a sustained attack on capitalism. He said he feared the radical youngsters have isolated themselves from the laboring man.<sup>1703</sup>

The question of violence as a means to achieve political aims was discussed also among the CPUSA youth. Hall saw political violence as “tactical question” in a speech he gave at the founding convention of the party’s new youth organization the Young Workers Liberation League in February 1970:

In the movement there has been some discussion about the use of guns and the willingness to use guns. I agree with those who say it is a tactical question. Like all tactical questions it must be measured by how it affects the masses in struggle. [...]

Would it be a tactic that would alienate those who are moving into struggle? I think it would. [...]

It is not a correct tactical concept for today’s reality. It would not advance the struggle.<sup>1704</sup>

In a 1971 pamphlet Gus Hall criticizes unnamed leftist leaders for developing “illusions of revolutionary grandeur” and becoming “dizzy with success”, dressing their guards in military regalia, walking to speaker’s platforms in military parades and issuing “pompous communiqués”.<sup>1705</sup> According to Hall, such leaders did a lot of damage as they “alienated many” and “destroyed thousands of good, promising cadre”. Luckily such leaders had by 1971 already disappeared from the scene as the “masses” “rejected the concept of small group confrontation to be used as a stimulant for larger mass actions”.<sup>1706</sup> The description aptly describes the Black Panther Party’s gun-toting leaders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. However, as a significant portion of the CPUSA’s African American members sympathized

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1702 Hall 1970b, 8.

1703 *The Day*, Jan 29, 1971. Hall made his comments as he was visiting Yale University. Bomb explosions in the toilets of public buildings were a recurring form of terrorism in the United States in the early 1970s. One of the most noted toilet bombings took place in the U. S. Congress building in Washington D.C. only about a month after Hall’s comment. The Weathermen terrorist group claim responsibility for the attack.

1704 *Daily World*, Feb 28, 1970.

1705 It is unclear whether Hall on purpose used Stalin’s phrase “dizzy with success” in this context. Stalin used the phrase in 1930 when he criticized the collectivization of Soviet agriculture which – according to Stalin – had been carried out with excessive zeal, leading to excesses that had to be corrected. See Wilczynski 1981, 151-152.

1706 Hall 1971, 50. “Masses” is a traditional Marxist-Leninist concept referring to non-bourgeois groups – i.e. workers and peasants – especially in capitalist countries. According to Lenin, masses are the “true makers of history”. See Wilczynski 1981, 344.



with the Black Panthers, Hall had to present his criticism carefully without mentioning any names.<sup>1707</sup>

Although Hall often criticized the New Left radicals with harsh words, he still considered the movement to be a positive phenomenon. The former steelworker believed that the history will show which elements of the movement were truly viable:

Hall noted that in the U.S. as well as in the capitalist world there was an upsurge of millions. Much of this movement has a spontaneous character and it is not clear where it is going. Many are going through a period of probing, he said. Hall, a former steel worker compared the upsurge with the process of making steel.

When the steel gets hot some bubbles appear, then the bubbles burst and the stable elements of the steel remain, he said.<sup>1708</sup>

#### 4.6.6. Youth rebellion within the party?

While the CPUSA did not experience a massive influx of new young members in the midst of the 1960s youth radicalism, it was able to seduce some representatives of the younger generations into its ranks. A concrete example of this inflow of fresh forces was seen in the national convention of 1966 where a dozen new young members were elected into the party's national committee. This dozen included such prominent future party members as Bettina Aptheker, Carl Bloice, Don Hammerquist, Jarvis Tyner and Michael Zagarell.<sup>1709</sup>

Although Jarvis Tyner, for example, later became a close associate of Gus Hall, the relationship between the party leadership and the young members was far from being frictionless. According to Dorothy Healey, there was discontent among the young CPUSA members which manifested itself clearly in the summer of 1968 when the party chose its candidate for the coming presidential election.<sup>1710</sup> According to Bettina Aptheker, "divisions were [...] growing within the party in the wake of Paris and Prague Springs".<sup>1711</sup>

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1707 According to Dorothy Healey, the questions concerning guns and Black Panthers were indeed problematic for the Party: "It drove many older Communists crazy to see that even our Party youth were involved in this enthusiasm for carrying guns and practicing with them. For people in the national office this was regarded as cause for expulsion. I knew we couldn't take that hard a line. [...] Young Communists were under tremendous pressures from others in groups like the Panthers and various New Left groups who regarded the Party as a group of stodgy reformist sell-outs. If we simply denounced anyone who talked about guns or carried one, we would lose most of our members under the age of thirty." See Healey & Isserman 1993, 212.

1708 *Daily World*, June 10, 1969. This steelmaking metaphor was indeed one of Hall's greatest favorites and he used it often when he discussed ideological differences within communist movement.

1709 *Yearbook of International Communist Affairs 1966*, 172. In addition to the persons mentioned above, the dozen included Robert Duggan, Michael Eisenscher, Peggy Goldman, Matthew Hallinan, Robert Heisler, Kathy Pearson and Tim Wheeler.

1710 Healey & Isserman 1993, 228.

1711 Pecinovsky 2019, 88. One example of the tense relationship between the young party members and the party leadership was the case of Donald Hammerquist. He was considered to be one of the leading young intellectuals in the party, influenced strongly by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and the American New Left. He tried to convince young radicals to join the CPUSA in order to elect a new leadership for the party. In the 1969 national convention Hammerquist



*Gus Hall celebrating with Charlene Mitchell and Michael Zagarell after they had been chosen as the CPUSA's presidential and vice-presidential candidates in July 1968. Hall's cheering was not wholly genuine, as he originally had wanted to become the party's candidate himself.*

Source: Getty Images

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submitted a document titled *Portland Youth Club Statement* which sharply attacked the party leadership for reformism and opportunism. According to the statement, the party had become “a social democratic sect”. Gus Hall said that the statement’s call for a “pure” revolutionary strategy would “only lead in one direction – toward the bog of ultra-Leftism and Trotskyism”. As Hammerquist’s attempts to renew the party were not successful he left the party before the party could expel him. See *Yearbook of International Communist Affairs 1970*, 482; Staudenmaier 2012, 31-32 and interview with Richard Healey in New York City, October 2013.

The CPUSA had not taken part in the presidential elections with its own candidate since 1940 when Earl Browder ran for president with James W. Ford – a prominent African American party member – as the candidate for vice president. Browder and Ford were on the ballot in 32 states and gathered little less than 50 000 votes which was about 0.1 percent of all votes. After Browder’s and Ford’s candidacy the CPUSA had supported the Progressive Party candidate Henry Wallace in the 1948 elections but had none of its own presidential candidates for almost three decades.

In the 1920s and 1930s the CPUSA’s participation in the presidential election had been an established custom as the party had taken part in all five elections between 1924 and 1940 – three times with William Z. Foster as the main candidate and twice with Browder. Gus Hall wanted the party to continue to follow this tradition in the election of 1968. Already in the spring of 1967 Hall pointed out that the party would have to decide whether it was going to be in 1968 an “electoral tumbleweed blown about by political breezes and currents” or whether it was going to be “a force that influences the decisions of others who are hesitantly moving”.<sup>1712</sup> According to Bettina Aptheker, the decision to nominate a communist candidate in the 1968 election was complicated because, for example, many in the party wanted to support Senator Eugene McCarthy who sought the Democratic nomination in the election. McCarthy, who was running on an anti-Vietnam war platform, was considered to be the most progressive major party candidate.<sup>1713</sup>

According to Dorothy Healey, Hall expected to be chosen as the party’s candidate. A nominating convention was scheduled for the summer of 1968. Things did not, however, turn out as Hall had planned, as Healey writes:

It turned out that Gus wasn’t the only Communist who had an eye on the nomination prize. Charlene Mitchell was bitten by the same bug and she completely out-organized Gus that spring and summer. When we had our district convention in Los Angeles, Charlene’s sister-in-law Kendra [Alexander] made a very emotional speech about how this was the year that Communists could make history by running a Black presidential candidate and how Charlene was obviously the best possible choice as that candidate. The motion passed unanimously.<sup>1714</sup>

Charlene Mitchell’s account of process is largely similar to Healey’s:

Initially the Party leadership in New York had decided to propose that Gus Hall be the Party’s presidential candidate, and it came into the convention prepared to make that proposal. Running a presidential campaign was a big step for the Party. We hadn’t done it since 1940, so it would be the first time in nearly thirty years that the party would project a public national presence. By the time the convention took place there was a feeling among many in the Party that we needed to project an image of the Party that spoke to the times. Somebody – I can’t remember if it was Kendra [Alexander] or Michael Myerson – nominated me to be the Party’s presidential candidate and people started lobbying.<sup>1715</sup>

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1712 Pecinovsky 2019, 84.

1713 Pecinovsky 2019, 88.

1714 Healey & Isserman 1993, 207.

1715 Charlene Mitchell’s unpublished autobiography, 66. Also according to Mike Myerson, the “party leadership came into the [1968] convention with the determination and decision to nominate Gus Hall for president”. See Pecinovsky 2019, 89.

The nominating convention chose 38-year old Charlene Mitchell as CPUSA's presidential candidate in New York on July 7, 1968. The decision was preceded by a debate on the convention floor during which Mitchell's brother Franklin Alexander, her sister-in-law Kendra Alexander and CPUSA veteran Gil Green spoke for her candidacy.<sup>1716</sup> Michael Zagarell, CPUSA's 23-year old national youth secretary, was chosen as the candidate for vice president.<sup>1717</sup> Mitchell was the first ever female African American candidate for U.S. president.<sup>1718</sup> "This was a picture of the Party that much of the progressive community could relate to – an African American woman and a youth", Mitchell writes.<sup>1719</sup> Choosing Mitchell and Zagarell as the CPUSA's candidates continued the party's tradition of "white-black tandems". In the 1930s and 1940s William Z. Foster and Earl Browder had ran for president with African American James Ford as their vice-presidential candidate.<sup>1720</sup>

In the press photos Gus Hall happily celebrated the nomination with Mitchell and Zagarell, but according to Dorothy Healey, he was not at all happy about the result. "He was outraged, but he couldn't very well challenge the Party's nomination of a Black woman without opening himself up to charges of white chauvinism", Healey writes.<sup>1721</sup>

According to Mike Zagarell, Hall was very concerned with his public image and his legacy and, as a consequence, he was very interested in becoming the party's presidential candidate:

I think he wanted to be the candidate very badly at that time. But in the party there was a widespread feeling that African Americans were the ones who were becoming most radicalized at the time in the country through the civil rights movement. They were the sector of the population that was most interested in the party and it would have been historical statement to put forward a Black candidate. [...] So because of that, there was a lot of feeling about that especially among younger communists who were more involved with these mass movements at the time. [...] It became politically impossible for him to run, so he acquiesced, but very unhappily.<sup>1722</sup>

Operation Solo documents contain only one actual reference to Hall's potential presidential candidacy, but it supports the picture given by Healey, Mitchell and Zagarell. As Morris Childs was about to travel to the Soviet Union in June 1968, Hall told him to "play down" his running for president because "factionalism in the CPUSA is causing Hall to hesitate about running".<sup>1723</sup>

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1716 Charlene Mitchell's unpublished autobiography, 66.

1717 As *The New York Times* pointed out, Zagarell was actually too young to run for vice president, because the U.S. constitution requires the president and the vice president to be at least 35 years of age. See *The New York Times*, July 8, 1968.

1718 Gillespie 2012, 156. According to Gillespie, the first ever African American presidential candidate of an established party was Clifton DeBerry, who was nominated by Socialist Workers' Party – CPUSA's Trotskyist rival – in 1964. In the 1952 election the Progressive Party had an African American woman – newspaper publisher and civil rights activist Charlotta Bass – as vice presidential candidate running together with Vincent Hallinan. The first ever African American vice presidential candidate was CPUSA's James W. Ford, who ran together with William Z. Foster in 1932. See Gillespie 2012, 156.

1719 Charlene Mitchell's unpublished autobiography, 66.

1720 In the 1970s and 1980s this tradition was continued when Gus Hall ran for president with Jarvis Tyner and later Angela Davis as his vice-presidential candidate. See Rosenberg 2019, 10.

1721 Healey & Isserman 1993, 207.

1722 Interview with Michael Zagarell on October 25, 2013.

1723 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on June 17, 1968; OSD, part 124, page 200.

According to Healey, the party put very few resources into Mitchell's campaign which may explain why she was only able to get on the ballot in a couple of states.<sup>1724</sup> Mike Myerson, who worked in Mitchell's campaign staff, later accused Gus Hall of engaging in "virtual sabotage" of the campaign and refusing to prioritize party resources – funds or personnel – to the campaign, thereby adding one more obstacle to an already complicated endeavor.<sup>1725</sup>

Although being on the ballot only in California, Minnesota, Ohio and Washington, Mitchell travelled widely around the country in the late summer and fall, speaking at community forums and college campuses and giving media interviews. In Mitchell's opinion, her campaign "greatly increased the CPUSA's visibility". "Through personal speeches and radio interviews I was able to speak to hundreds of thousands of people and provide analysis that sharply differed from that of the two dominant parties", Mitchell estimated in her autobiography.<sup>1726</sup>

The main points of Mitchell's campaign consisted of ending the Vietnam War, ending the arms race and the cold war, ending the military-industrial complex, outlawing racism and antisemitism and providing a guaranteed, adequate annual wage for working people.<sup>1727</sup> Such demands were probably too radical for the voters in California, Minnesota, Ohio and Washington, because Mitchell and Zagarell received only 1 075 votes in the election.<sup>1728</sup> The result was embarrassingly weak considering the fact that altogether 73 million votes were cast in the election. The result was embarrassingly weak also if one compares it with other leftist parties: CPUSA's old Trotskyist rival Socialist Workers' Party – with Fred Halstead as its main candidate – was able to gather more than 41 000 votes, whereas Socialist Labor Party's candidate Henning A. Blomen could gather almost 53 000 votes.<sup>1729</sup>

In her memoirs Dorothy Healey remembers how heartened she was by the role that the young party members had started to play in the CPUSA in the late 1960s. In Healey's account, Charlene Mitchell's presidential candidacy was a sort of a climax in this regard. In her opinion, the occupation of Czechoslovakia just one and half months after Mitchell's nomination – and the subsequent events within the CPUSA – ended this development:

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1724 Healey & Isserman 1993, 207. According to Healey, young communists Don Hammerquist and Mike Myerson served as Mitchell's campaign staff, but they were "hindered as much as they were helped by other Communists".

1725 Pecinovsky 2019, 89.

1726 Charlene Mitchell's unpublished autobiography, 68. Also Dorothy Healey thought it was worthwhile to take part in the presidential elections: "Naturally we couldn't expect to win. [...] Still, there were few enough times when the American public was willing to listen to a Communist, even out of curiosity. Election campaigns offered us a chance to speak to others outside our normal circle of influence." Bettina Aptheker, however, felt it was a mistake for Mitchell to run. "She started so late and had no hope of getting on the ballot [in most states]. Party energy should have been put elsewhere", Aptheker said. See Healey & Isserman 1993, 207 and Pecinovsky 2019, 88.

1727 Charlene Mitchell's unpublished autobiography, 66-67.

1728 *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections*, 695. Most of her votes Mitchell got from Minnesota, where 415 persons voted for her. From Washington she got 377 votes, from California 260 and from Ohio 23 votes.

1729 *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections*, 680 & 694. Socialist Labor Party – founded in the 1870s – is the oldest socialist party in the United States. The party's militant far-left political line is strongly influenced by Daniel De Leon, who led the party in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For more information on the party, see, for example, *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections*, 79.

The fact that in 1968 Gus was denied the nomination he so clearly wanted as the Party's presidential candidate was symbolic of a much greater discontent among young delegates to the Party's nominating convention. On issue after issue the young people were really pressing forward and the more orthodox national leaders like Gus, Carl and Helen Winter, Jim Jackson and Hy Lumer were being forced to retreat, the first thing anything like that had happened since the mid-1950s. If that 1968 convention would have been a regular Party convention, charged with electing a new leadership, I suspect that most of those around Gus would have been in danger of losing their seats on the National Board. But once again, as in the past, an international issue arose which cemented the power of the old guards.<sup>1730</sup>

#### 4.6.7. The Soviet view of the New Left

The left-wing radicalism which emerged in many Western countries in the 1960s was a problematic phenomenon for the Soviets. On the one hand the Soviets were of course happy to see students and other radicals expressing their discontent with the capitalist system, but on the other hand their glee was overshadowed by the fact that most New Left theoreticians were more or less critical towards the Soviet Union and Soviet-style traditional Marxism-Leninism.

The CPSU did not just sit idly while the New Left intellectuals undermined the leading position of the Soviet Union but rather sent its theoreticians into a counterattack.<sup>1731</sup> Just like Gus Hall, the Soviets criticized the New Left radicals for being "petty-bourgeois" and not understanding the true nature of revolutionariness. According to A. I. Borisov, the petit bourgeoisie was not capable of looking at society scientifically. This missing scientific view of society was replaced by a mess of bourgeois ideas and arbitrarily interpreted Marxism:

Thus, in all forms of left-wing opportunism, the most prominent features are extreme subjectivism, the inability or unwillingness to regard the objective laws of social development and calling directly for revolutionary action without being linked to the concrete political situation. [...]

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1730 Healey & Isserman 1993, 228. Peggy Dennis sees the CPUSA's situation in 1968 in a very similar way as Dorothy Healey. According to her, "the Czechoslovak events froze the Communist Party leadership into a new decade of dogmatism and sectarianism" and launched "a renewed era of ideological purity" in the party. Dorothy Healey's son Richard Healey saw the party convention in July 1968 as a turning point: "The best young people left after the '68 convention. It had become a battle of Don Quixote against the windmill, a self-defeating, de-energizing activity." See Dennis 1977, 278-279 and Healey & Isserman 1993, 238.

1731 Following account of Soviet views concerning the New Left is based on two Soviet books translated into Finnish: Eduard Batalov's *Kapinafilosofia – Vasemmistoradikalismin ideologian tarkastelua* (*The Philosophy of Revolt – Criticism of Left Radical Ideology*) and A.I. Borisov's "Vasemmisto"-radikalismi ja työväenliike kehittyneissä kapitalistisissa maissa (*"Left" Radicalism and the Workers' Movements in Developed Capitalist Nations*). Both books have been translated in English, but due to the limited availability of the books, I am referring to the Finnish-language versions of them. All quotations here are translated by me. In addition to Batalov and Borisov, I will refer to Yuri Zhukov's article on Herbert Marcuse, which was published in *Pravda* on May 30, 1968. An abridged, English-language version of the article was later published in *A Documentary History of Communism, Vol. 2*.

The proletarian revolutionariness is characterized by a scientifically realistic assessment of the objective situation, combined with the impact of the revolutionary energy and initiative of the people. [...] The petty bourgeois revolutionariness differs from the proletarian revolutionariness in that it is based on spontaneity of the mood, an outburst of emotion.<sup>1732</sup>

According to Eduard Batalov, the New Left of the 1960s was a product of a crisis of the bourgeois in capitalist countries. He pays attention to the fact that most representatives of the New Left were students and intellectuals coming from bourgeois families. As the size of the intelligentsia grew and its role changed during the post-WWII decades, Batalov writes, some of its members became “overspill intelligentsia” which could also be described as “white-collar proletariat”. Becoming a member of this overspill intelligentsia evokes protests and, in the end, demands for a radical renewal of society.<sup>1733</sup>

According to Batalov, these New Left intellectuals do not grasp Marxism as a whole, but they embrace only parts of it – parts that fit their personal ideas. Usually these parts are related to the destructive features of the revolutionary process – to smashing the existing social system – and the positive and constructive features of Marxism are left without attention. “The left-wing radical cannot grasp Marxism as an unbroken, historically developing doctrine: he or she chooses from this doctrine the parts that suit his or her radical and critical mood”, Batalov writes.<sup>1734</sup>

Batalov and Borisov both condemn the ideas of Régis Debray and other New Leftists who exhorted young revolutionaries to take up arms to achieve their aims. They both emphasize that revolutionary war is only one form of revolution. The use of violence must be reflected very carefully because it does not always lead to the desired results. “Armed violence is necessary and useful only when, in addition to the will to fight of the masses (especially of the masses, not of individuals!), certain objective circumstances prevail for the will of the masses to materialize as victory”, Batalov writes.<sup>1735</sup> Borisov agrees with his colleague:

The working class may be forced to resort to armed rebellion when reactionary forces try to prevent the will of the people from being realized. But then the Communists will follow Lenin’s instruction that proclamation of the rebellion is permissible only when a revolutionary situation has really arisen and the support of the majority of the people is guaranteed.<sup>1736</sup>

In Borisov’s opinion, the radical New Leftists who want to free the individual from the repressive system and smash “the establishment” are actually reactionaries if their thinking means denying the industrial society.<sup>1737</sup> Their thinking is close to anarchism and, as such, far from scientific Marxism.<sup>1738</sup>

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1732 Borisov 1971, 11.

1733 Batalov 1977, 26-27 & 105. See also Borisov 1971, 25.

1734 Batalov 1977, 36.

1735 Batalov 1977, 175-176 & 183. Batalov also refers to Lenin, according to whom “there are circumstances under which violence is both necessary and useful, and there are circumstances under which violence cannot lead to any results”.

1736 Borisov 1971, 15-16.

1737 Borisov 1971, 18-19.

1738 Borisov 1971, 26.

Borisov does not agree with Marcuse's claim that the working class in Western Europe and the United States had integrated with the capitalist system and was no longer interested in overturning the system. Nor does he agree with the idea of youth as the new proletariat and vanguard in the revolutionary process.

It is the working class who, as the producer of material goods, is constantly the driving force of modern society and, because of the private capitalist ownership of the means of production, is the bearer of the idea of socialism. This position of the working class is not dependent on cyclical aspects, nor on the new elements of modern capitalism, even if they are very significant.

V.I. Lenin demonstrated that industrial workers play a key role in the collective struggle of all working people. "Only a certain class, namely the workers of cities and of factories in general, industrial workers, are capable of leading the entire labor force and the deprived in the battle to defeat the yoke of capital [...]" he wrote.<sup>1739</sup>

According to *Pravda*, Marcuse was an instrument for the capitalists to sow disagreement into the ranks of revolutionary forces in Western countries. The Soviet paper discussed Marcuse's visit to Paris in May 1968 during the massive student demonstrations in the city. Marcuse spoke at a UNESCO colloquium dedicated to the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx. According to *Pravda*, Marcuse's address was a "pitiful and inconsistent" attempt to refute Marxism:

As one would expect, the Marxist philosophers participating in the colloquium gave this false prophet the refutation he deserved. Some were amazed: Why did Marcuse say that the working class "could no longer play a revolutionary role" at the very moment when in the capitalist world, and in particular in France where he spoke, the wave of an acute class struggle was breaking so highly? However, the more far-sighted people understood: Marcuse was catapulted from far-off San Diego to Paris just for this reason. It was necessary to put into use all means in order to attempt to interfere and bring chaos into the ranks of those struggling against the old order and – mainly! – to attempt to put young people, especially students, in opposition to the basic force of the working class.<sup>1740</sup>

According to Batalov, Marcuse's thinking can be explained by looking at his personal history. Just like his German colleague Theodor Adorno – who also emigrated to the United States during the Nazi rule in Germany – Marcuse had been raised in the spirit of traditional European values and "the sublime".

Following a twist of fate, they ended up in industrial America and couldn't help but feel very homeless in this rather peculiar world of technological rationality, calculation and gain, a world which penetrated even to the most intimate aspects of life, a world of standardization where everyone was cast in the same mold. They were outsiders in this rationalized world, and it is no wonder that many of them became ideologues of the outsiders, in other words, ideologues of people who were derailed off the conventional social rails.<sup>1741</sup>

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1739 Borisov 1971, 40.

1740 *Pravda*, May 30, 1968. An abridged, English-language version Yuri Zhukov's article on Herbert Marcuse was published in *A Documentary History of Communism*, Vol. 2, 339-342.

1741 Batalov 1977, 62.



#### 4.6.8. The troubled relationship between the Old and the New Left

In the 1960s the United States experienced an unprecedented cultural change which in many ways liberalized the country. Politically the United States experienced an emergence of a prominent leftist movement which at its heyday gathered tens of thousands of followers. Meanwhile the last remains of the anticommunist legislation of the previous decades were invalidated by Supreme Court rulings. Indeed, the operating environment for a Communist Party became a whole lot more favorable during the decade but for some reason the party could not really increase its popularity. In the early 1970s the CPUSA was only in a slightly better shape than it had been before the tumultuous 1960s. How come the changes of the 1960s did not have a stronger positive effect on the party's standing?

When answering this question, one has to take a broader look at American society in the 1960s and pay attention to two factors. Firstly, the New Left was not primarily an economic protest but rather a cultural and social one.<sup>1742</sup> The United States had experienced a massive rise in the general standard of living after the Great Depression of the 1930s. Many of the participants of the New Left movements came from middle-class or even upper-class families. Unlike the socialists and communists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the New Left participants were children of affluence.<sup>1743</sup> Hunger and deprivation were not among their greatest concerns – instead they protested against alienation and the materialist lifestyle of contemporary America. To them – as Paul Hollander points out – “‘affluence’ became something of a dirty word, often prefixed by ‘empty’”.<sup>1744</sup> Considering all this, it was not surprising that the New Leftists did not throng into the ranks of the CPUSA which still laid major emphasis on labor issues and questions related to material welfare.<sup>1745</sup>

Secondly, history weighed on the CPUSA's shoulders. The party that had for decades been closely connected to the tightly-ruled Soviet Union was not very attractive in the eyes of New Left youth who shunned all authoritarianism and bureaucracy. The ageing leadership of the party did not make it any more attractive.<sup>1746</sup> Moreover, as historians Lewis

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1742 The world-wide 1960s radicalism has often been linked to demographics and the rapidly increasing student numbers during the decade. In the United States college enrollment tripled during the 1960s to nearly ten million. See Kazin 2011, 212.

1743 According to Paul Hollander, “a combination of material security, leisure, few (if any) responsibilities, encouragement to self-expression (from parents and educational systems), the daily routines of life in the suburbs and on the college campuses added up to a constellation of circumstances out of which rebellious activism could easily arise”. He also quotes writers who saw simple boredom a central ingredient in the youth restlessness. Youth leader Jerry Rubin – for example – wrote: “We want to be heroes, like those we read about in the history books. We missed the first American Revolution. We missed World War II. We missed Chinese and Cuban Revolutions. Are we supposed to spend our futures grinning and watching TV all the time?” See Hollander 1981, 183-184.

1744 Hollander 1981, 179.

1745 According to Aileen Kraditor, the theories of Herbert Marcuse and his colleagues replaced Karl Marx's immiseration theory in the 1960s following “the greatest surge of prosperity reaching the largest proportion of the population in history”. The New Left intellectuals now claimed that the mass poverty caused by the capitalist system was no longer material but spiritual. “The Left's shift from a material to a spiritual emphasis is among the principal causes of the CP's demise”, Kraditor writes. See Kraditor 1988, 238.

1746 As mentioned earlier, youth was not well represented in the CPUSA leadership. Of the eight

Coser and Irving Howe point out, the new generation had grown tired of the constant confrontation between the two great powers and was convinced that the United States and the Soviet Union had both become “rigidly bureaucratic (or ‘square’), while the true sources of political vitality can be found only in certain underdeveloped countries where the national leaders still have style, initiative and flavor”.<sup>1747</sup> The greatest hero for the radical youth in the early 1960s was Fidel Castro, who “dared to tweak Uncle Sam’s nose, fought heroically, speaks rhetorically and dresses spectacularly”.<sup>1748</sup>

Paul Hollander analyzes the New Left infatuation with Fidel Castro more thoroughly in his *Political Pilgrims*. According to Hollander, the Cuban revolution was “‘a fresh new cause’ which appeared quite different from the state socialist bureaucracies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, further discredited by Khrushchev’s revelations in 1956”.<sup>1749</sup> The leaders of the revolution were considered flexible and independent, free from the burden of the past as “they were not part of the Old Left and its errors, no inheritors of its dogmatism”. Many western intellectuals had a profound – and sometimes even cult-like – admiration for the leader of the Cuban revolution. Hollander pointed out that Castro had all the qualities a frustrated Western intellectual could hope for: “he was an aristocrat of sorts, son of a landowner, graduate of law school, authentic underdog guerilla fighter, subsequently the holder of great power unhindered by parties, parliaments, sordid interest groups, petty politicians – a man with dreams and power to implement them”.<sup>1750</sup>

According to Hollander, many western intellectuals were fascinated by the image of Cuba as an exuberant island of song-and-dance-loving natives among whom a strong sense of community prevailed. Michael Parenti – who later became a prominent cultural critic in

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top leaders nominated in the 1959 convention, 45-year old James Jackson was the youngest. Two of leaders – chairman emeritus William Z. Foster and vice chairperson Elizabeth Gurley Flynn – had been born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As it happens, four of the eight top leaders – Foster, Flynn, Eugene Dennis and Benjamin Davis – died within five years of the 1959 convention. The persons replacing them were not much younger. For example Henry Winston, Eugene Dennis’s successor as a national chairman, was born in 1911. For leaders’ biographical details, see, for example, *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*.

1747 Howe & Coser 1962, 568. Style indeed seems to have been a problem for the CPUSA communists in the early 1960s. As an anonymous campus radical explains in a 1965 *Saturday Evening Post* report, the young Trotskyists and Maoists seem to have been much more skilled in this sense: “The really swinging cats are the Young Trots and Progressive Labor. They smoke pot, do what they please, say what they please. They’ve got the best looking women on the left. The Communists have some really terrible-looking chicks. The Communists are real squares, little old men at the age of 20. There is something about the party that just eats up your head. They always stick out at student meetings, because the guys wear coats and ties.” See *Saturday Evening Post*, May 8, 1965.

1748 Howe & Coser 1962, 569-570. John Patrick Diggins agrees with Howe & Coser on the role of Fidel Castro: “Faith in Castro as a charismatic caudillo mesmerized much of the New Left. Young, bearded, defiant, Castro became the symbol of rebellious young Americans in search of John Wayne of the Left, a guerilla who could shoot his way to power and at the same time remain virtuously uncorrupted by the temptations of power.” See Diggins 1992, 237.

1749 Hollander 1981, 225.

1750 Hollander 1981, 241. Many western scholars considered Castro a fellow-intellectual, an image which Castro deliberately conveyed. One writer tells us that while Castro was in jail, he “used the time to read voraciously and eclectically St. Thomas Aquinas, John of Salisbury, Luther, Knox, Milton, Rousseau and Tom Paine – any notable authority he could lay his hands on”.

the United States – wrote that “Cubans are not preoccupied with money anxieties of the kind that plague most Americans, and the absence of money problems and all related competitiveness, personal fears and aggression has a palpable effect on social relations”.<sup>1751</sup> In Hollander’s opinion, Cuba played similar role to the political pilgrims of the 1960s as Soviet Union had played in the 1930s:

If the Soviet Union in the 1930s was seen as the antidote or polar opposite of the chaos and “rudderlessness” of Western societies, Cuba in the early 1960s was the counterpoint to alienation, social isolation, depersonalization and other ills of mass society.<sup>1752</sup>

As noted above, the New Left did not feel that there was continuity between itself and the Old Left. Rather the New Left leaders wanted to distance themselves from the bitter ideological disputes of the preceding leftists:

“We began,” says Clark Kissinger, national secretary of Students for a Democratic Society, “by rejecting the old sectarian left and its ancient quarrels. [...] We are interested in direct action and specific issues. We do not spend endless hours debating the nature of Soviet Russia or whether Yugoslavia is a degenerate workers’ state.”<sup>1753</sup>

The generation gap was not unilateral. If the New Leftists saw the older generations as hard-headed dogmatists stuck in age-old ideological battle trenches, the Old Left representatives often considered the New Leftists superficial, unread and unanalytical.<sup>1754</sup> This attitude can also be seen in Lewis Coser’s and Irving Howe’s 1962 description of the new generation:

When they turn to politics, they have little concern for clear and precise thought. What attracts them is the surface of vitality, the appearance of freshness, the gesture of drama. They care more for style than conviction and incline more to outbursts of energy than sustained work.<sup>1755</sup>

Howe knew what he was talking about as he had personally had discussions with some of the most prominent New Left leaders. In his autobiography *A Margin of Hope*, Howe draws a vivid picture of SDS leaders’ 1962 visit to the editorial board of the well-known leftist journal *Dissent*. Howe and Coser – both prominent representatives of the non-communist Old Left – had been among the founders of *Dissent* in 1954. At first, the two generations seemed to agree on most issues – like the need for social criticism and a dislike for Soviet-style Marxist-Leninism – but after a while the *Dissent* editors winced when the SDS leaders started juxtaposing “participatory democracy” with the existing representative democracy.

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1751 Quoted in Hollander 1981, 244.

1752 Hollander 1981, 244.

1753 *Saturday Evening Post*, May 8, 1965.

1754 Old Left representatives voiced these kind of views of their young successors for example in a panel discussion which was published in the journal *American Scholar* in the fall of 1967. See *Confrontation: The Old Left and the New*, 574-575.

1755 Howe & Coser 1962, 569. Hollander has somewhat similar view of the New Left radicals who he considered “generally less interested in theorizing” and “more action-oriented, more interested in immediate gratification”. This action-orientation, however, “often bordered on anti-intellectualism”. Writers like Marcuse, Mills, Che Guevara and Mao “were more used as a source of slogans and ‘role models’ than for theoretical enlightenment”. “At a time when deep feeling and spontaneity were prized, articulate elaborations and expositions commended less respect and interest”, Hollander writes. See Hollander 1981, 216-217.

According to Howe, it “sounded a little too much like the fecklessness of our youth, when Stalinists and even a few Socialists used to put down ‘mere’ bourgeois democracy”. The *Dissent* editors also found it troubling that the SDS leaders were ready to excuse the lack of freedom in Cuba, “a country that seemed to them the home of a better kind of communism”. A clash of generations was inevitable, as the *Dissent* editors believed that socialism had to be “set strictly apart from all dictatorships, whether by frigid Russians or hot Cubans”.<sup>1756</sup>

Howe attended some SDS board meetings which he described as “interminable and structureless sessions”. According to Howe, “nothing was thought through” in the “blur of fraternity”. He could not agree with the SDS decision-making and political culture:

For some of the SDS people, the ideal polity seemed to be a community without or beyond rules, an anarchy of pals, in which anyone dropping in at a meeting could speak as long as they wished, whether upon the topic of the moment or not; then, out of this chaos of good feeling, concord would emerge. But to me it all seemed a chaos favoring manipulation by tight sects and grandiose charismatic leaders.<sup>1757</sup>

Leszek Kolakowski, the renowned historian of Marxist thought, did not hold New Leftists in high regard. Although the New Leftists claimed to be Marxists and used Marxist vocabulary, their ideology had little in common with Marx’s thoughts, Kolakowski argues. Much like Hollander, Kolakowski saw the New Left as a passing protest movement of well-off youths:

While the ideological fantasies of this movement, which reached its climax around 1968-69, were no more than a nonsensical expression of the whims of spoiled middle-class children, and while the extremists among them were virtually indistinguishable from Fascist thugs, the movement did without doubt express a profound crisis of faith in the values that had inspired democratic societies for many decades.<sup>1758</sup>

According to Klehr and Haynes, the New Left radicals saw the CPUSA as a “staid, conservative dinosaur” not only because of its close connection with the Soviet Union but also because of its domestic alliances:

In domestic politics it [the CPUSA] advocated alliances with liberal Democrats to counter right-wing Republicans, advocated peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union, and insisted that the working class and hence the union movement was a key element in any progressive coalition. None of these positions was calculated to appeal to the youthful radicals who despised liberalism and liberals, were far more excited by newer and more energetic communist regimes than the Soviet Union, and believed that the union movement was racist and part of the status quo.<sup>1759</sup>

Max Elbaum, a veteran New Left activist, studies the division between the Old and the New Left in length in his 2002 book *Revolution in the Air*. According to him, it was largely

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1756 Howe 1982, 291-292.

1757 Howe 1982, 292. Also in Vivian Gornick’s interview book *The Romance of American Communism* the New Left is repeatedly criticized for lack of structure, discipline and organization and for chaotic procedures. Following quote is typical for Gornick’s interviewees: “They were a bunch of middle-class anarchic kids with no base, no structure, no sense of history, no program, no party, no nothing. I didn’t know what the hell they were all about and I still don’t know. They would, I thought, just burn themselves out, nothing would come of all the tumult. And, to my sorrow, I was right.” See Gornick 1977, 188, 194-195 & 202.

1758 Kolakowski 2005, 1179-1180.

1759 Klehr & Haynes 1992, 171-172.

a clash between “trade union, pro-Soviet Marxism-Leninism” and “Third World liberation Marxism-Leninism”:

Though the two generations used the same Marxist phrases and texts, they frequently talked right past each other. Indeed, the gap was so large that many on both sides could not even recognize militants from the other generation as part of what they considered the communist movement.<sup>1760</sup>

According to Elbaum, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was a watershed for the New Left as Soviet tanks suppressed the Czechoslovak experiment with “socialism with a human face”. The Soviet Union was now seen as repressive, militaristic and disrespectful of national self-determination as the United States. Another factor irritating the “Third World liberation Marxist-Leninists” was the Soviet Union’s half-hearted support for national liberation movements. In their opinion, Moscow seemed far more interested in pursuing peaceful co-existence with Washington than in backing revolution.<sup>1761</sup>

Among the New Leftists the CPUSA was seen as a staunch defender of all Soviet policies. In addition to this, the CPUSA’s domestic policies were considered seriously flawed as the party did not pay enough attention to African American radicalism and other new currents in the society. Instead, the CPUSA insisted on the centrality of the trade unions in the strategy of the Left. According to Elbaum, all this alienated young militants from the Party:

The CPUSA failed to engage the new radical generation as a partner-in-struggle, refused to entertain the notion that it had things to learn as well as things to teach, defended Soviet actions that were backward if not indefensible and walled itself off from the new movements in sectarian complacency. Thus the most experienced socialist group in the country missed the chance to connect itself to the new generation – with negative consequences for all concerned.<sup>1762</sup>

#### **4.6.9. Interviewees’ views on Gus Hall and the New Left**

As many of my interviewees had joined the party in the 1960s and could well be described as representatives of the so-called Sixties generation, many of them also commented profusely on Gus Hall’s relationship with the New Left of the 1960s.

According to the interviewees, Hall’s relationship with the New Left was tense, resentful and disdainful. Bettina Aptheker – who had a successful academic career as a professor of feminist studies – explained Hall’s problematic relationship with the New Left partly by referring to the low level of his education:

The problem there was that the New Left was overwhelmingly dominated by the students and Gus had no educational experience. He was self-educated. He had no experience with what it meant to be in the university or what students were going

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1760 Elbaum 2002, 48.

1761 Elbaum 2002, 48.

1762 Elbaum 2002, 51. Elbaum’s views are somewhat similar to Peggy Dennis’s ideas. In her 1977 autobiography she wrote that “throughout the 1960s decade the current Party leadership placed the organization in opposition to and in isolation from practically every new form of struggle that erupted in the ghettos, on the campuses and in the streets”. See Dennis 1977, 290.

through and also he had no understanding of the relationship between universities and industry as the scientific and technological revolution was developing. He didn't understand that.<sup>1763</sup>

According to Aptheker, Hall's attitude could also be explained by the fact that he tended to see the world as it had been in his youth when he took part in organizing the steelworkers:

He was stuck in the 30s. That was the heart of his experience. He was one heck of an organizer in the 1930s in the steel industry. But the economy, the whole political economy had changed vastly by the 60s and 70s. We [the young communists] saw what was happening and so we had what seemed to us to be an absurd debate.<sup>1764</sup>

Michael Myerson, Jay Schaffner and Michael Zagarell emphasized Hall's contemptuous and suspicious attitude towards other currents within the political left. According to Myerson, Hall was distrustful towards party members who were strongly involved, for example, in the peace movement as they were "mixing with all these strange people". Similarly he was suspicious of people who were reading the wrong books:

Sometime in the late 1960s, in 1967 or in 1968, I was reading a book by Regis Debray, who was in Bolivia with Che Guevara at the time. I had the book with me at a party meeting. Gus asked me "What are you reading that shit for? You don't need to read that". I asked him if he had read the book and he said "I don't need to read that". [...] Anything that didn't come from him was, if not suspect, in some way worrisome.<sup>1765</sup>

Like many other party members, Jay Schaffner pointed out that Hall's policy led the CPUSA to an isolated position within the political left. In his opinion, the CPUSA's attitude towards the New Left reflected the Comintern's third period position that the Communist Party was the leading organization of the socialist movement and all others were phonies and enemies. Schaffner reminded that Hall had studied in the International Lenin School in Moscow during the Comintern's third period which may have influenced his thinking in this regard:

Possible common points of unity with other left-wing organizations were not discussed. The party was separated and apart from the rest of the left. The party was "the real left". Gus referred to other left-wing organizations as the phony-left, the

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1763 Interview with Bettina Aptheker in Santa Cruz, California, August 2010.

1764 Interview with Bettina Aptheker in Santa Cruz, California, August 2010. Aptheker gained first-hand experience of Hall's attitudes when her first book *The Academic Rebellion in the United States* was published in 1972: "In it I was trying to show the new relationship between industry, military, science, technology and the role of ideology. [...] He was very critical of that book, very critical in fact that it was published. He had nothing in his own experience to understand the book. The world was changing around him and he had no way to grasp what was changing."

1765 Interview with Michael Myerson in New York City, August 2010. Jay Schaffner witnessed a similar kind of exchange of words in a meeting of DuBois Clubs. This time Gus Hall was not involved, but the answer of the party leader shows that Hall was not the only one despising the New Left in the party leadership: "Somebody asked in Du Bois Clubs national conference in 1968 why are we not discussing what everybody else are discussing, like the works of André Gorz. A political bureau member of the party answered by saying 'Gorz Schmorz! What do we need him for? We have Marx and Engels and Lenin!' That characterizes what the attitude towards the New Left was. There was no real appreciation. Nobody in the party really read or studied Gramsci for example. In the party school in the early 1970s we read Marx, Engels and Lenin and most recent central committee reports of Winston and Hall." See interview with Jay Schaffner in New York City, October 2013.

pseudo-left or the government-left. Those who wanted to reform the Democratic Party were not viewed as real communists.<sup>1766</sup>

According to Michael Zagarell, Hall's political line isolated also the young communists:

There was a group of party youth who argued that we should be in SDS [Students for a Democratic Society]. But the party's policy was that you should mainly be building the DuBois Clubs. This tended to isolate many communists from other groups. [...]

We wanted to form a new socialist youth organization which would have brought all these trends together from SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], from [Black] Panthers, from SDS, from DuBois Clubs. But that would have meant that you couldn't control it, that you would have had to work with people with dialogue. Gus was not ready to have dialogue with most of the Left. He did not encourage it because it would not have been on our complete control. So we didn't go that route and that hurt the DuBois Club. Instead, we went to different route which isolated the party more in the long run. [...]

The youth policy was just a symptom of deeper problems within the party. [...] Gus generally had the tendency to be very critical of everybody outside the party and critical of everybody in the party except of himself.<sup>1767</sup>

#### 4.6.10. Conclusions

According to Dorothy Healey, Gus Hall regarded the New Left as a distraction or a threat to the CPUSA's political prospects rather than as a fertile field for young party members to work in. "The Party's hostile attitude toward the New Left was probably the greatest political liability we had to contend with in the 1960s", Healey writes in her autobiography. As mentioned earlier, Healey saw the CPUSA's strategy of establishing a separate communist youth organization as an explanation for the party's isolation "from the most significant outbreak of youthful radicalism in thirty years".<sup>1768</sup>

Healey is known for her highly critical attitude toward Gus Hall, but her assessment of Hall's relationship with the New Left and its consequences may be correct. The role of the CPUSA and its members remained somewhat limited when one looks at U.S. student politics in the 1960s. The situation might have been at least slightly different if the CPUSA would have – instead of founding its own short-lived youth organization – instructed its young members to join actively the SDS which was the hub of radical student politics.

The same thing can be said about the CPUSA's role in the anti-Vietnam War movement and the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Although some individual party members were

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<sup>1766</sup> Interview with Jay Schaffner in New York City, October 2013. According to Schaffner, the fact that the CPUSA played no role in the massive antiwar demonstrations in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention in August 1968, is a concrete example of the party's isolation from other left-wing groups. "There was no national mobilization by the party to bring people to Chicago. Arnold Johnson was there as an observer, and that was the party's national presence in the demonstrations", Schaffner said.

<sup>1767</sup> Interview with Michael Zagarell in New York City, October 2013.

<sup>1768</sup> Healey & Isserman 1993, 185.

involved in the movement and the CPUSA took part in organizing antiwar demonstrations, its role in the movement was by no means central. According to John Barron, the Soviets considered the CPUSA to be “the primary instigator” in the antiwar movement, but this was not the case.<sup>1769</sup> Barron may be right when he writes that the Soviet leaders “ludicrously overestimated the influence of the American party and credited it with causing phenomena, such as the anti-Vietnam War movement, in which it played only a peripheral part”.<sup>1770</sup>

For a person studying Gus Hall’s political line, taking a look at Hall’s relationship with the New Left is rewarding as it clearly exposes some of the basic elements of his thinking. Hall was, for example, a staunch defender of the role of the working class in a revolutionary process. A true Marxist movement could draw its power only from the working class. Herbert Marcuse’s claims that the U.S. working class had lost its revolutionary fervor and that intellectuals and students could act as the vanguard in the revolution were in Hall’s eyes signs of irredeemably petty-bourgeois mentality and, as such, heretic thoughts. A truly socialist revolution could only be carried out under the leadership of the proletariat – all other alternatives would make it something else than a socialist revolution.

If one compares Hall’s attitude toward the New Left with the Soviet Union’s attitude, one quickly sees many similarities in these attitudes. The Soviets also attacked the petty-bourgeois nature of the New Left philosophy and pointed out that the petty bourgeoisie – which was lacking working-class consciousness – was not capable of looking at society scientifically. As a consequence, the petty bourgeoisie could not understand the true nature of revolutionariness. New Left intellectuals did not grasp Marxism as a whole, but they embraced only parts of it – parts that fit their personal ideas. Usually these parts were related to the destructive features of the revolutionary process and the positive and constructive features of Marxism were left without attention.

Hall and the Soviet intellectuals also agreed when it came to the use of violence in a revolutionary process. To Hall violence was not “a correct tactical concept for today’s reality” and it would not “advance the struggle”. Hall’s thinking was in line with that of Soviet writer A.I. Borisov who pointed out that “proclamation of the rebellion is permissible only when a revolutionary situation has really arisen and the support of the majority of the people is guaranteed”.

In the early 1960s Hall eagerly visited university campuses all across the United States speaking to thousands of students. Such travels and encounters did not, however, give him new ideas about how to make use of this renewed interest in radical politics and communism. Although the CPUSA’s youth organizations had failed one after another during the previous decades, Hall wanted once again to launch a new organization. Hall had great expectations concerning the W.E.B. Du Bois Clubs of America, but the organization did not live to see the 1970s.

The weak success of the Du Bois Clubs is indeed surprising considering the radical wave that swept through large parts of American youth in the 1960s. Several factors were surely causing the breakdown of the organization, but probably one of most important ones

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1769 Barron 1995, 11.

1770 Barron 1995, 300.



was the role of the party leadership as it moved the organization's headquarters away from Berkeley and turned its publications and recruiting efforts away from campuses and focused on working-class youth. William Divale's claims of the Hall-led "genocide" against Du Bois Clubs may be exaggerated, but there may be a bit of truth in his description of the party leadership as "mossbacks" who were not only separated from the youth by a generation gap but also an intellectual one.

## 5. Gus Hall as a party leader

### 5.1. Hall's relationship to membership groups within the party

#### 5.1.1. African American members

In addition to information related to political and ideological questions, Operation Solo material of course offers plenty of information concerning social relationships within the CPUSA. As African Americans and the Jewish were two distinctive groups within the party membership, it may be appropriate to discuss Hall's relationships with these groups in separate subchapters. In addition to that, it may be useful to study Hall's relationships with CPUSA intellectuals and Midwestern, Finnish American, female and young party members.

There is no exact information available on the proportion of African Americans in the CPUSA membership in the 1960s. The party had campaigned actively among the African Americans since the late 1920s but they never became as significant membership group as the Jews, for example. In 1935 their proportion of the party membership was 11 percent and in 1946 it had grown to 14 percent.<sup>1771</sup> There is no information on how the proportion of African Americans developed in the 1950s but in the party leadership their position seems to have grown stronger during the decade. In 1957 the proportion of African American members in the party's central committee was 25 percent and in 1961 it had grown to almost 29 percent.<sup>1772</sup> As the composition of the central committee does not directly reflect the composition of the party membership, one cannot say whether the proportion of African American party members actually grew in the late 1950s.<sup>1773</sup> That is possible, however, because as Harvey Klehr points out, the African American members were far less likely to leave the party than white members.<sup>1774</sup>

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1771 Glazer 1961, 175 and Klehr 1978, 57.

1772 Klehr 1978, 63.

1773 According to J Edgar Hoover's 1969 book *On Communism*, the proportion of African American members in the CPUSA in the late 1960s was "only ten percent [...] despite a disproportionate amount of time, money and effort spent in this field". If this really was the case, African Americans were somewhat overrepresented in the party leadership. Out of the fifteen top positions in the party in 1969, seven were held by African Americans. See Hoover 1969, 35 and *Yearbook of International Communist Affairs 1970*, 480.

1774 Klehr 1978, 67-68. Klehr writes: "Undoubtedly the relative absence of racism in the party and the opportunities it provided for black leadership made it an attractive permanent home for some. Additionally, whereas many white communists, particularly Jews, could function politically as radicals after leaving the CPUSA [...] there were far fewer forums within the black community for disenchanted communists who remained radical. Such civil rights organizations as the NAACP were wary of being tainted by communist contacts. Indeed, there were far fewer opportunities of any kind for blacks in American society and this deterrent may have convinced some that their future was even dimmer outside the CPUSA than inside it."

In the late 1980s, after the death of CPUSA's chairman Henry Winston in 1986 and after Hall did not nominate a successor to Winston, Hall was accused of racism by some party members.<sup>1775</sup> Such claims were surprising considering Hall's decades-long work for racial equality in the United States. Operation Solo documents do not contain material which would support claims of Hall's racism but he does seem to have had tense relationships with several African American CPUSA leaders. However, a closer look at these tense relationships reveal that the explanation for the tension might rather be found in personal characteristics of the party leaders than in any racial factors.

During Hall's first years as the party's top leader, he was challenged especially by Ben Davis who had been a member of William Z. Foster's hard-line faction during the factional disputes of the late 1950s. During the disputes Davis had, for example, vigorously defended the Soviet occupation of Hungary in 1956. Davis was by no means a light-weight opponent for Hall. Born in 1903, Davis was a lawyer and had served in significant party positions since the 1930s. He had – as one of the very few American communists – been victorious in an election, having been elected as a councilman in New York city council in 1943 and 1945. In the 1959 party convention Davis had become the national secretary of the party.<sup>1776</sup>

According to the Operations Solo documents, in the summer of 1960 – after six months of Gus Hall as the general secretary – Davis complained about “centrism” of the CPUSA.<sup>1777</sup> Based on Operation Solo material, centrism seems to have been a mocking word used by the far-left communists to describe their middle-of-the-road comrades. As mentioned earlier in this study, William Z. Foster – who was Ben Davis's ideological soul mate – called Otto Kuusinen mockingly a centrist when they met on Foster's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in February 1961 at a rest home located outside Moscow.<sup>1778</sup> Mao Tse-tung also used the word to criticize the resolution of the conference of Latin American CPs in Havana, Cuba in November 1964.<sup>1779</sup>

As William Z. Foster was in Moscow, Davis did not have too many like-minded comrades in the party leadership. According to Gus Hall, Davis was “the only opposition to the leadership” in the national office of the party.<sup>1780</sup> Despite having little support for his line, Davis seems to have continued his opposition against the party leadership. In May 1961

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1775 Murrell 2015, 322. Instead of nominating a successor to Winston, the central committee of the party abolished the title of the general secretary and named Hall as the chairman. Many party members had assumed that after Winston's death another African American would be named as the chairman to continue the tradition of having joint African American and white leadership in the party. In the late 1980s many African American members felt that there was a decline in the attention paid to the African American struggle in the party and this explained by the lack of an African American top leader in the party. According to Gay Murrell, “Hall's power grab inflamed the turbulent mood within the party” and was one of the reasons leading to the split of the party some years later. See Charlene Mitchell's unpublished autobiography, 1; Murrell 2015, 322 and Rosenberg 2019, 13-14.

1776 For more information on Ben Davis, see *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 85-87 and *African American National Biography*, 564-565. The position of the national secretary was clearly much less influential than the positions of the general secretary and the chairman of the CPUSA.

1777 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on August 1, 1960. OSD, part 11, page 167.

1778 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on July 19, 1961. OSD, part 32, page 52.

1779 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 1, 1965. OSD, part 85, page 37.

1780 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on July 11, 1960; OSD, part 20, page 234.

Morris Childs reported to his Soviet contact person in New York that Davis had a “hostile attitude” toward the CPUSA and that the party intended to “take action”.<sup>1781</sup> Operation Solo documents do not reveal what action the party took, but Davis was not subjected to similar measures as Milton Rosen and Mortimer Scheer who were expelled from the party later in 1961. Rosen – former New York state party labor secretary – was accused of “advocating a policy of splitting the labor and Negro people’s movement into ‘right’ and ‘left’ centers instead of fighting for a policy of uniting all honest forces against the main enemy, big business and the racists”.<sup>1782</sup> In 1962 Rosen and Scheer founded the pro-Chinese Progressive Labor Movement which in 1965 changed its name into the Progressive Labor Party.<sup>1783</sup> During the 1960s this radical party became one of the most prominent organizations within the American New Left. In February 1960 Morris Childs had listed Ben Davis as being one of CPUSA’s worst factionalists together with Rosen and Scheer, but Davis was not factionalist enough to join the Progressive Labor Movement.<sup>1784</sup>

The fact that Hall and Davis were indicted together in March 1962 in yet another court case against the communist leaders, did not seem to improve their relationship. The party’s two top leaders were indicted for refusing to register the party as a subversive organization.<sup>1785</sup> The court cases against Hall, Davis and the party dragged on for years but they never led to any sentences.<sup>1786</sup>

Historian Gerald Horne points out that in October 1962 – probably because of Davis’s factionalist tendencies – Hall “strongly suspected” that Davis was an FBI informant.<sup>1787</sup> Apparently this was not the case, but the FBI did not hesitate to take advantage of tension between Davis and Hall to further muddle up the internal situation in the CPUSA and to encourage factionalism. For example, as a part of their COINTELPRO operations the FBI agents developed a cartoon “showing caricatures of Hall and Davis squaring off in a ring to fight for the prize of CP leadership clearly showing the fact that one is white and the other is Negro thus creating the impression that race is an issue”.<sup>1788</sup> The FBI was interested in confusing the situation not only within the CPUSA but also within the Davis household. The Bureau was aware that their financial situation had been tight for some time and that

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1781 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on May 30, 1961; OSD, part 30, page 65.

1782 *The Worker*, January 7, 1962. Rosen and Scheer had both wanted to become members of CPUSA national committee in the party’s 17<sup>th</sup> national convention in 1959 but were not successful. Since their defeat they had “organized and continued an organized opposition to the basic policy decisions of that convention”. See also *The New York Times*, January 6, 1962.

1783 *Yearbook of International Communist Affairs* 1966, 176.

1784 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on February 12, 1960; OSD, part 18, page 62.

1785 *The New York Times*, March 16, 1962. The CPUSA had been indicted earlier in December 1961 for the same reason. See *The New York Times*, December 2, 1961.

1786 The judicial process ended only in May 1966 when the Justice Department decided to drop the charges against Hall. By that time Davis was already dead. The case against the party had ended already in June 1964 when the Supreme Court left the court of appeals decision standing. The court of appeals had in December 1963 held that no one can be forced by a registration proceeding to declare his association with a party that has been labeled criminal. See *The New York Times*, Dec 18, 1963; *The New York Times*, June 9, 1964 and *The New York Times*, May 5, 1966.

1787 Horne 2013, 268. Horne’s findings are based on FBI documents in Ben Davis’s FOIA file.

1788 Horne 1994, 310. It is unclear how widely such a cartoon was distributed and whether it was published anywhere.

this had caused frequent arguments between Ben Davis and his wife Nina. Considering this, the FBI agents reasoned in June 1962, spreading information on Gus Hall's "luxurious spending habits" "would have considerable effect on Nina Davis".<sup>1789</sup>

Ben Davis died in August 1964. Although Hall's most notable left-wing contender was now gone, leading the party was by no means an easy task. A special challenge was presented by another African American CPUSA leader, namely James Jackson.

Jackson was born in Richmond, Virginia in 1914 to the family of an African American pharmacist. He also studied pharmacy and received a university degree in 1937. Jackson joined the communist party in 1931. In the late 1930s Jackson was one of the founders of the civil rights organization Southern Negro Youth Congress and worked as an organizer for the Tobacco Workers Union. During the WWII he served as a sergeant in Burma. After the war Jackson worked, for example, as the CPUSA's district organizer in Louisiana and the party's educational director in Detroit, Michigan. In June 1951 Jackson was indicted with other CP leaders for a conspiracy to violate the Smith Act, but he fled and lived in the communist underground apparatus for the next four years. He surrendered in New York City in 1955 and in 1956 he was sentenced to two years in prison. However, after the Supreme Court's *Yates vs. United States* decision in 1957 Jackson's conviction was reversed. In the late 1950s Jackson became a member of the CPUSA's secretariat, national committee and national executive committee and he visited the Soviet Union and China. In 1960 he became the editor of *The Worker*.<sup>1790</sup> As the FBI's reactions to the scuffles between Hall and Jackson show us concretely how the Bureau was ready to intervene in the internal affairs of the CPUSA, I will now take a close look at the relations between Hall and Jackson.

Unlike many other CPUSA members, Jackson was well aware of the financial support which the CPUSA received from the Soviet Union. And not only did he know about it, but he also wanted to be one of U.S. communists controlling the money flow. All through the 1960s, there are numerous examples of how Jackson tried to put himself into a position in which he could have been in charge of the incoming subsidies. Not surprisingly such attempts enraged Gus Hall, the all-mighty controller of the Soviet funding.

In October and November 1961, for example, as Jackson and other CPUSA delegates were visiting Moscow to attend the 22<sup>nd</sup> congress of the CPSU and to celebrate the anniversary of the October revolution, Jackson "had made an effort to undermine CG 5824-S\* [Morris Childs] in the eyes of the Soviets". According to Elizabeth Gurley Flynn – another member of the CPUSA delegation – Jackson had indicated to the Soviets that Childs "was 'not the man for the job' (negotiating financial transactions for the CPUSA with the Soviets)". Such actions made Hall "furious" and he cursed Jackson "in gutter language". According

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1789 Horne 2013, 268.

1790 Detailed information on Jackson's life can be found in Sara Rzeszutek's 2015 biography of James Jackson and his wife Esther Cooper Jackson. FBI's *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.* offers a concise summary of Jackson's whereabouts until the spring of 1963. See *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.*, 61-70. *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.* can be found in Ernie Lazar's collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 2).

to Hall, Jackson was interested in the financial negotiations “for personal reasons” as he would like to “feather his nest” by controlling the Soviet funds.<sup>1791</sup>

Apparently this was not the first time when Jackson had expressed his interest in the financial dealings between the CPSU and the CPUSA. Before the CPUSA delegation’s departure for the Soviet Union, Morris Childs asked Gus Hall to write him a letter which he could give to the CPSU officials in Moscow. The letter stated that Morris Childs alone “was to deal with the Soviets on ‘confidential matters’ having to do with the relations between the CPSU and the CPUSA”. The reason for acquiring such a letter was that during the past two years James Jackson had “made efforts within the Party in the U.S. to attempt to get some control of the apparatus which CG 5824-S\* has had for a number of years”.<sup>1792</sup>

The 1961 visit to Moscow was not the last time that Jackson expressed his interest in money coming in from the Soviet Union. In September 1964 Jackson visited the Soviet mission in the United Nations in New York City and requested that he would be given funds immediately. The Childs brothers’ Soviet contact person Vladimir Chuchukin – who told Jack Childs about the incident – said that the Soviets were “very much upset” and wanted an explanation as to why Jackson made such a request when all financial transactions were made “through channels”.<sup>1793</sup>

The FBI directors immediately noticed that such a misstep by Jackson would open great possibilities to affect the CPUSA’s internal affairs:

The Bureau feels that this situation will afford CG 5824-S\* [Morris Childs] an excellent opportunity to take steps to discredit James Jackson in the eyes of Gus Hall and thereby virtually eliminate any possible consideration that Hall may be giving to having Jackson assume a more responsible position within the national leadership of the Communist Party, USA. In this connection, CG 5824-S\* should pull no punches in advising Hall of the seriousness of Jackson’s indiscretion. It is suggested that CG 5824-S\* point out to Hall that the CPUSA has been placed in a most embarrassing position by having to offer an explanation for Jackson’s stupid blunder.<sup>1794</sup>

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1791 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on November 27, 1961; OSD, part 34, page 197. Morris Childs reported from Moscow already in October that Jackson was “making inquiries concerning CPSU-CPUSA financial transactions” which only Childs was authorized to discuss. Little later Childs reported that Jackson had been travelling around Eastern Europe attempting to raise money for “Party projects” in the United States. According to Childs, Jackson had visited GDR, Czechoslovakia and Hungary “without an authorization from the CPUSA”. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on November 2, 1961; OSD, part 34, page 113 and report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on November 9, 1961; OSD, part 34, page 138.

1792 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 25, 1962; OSD, part 40, pages 197-198. According to Childs, also Henry Winston had – “to some extent” – made similar efforts as James Jackson.

1793 Letter from the Director to FBI’s Chicago office on October 7, 1964; OSD, part 70, page 56. Another, more detailed Solo document reveals that Jackson had in the Soviet U.N. mission requested that he would be immediately given “color prints”. “Color prints” were code language used by Vladimir Chuchukin and Jack Childs and it referred to money. Traditionally a “color print” had signified a sum of \$1 000. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 5, 1964; OSD, part 70, page 60.

1794 Letter from the Director to FBI’s Chicago office on October 7, 1964; OSD, part 70, page 56.

When the incident was later discussed with Jackson, he “adamantly stated that he had never asked anyone in the United Nations specifically for money”.

Jackson then went on to explain that there are hundreds of people at the United Nations working as press representatives for various socialist countries. He stated that all of these press people live very well in this country, have good apartments, have cars etc. He stated that he had once suggested while talking to some of these press people, in his capacity as the editor of *The Worker*, that if these press people at the United Nations could see fit to perhaps send anonymously maybe \$5 or so a month to the Party or *The Worker*, this could represent a substantial amount and be of great assistance to the people and the Party. However, he stated he never specifically asked for any money and had only suggested the above contribution. Jackson stated that apparently they must have misinterpreted his suggestion as an outright request for money.<sup>1795</sup>

The Soviets took the incident seriously. When Morris Childs in December 1964 met with Mikhail Suslov, a member of the presidium and secretariat of the CPSU’s central committee, in order to discuss Soviet subsidies for the CPUSA in 1965, Suslov took up the issue. According to Suslov, Jackson had asked for an emergency loan of \$10 000 and said that *The Worker* would fold without such a loan. Criticism coming from such top Soviet leader was not a matter that could be taken lightly:

Suslov indicated that such requests must stop and that if the CPUSA expects to receive a substantial subsidy based on the budget submitted, then they must see to it that Jackson no longer makes such appeals.<sup>1796</sup>

Criticism coming from such high level did not, however, stop Jackson’s dubious dealings at the United Nations. During the spring of 1967 the Soviets complained about Jackson’s frequent visits to the Soviet diplomatic establishments and requested the CPUSA to take steps to limit such activities. Reportedly Jackson visited the Soviet mission at the United Nations as many as three to four times a week. In addition to that, he was “constantly hanging around the United Nations Missions of Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and other countries”.<sup>1797</sup>

According to the FBI agents, Jackson did not only hang around U. N. missions of the socialist countries, but he was “beginning to take into his own hands a number of details connected with the Party’s international contacts with which he was not formerly concerned”. This tendency worried the Chicago agents to such an extent that countermeasures were considered appropriate:

It would seem that a situation may be rapidly developing where Jackson in his quest for personal position may attempt to assume more of the matters which have heretofore been the exclusive province of the Solo operation. Counterintelligence action against Jackson, although desirable per se, has now begun to assume the added aspect of a necessary step for the defense of the Solo operation itself.<sup>1798</sup>

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1795 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on December 3, 1964; OSD, part 73, page 8.

1796 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 12, 1965; OSD, part 80, page 81.

1797 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on May 18, 1967; OSD, part 114, page 218.

1798 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on May 18, 1967; OSD, part 114, page 219.

The Chicago agents had a clear idea of the counterintelligence operation that should be implemented. The operation should be carried out with the help of media:

Publicity centered upon Jackson as the go-between for the CPUSA and the Soviet Union, receiving orders from Russians and other Parties of the international communist movement [...] could have a most salutary effect upon the integrity of the Solo operation as now constituted. Such an expose would almost surely kill any chance of Jackson replacing anyone engaged in the handling of confidential international matters.<sup>1799</sup>

The FBI headquarters did not, however, think that such an operation was needed. The headquarters did not see Jackson as a threat to Operation Solo. “If the Soviets are displeased with Jackson’s injudicious activities at the United Nations, it would be most unlikely that they would reverse themselves to trust him in the sensitive activities involved in the Solo Operation”, the headquarters replied. In addition to that, the headquarters also considered such an operation to be a security risk to Morris Childs.<sup>1800</sup>

While the headquarters opposed the idea of a counterintelligence operation against Jackson, it was not forgotten among the agents. Five months after the headquarters had turned down the proposal of the Chicago office, the New York office suggested that Jackson would be “neutralized” by publishing an article which could convince the Soviets that Jackson constitutes a threat to their operations. The New York office had written an article on Jackson and they suggested that it would be made available to the daily press when Jackson was leaving for the Soviet Union to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October revolution.<sup>1801</sup>

This time the idea was not discarded. A story on a power battle between Jackson and Hall in the CPUSA was published in *New York Sunday News* on November 5, 1967. The story – headlined “Two Battle to Rule U.S. Red Party” – was published at the time when both Hall and Jackson were in Moscow in order to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October revolution. According to the paper, “a pitched battle for control of the dissension-riddled U.S. Communist Party” would erupt “when party boss Gus Hall and the leading Negro Red James E. Jackson return from Moscow shortly”. The story – which, according to the writer Richard McCowan, was based on “highly informed sources” – predicted that Hall’s era as the party leader was coming to an end:

He [Jackson] considers himself to be the American Party’s leading theoretician on race relations and could be useful in fomenting civil unrest in this country. Hall, according to the sources, hates his guts.

Chairman Edwin Willis (D-La.) of the House Un-American Activities Committee said last week that there is no doubt that Communist elements “played a major and key role” in the 1964 Harlem race riots. The Soviets, seeking to exploit racial unrest, prefer Jackson to Hall. [...]

When he returns after the Moscow celebrations, Jackson is expected to be the key liaison man between the U.S. Communist Party and Red bloc delegates at the

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1799 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on May 18, 1967; OSD, part 114, page 220.

1800 Letter from the Director to Chicago office on May 26, 1967; OSD, part 114, page 207.

1801 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 19, 1967; OSD, part 117, pages 186-187.



United Nations. Hall will be left out in the cold – with Jackson the heir apparent to the shaky throne. [...]

The Jackson-Hall feud points out the growing black power movement in the party as the source of Jackson's new-found strength.<sup>1802</sup>

The article was clipped from the newspaper by CPUSA official Helen Winter and mailed to her husband Carl Winter who as the editor of *The Worker* was also in Moscow celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October revolution. The article was discussed by the CPUSA and CPSU members in Moscow. The Soviets were upset by the article which implicated that there is “a direct definite connection and liaison between the CPUSA and the CPSU”:

They indicated that this is precisely the sort of thing which they had previously warned the CPUSA about when Jackson had begun visiting Soviet establishments in the United States. They once again reiterated their request that Gus Hall restrain Jackson's activities in this respect.<sup>1803</sup>

The article was discussed with Gus Hall in the early December:

According to Hall, this article is “a lot of bunk” and the FBI is obviously the source of the article because it is the same type of thing that the FBI puts out. He stated that he believes it is an effort by the FBI and/or the right wing to worsen the relations between the USA and the USSR by showing that the CPUSA is a stooge of the CPSU. [...]

Hall also stated that Jackson has no business making these trips to Soviet establishments and, therefore, the CPSU should be informed that Hall will “keep Jackson out of their hair”.<sup>1804</sup>

FBI agents were satisfied with their operation which took place exactly as had been planned:

The Soviets and Hall reacted according to our plan and it appears we have eliminated Jackson as a potential rival to our Solo Operation which maintains the liaison between the Communist Party, USA and other communist parties of the world.<sup>1805</sup>

The FBI's newspaper article operation did not affect Jackson's position in the party and he remained the chairman of the foreign affairs department of the CPUSA. The relationship between Hall and Jackson remained tense. In January 1968, for example, Hall was angry at Jackson because he believed that Jackson had pocketed money from book deals with the Soviets.<sup>1806</sup> Hall's distrust towards Jackson increased when he learned – by leafing through

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1802 *New York Sunday News*, November 5, 1967. A photocopy of the article is included in the report from FBI's New York office to the Director on November 9, 1967; OSD, part 118, pages 67. Apparently the writer used FBI's ready-made article only as a starting point for his own work – the end result is somewhat different from the FBI article. The FBI article is included in the report from FBI's New York office to the Director on October 19, 1967; OSD, part 117, pages 186-187.

1803 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on December 12, 1967; OSD, part 119, page 19.

1804 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on December 12, 1967; OSD, part 119, page 19.

1805 Memo from C.D. Brennan to W.C. Sullivan on December 19, 1967; OSD, part 119, page 76.

1806 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on February 5, 1968; OSD, part 120, page 168.

Jackson's passport – that Jackson had visited Argentina recently. Hall was not aware of such a trip. Hall told Morris Childs that he was “flabbergasted” and that Jackson's activities worried him a great deal.<sup>1807</sup>

Hall's distrust towards Jackson did not decrease when he a few weeks later learned that Jackson had spent ten extra days in Paris when he was returning from a consultative meeting of CPs in Budapest in March 1968. Hall believed that Jackson had been in Paris with his girlfriend.<sup>1808</sup> Because of Jackson's capers and their political disagreements, Hall was not unreservedly happy to see Jackson as the CPUSA's representative in the preparatory meeting of CPs which was scheduled to begin in Budapest in late April 1968.<sup>1809</sup> The meeting prepared the international meeting of world's communist and workers' parties which eventually took place in Moscow in June 1969.

If Hall's relationships with Ben Davis and James Jackson were strained, it was little less so with Henry Winston, who became the CPUSA's chairman in 1966. Winston had been born in Mississippi in 1911 and he had joined the party in 1930. Although his background was somewhat different from Hall's, their adult lives bore many similarities. Hall and Winston both served in the U.S. armed forces during WWII and in the late 1940s they were both defendants in the first Smith Act trial. Just like Hall, Winston went underground in 1951 after he had received a five-year prison sentence in the trial. Winston surfaced in 1956 after hiding from the authorities for five years. Just like Hall, he was given an additional three-year sentence because of his underground escape. During his prison sentence a brain tumor was discovered. The tumor was removed but Winston lost his eyesight. In 1961 President John F. Kennedy commuted Winston's prison sentence on humanitarian grounds and he was released from prison.<sup>1810</sup>

Looking at Operation Solo documents, Gus Hall's relationship with Winston was double-edged. On the one hand Hall saw Winston as “a good front man and a person capable of

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1807 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on February 26, 1968; OSD, part 120, page 255.

1808 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 25, 1968; OSD, part 122, page 35. While being married with Esther Jackson, James Jackson had – according to Operation Solo documents – extramarital relationship with at least one other woman. In the fall of 1966 high-ranking Soviet officials Nikolai Mostovets, Igor Mikhailov and Timur Timofeev told Morris Childs that Jackson had a girlfriend residing in the Soviet Union. According to the officials, Jackson was “quite serious” with the relationship. He had sent Timofeev letters requesting that he would be employed by the Institute of International Workers' Movement in Moscow. Timofeev was the director of the institute. “He is requesting such employment ostensibly so that he can come to the Soviet Union to write and undertake private research, but actually he desires to be near his girlfriend”, Childs was told. See Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on November 25, 1966; OSD, part 110, page 12.

1809 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 28, 1968; OSD, part 122, page 120. Sara Rzeszutek does not mention any of these conflicts with Gus Hall or with the Soviets in her 2015 biography of James and Esther Jackson. All in all, her study offers very little detailed information concerning Jackson's party activities. When compared to Operation Solo documents, Rzeszutek draws a very different kind of picture of Jackson. According to her study, Jackson was a tireless campaigner for civil rights and a loving husband, whereas Operation Solo documents draw a more egoistic picture of Jackson.

1810 For more information on Henry Winston, see. *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 421-422

drawing great sympathy”, but at the same time he did not consider blind Winston to be a full-powered political actor. This could be seen when Hall discussed with Morris Childs sending a CPUSA delegation to the 13<sup>th</sup> congress of the Chilean communist party and to the Latin American Solidarity Conference which were held in Chile in October and November 1965. Hall hoped that Childs would travel to Chile with Winston, because Winston could not by himself re-establish the CPUSA’s relations with Latin American CPs as Hall wished.<sup>1811</sup>

In addition to Hall, the FBI had also noticed Winston’s propaganda value. Winston returned to the United States in February 1964 after living in the Soviet Union for two and half years. He had received medical treatment in the Soviet Union and hoped to return there to complete his treatment. According to one FBI chief, Winston’s return to the Soviet Union should somehow be prevented:

It is, of course, against our best interests to allow Winston to return to Russia. Winston has a great propaganda value to the world communist movement and is able to invoke terrific emotional appeal wherever he travels because of his allegations that he was tortured and blinded by “reactionary U.S. prison authorities”. By allowing Winston to once more return to Russia would only enable him to continue his anti-American activity from the point where he left off prior to his recent return to this country.<sup>1812</sup>

The FBI’s analysis of Winston’s propaganda value was correct, because according to Boris Ponomarev, the head of the international department of the CCCPSU, the CPSU regarded Winston “as the greatest living example of United States imperialistic brutality”. As such, the CPSU thought that Winston could be used as a propaganda asset in North Vietnam. According to Ponomarev, the CPSU had planned “to send Winston to North Vietnam to exert some positive influence on the North Vietnamese in an effort to change their ideological position in support of the Communist Party of China”.<sup>1813</sup>

Although Winston was “a good front man and a person capable of drawing great sympathy” – as Hall put it – he could also be a difficult person to get along with. During his lengthy stay in the Soviet Union in the early 1960s the Soviets repeatedly complained to Morris and Jack Childs about Winston’s difficult behavior. According to the Soviets, Winston acted in a very authoritative and arrogant manner. Morris Childs thought that as a result of the royal treatment Winston was receiving in the Soviet Union, he had become “hypnotized by his own importance”. One CCCPSU official had told Jack Childs that Winston was “most

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1811 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on September 10, 1965; OSD, part 93, pages 164-165.

1812 Memo from F. J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on March 19, 1964; OSD, part 60, page 21. Baumgardner also wrote that Winston “had been placed on exhibition by the Soviet Union and other European communist nations as an example of ‘capitalist sadism’ and of racial discrimination and brutality against Negroes in the United States”. In order to prevent Winston’s return to the Soviet Union Morris Childs should point out to Gus Hall – among other things – that Winston’s return would demonstrate the close connection between the CPUSA and the Soviets. Another way to prevent Winston’s return would be to have State Department to revoke his passport.

1813 J. Edgar Hoover’s letter to the attorney general, September 13, 1963; OSD, part 47, page 74.

difficult to get along with” and “six translators assigned to Winston had quit, and no one, including stenographers, could work with him”.<sup>1814</sup>

Apparently also Gus Hall got to learn about the difficult features of Winston’s personality after he became the chairman of the party. In June 1968 Hall instructed Morris Childs to ask the CPSU “to keep Henry Winston in the USSR for as long as possible when he arrives in Moscow for medical treatment”. The relationship between the two top leaders seems to have become troubled:

CG-5824-S\* [Morris Childs] told Hall that he will make no reference to the problems which Winston is creating for Hall, but will try to convince the Russians that Winston’s deteriorating physical condition should require extensive treatment.<sup>1815</sup>

### 5.1.2. Jewish party members

If Gus Hall’s relations with the CPUSA’s African American leaders were often strained, his relations with the members with a Jewish background were usually much better. In fact, looking at Operation Solo documents, it seems that Hall’s closest associates in the party consisted mainly of party members of Jewish background.

The large number of persons of Jewish background in the CPUSA leadership can of course be explained by the large number of persons of Jewish background in the party membership. There is no exact information available on the proportions of different ethnic and other groups in the party membership<sup>1816</sup>, but Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter claim in their study of Jewish radicalism that in the 1930s full half of the CPUSA membership were Jews and that their predominance continued in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>1817</sup> People of Jewish background were indeed overrepresented in the party, because historically the proportion of Jews in the United States was just a few percent. In the mid-1960s, for example, the proportion of Jews in the United States was only three percent.<sup>1818</sup>

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1814 Memo from F. J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on March 19, 1964; OSD, part 60, page 22. Henry Winston’s difficult behavior is mentioned repeatedly in Operation Solo documents. For example, in the fall 1961 Winston behaved like a boss towards his party comrades although he was not in a leading position in the party. He also caused Morris Childs embarrassment by “demanding special attention from the Soviets”. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 16, 1961; OSD, part 34, page 54 and report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 31, 1961; OSD, part 34, page 111.

1815 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on June 17, 1968; OSD, part 124, page 204. Unfortunately the Operation Solo documents do not reveal what kind of problems Winston had created for Hall.

1816 Nathan Glazer and Harvey Klehr, for example, examine Jewish members closely in their studies concerning the social basis of American communism, but neither of them present any estimation on the proportion of the Jews in the CPUSA. Klehr, who studied the party’s central committee members between 1921 and 1961, points out, however, that one third of all 212 central committee members had a Jewish background. See Glazer 1961, 130-168 and Klehr 1978, 37-52.

1817 Rothman & Lichter 1982, 99. See also Lewy 1990, 295.

1818 Isserman & Kazin 2000, 252.

Hall tended to co-operate with Jewish-background party members especially when he was dealing with party finances. Morris and Jack Childs – both Jewish – of course played a very central role in the CPUSA's internal finances. In addition to them, Jack Kling, Isadore Needleman and Max Weinstein were closely involved in handling the CPUSA funds. They were considered “trustees” to whom the party's reserve funds were entrusted, hard-core communists who followed party's oral instructions without asking questions or needing formal documents.<sup>1819</sup>

Chicago-based Kling had served as a depository for confidential CPUSA funds already during Eugene Dennis's leadership. In the 1960s he was also the state secretary of Illinois CP.<sup>1820</sup> New York -based Isadore Gibby Needleman was an attorney for Amtorg Trading Corporation, which was the trade organization of the Soviet Union in the United States. He also played a role in the confidential communications between Moscow and the CPUSA.<sup>1821</sup> Chicago-based Max Weinstein was a businessman and trusted, long-time party member. In the spring of 1966 Weinstein made a lengthy trip to the socialist bloc countries to negotiate business arrangements which could financially benefit the CPUSA.<sup>1822</sup> According to an FBI report, in June 1965 Kling was holding reserve funds for \$102 000, Needleman for \$20 000 and Weinstein for \$15 000.<sup>1823</sup> In September 1965 an additional \$16 000 were transferred to Kling “to hold as CPUSA depository”.<sup>1824</sup>

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1819 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 29, 1962; OSD, part 41, page 183.

1820 Not surprisingly, Kling does not discuss CPUSA's financial affairs in his 1985 autobiography *Where the Action Is: Memoirs of a U.S. Communist*. For more information Kling, see, for example, report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 25, 1965; OSD, part 84, page 91.

1821 For more information on Needleman, see, for example, report from FBI's New York office to the Director on July 7, 1964; OSD, part 66, page 172. Later in the 1960s Needleman was closely involved in Gus Hall's horse dealings with Eastern European countries which will be studied in detail in Appendix 3 of this study.

1822 For more on Weinstein's trip, see report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 1, 1966; OSD, part 100, pages 61-68.

1823 Memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 19. In addition to the three persons mentioned above, CPUSA reserve funds were also held by Helen Winter (\$25 000), “Hall's friends in Cleveland and Wisconsin” (\$10 000) and “Hall's relatives in Clifford, Wisconsin” (\$5 000). Kling and Weinstein did not only hold the CPUSA's reserve funds but they also made investments with the party money. As mentioned earlier in this study, Gus Hall was very eager to have the CPUSA's monies invested in promising businesses. Morris Childs made most of the investments, but in June 1965 Kling and Weinstein invested more than \$15 000 in bumper reprocessing business. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on June 30, 1965; OSD, part 91, pages 98-99.

1824 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on September 30, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 86. Not all CPUSA members involved in financial activities had a Jewish background, however. Lement Harris was a son of a successful commodities broker and had graduated from Harvard. He was actively involved in agricultural politics and became one CPUSA's leading agricultural specialists. According to Operation Solo documents, Harris had been involved CPUSA's secret financial activities already in the 1940s when he assisted CPUSA's financial officer William Weiner together with Jack Childs. In another Operation Solo document, Harris is described as “old-time party member, confidant and financial advisor”. See memo from R.W. Smith to W.C. Sullivan on September 16, 1965; OSD, part 94, page 8 and memo from C.D. Brennan to W.C. Sullivan on July 24, 1967; OSD, part 116, page 94. For more information on Harris see *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 181-182.

In addition to financial matters, Jewish party members held influential positions also in other functions of the Hall-led CPUSA. One example of this was Carl Winter who had been Hall's co-defendant in the Smith Act trial and who had held important positions in the party ever since the 1920s.<sup>1825</sup> In the factional squabbles of the CPUSA in the late 1950s Winter was a centrist, together with Hall.<sup>1826</sup> Just like Morris Childs, Winter seems to have been Gus Hall's confidante when it comes to handling the CPUSA's international relations. In the summer of 1965 Hall chose Winter to make a lengthy trip to Romania, the Soviet Union and Cuba. Morris Childs had just returned from a two-month trip to the Soviet Union and was physically exhausted so Hall decided to send Winter instead of him.<sup>1827</sup> In addition to Romania, the Soviet Union and Cuba, Winter also visited Mongolia during his trip that lasted almost three months.<sup>1828</sup> In January 1966 – three months after his return to the U.S. – Winter was appointed as the chief editor of *The Worker* after James Jackson was released from the position. It is unclear whether the troubled relationship between Hall and Jackson played a role in Winter's appointment as the chief editor. Officially the reason for Jackson's leave was the book he was writing on the "Negro question" in the United States.<sup>1829</sup>

Another CPUSA member with a Jewish background who is frequently mentioned in Operation Solo documents is Hyman Lumer. He was elected as the CPUSA's educational director in the 17<sup>th</sup> national convention in 1959. Lumer was well suited to work as an educational director as he was an exceptionally well-educated CPUSA member. He had earned a Ph.D. in biology at the Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio in 1935.<sup>1830</sup> He taught biology at the Western Reserve University and at Fenn College in Cleveland

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1825 Winter had been, for example, the head of the Young Communist League in the 1920s and chairman of the Michigan CP in the late 1940s. His original name was Philip Carl Weisberg but like so many Jewish communists he changed his name. Carl Winter was married to Helen Winter, who was involved in CPUSA finances and like Jack Kling, Isadore Needleman and Max Weinstein held party's reserve funds. Unlike her husband, Helen Winter did not come from a Jewish family. Her father Alfred Wagenknecht was a leader in the Socialist Party of America in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and later in the CPUSA. For more information on Carl Winter, see *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 422-423.

1826 *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 423. Also Finnish American communist leader Carl Ross positioned Winter in the center group together with Eugene Dennis, between the more extreme groups led by John Gates and William Z. Foster. See Carl Ross's oral history interview transcript, part III, p. 44.

1827 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on June 15, 1965; OSD, part 90, page 126. Morris Childs did not see that Winter's trip posed a risk for Operation Solo. Winter was an explicitly reluctant traveler and was not interested in taking over Childs's position as CPUSA's "foreign minister". Interestingly, Winter – who was a highly devoted communist – told Childs that he wanted make his stay in the Soviet Union as short as possible. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on June 16, 1965; OSD, part 91, pages 57-59.

1828 Winter was not able to meet Fidel Castro during his two-week stay in Cuba because "Castro was not available". Hearing this angered Gus Hall profoundly. For a detailed information on Winter's trip, see report from FBI's New York office to the Director on November 16, 1965; OSD, part 96, pages 34-37.

1829 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on January 24, 1966; OSD, part 98, page 110. Jackson did publish two books related to the "Negro question" after his term as the editor of *The Worker*. *The Meaning of "Black Power"* was published in 1966 and *U.S. Negroes in Battle – From Little Rock to Watts* was published in 1967.

1830 *Investigation of Communist Activities in the Youngstown and Northern Ohio Areas*, 5956.

where he also headed the biology department. Lumer left the academic world in 1947 and started working as a union organizer for the United Electrical Workers' Union. He was arrested in the 1950s under the anticommunist section of the Taft-Hartley Act and later served an 18-month prison sentence.<sup>1831</sup>

Looking at Operation Solo documents, Lumer seems to have been a close confidant of Gus Hall, much like Carl Winter. In 1960 Lumer was so closely connected to Hall that Eugene Dennis complained that it was impossible to talk to Hall because Lumer, "Hall's shadow", was always around.<sup>1832</sup> In 1965 Hall appointed Lumer to establish a joint communist party leadership school together with the Canadian CP.<sup>1833</sup> He was also made responsible for selecting the U.S. students to the school.<sup>1834</sup> In the mid-1960s Lumer traveled frequently to the Soviet bloc countries, representing the CPUSA, for example, at the CPSU's 23<sup>rd</sup> congress in April 1966 together with Morris Childs, James Jackson and Henry Winston. He also published articles frequently not only in *Political Affairs* but also in *World Marxist Review*.

The fact that Hyman Lumer was made the editor of *Political Affairs* in 1963 can be seen as another indicator of Hall's close connection to Lumer. Hall disliked the fact that Herbert Aptheker, who had edited the journal since June 1957, had opened its pages to non-party leftists. By extending the list of contributors Aptheker hoped to boost the sales of *Political Affairs* and thus expose wider audiences to its ideas. Such thinking was too much for Hall who criticized Aptheker also for not being in close touch with the party and for not consulting the party leadership. Eventually in May 1963 Aptheker was replaced by Lumer and Betty Gannett who became the executive editor of *Political Affairs*.<sup>1835</sup>

### 5.1.3. Female party members

Kate Weigand's 2002 book *Red Feminism – American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* emphasizes the role of the communists in the American feminist movement and states, for example, that "the Communist Party's work on women's issues in the 1940s and 1950s laid important groundwork for the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s". "Even though the radical women's movement was, by the 1970s, very different from that of the 1940s and 1950s, feminists also incorporated important elements of the Communist Party's program into their agenda for women's liberation", Weigand writes.<sup>1836</sup>

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1831 *New York Times*, July 26, 1976. Lumer's short biography is also included, for example, in his 1970 pamphlet *Israel Today: War or Peace?*

1832 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on February 4, 1960; OSD, part 18, page 35.

1833 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on February 24, 1965; OSD, part 82, page 227.

1834 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on June 9, 1965; OSD, part 90, page 117.

1835 Murrell 2015, 146. The short notice which was published in *Political Affairs* in May 1963 of course did not reveal the tensions between Hall and Aptheker. It said that the "brilliant and creative" editor of the journal was taking a leave and would assume "other high responsibilities in the field of Marxist research and scholarship" which were soon to be announced publicly.

1836 Weigand 2002, 142 & 157.

According to long-time CPUSA member Bettina Aptheker, Weigand's view of the CPUSA is distorted and idealized. As Weigand's study is based solely on archival sources and not on interviews, she does not get an accurate picture of the party's stance on women's liberation, Aptheker points out. In her opinion, Weigand "wishes for more than was true about the Party". To Aptheker, the book's title *Red Feminism* is an oxymoron. "To say that Communist women of the 1940s and 1950s 'were revolutionizing the way the Party dealt with women's oppression, liberation and history' as Weigand repeatedly asserts, is so far from the reality of Party life as I knew it as to be ludicrous – no matter what the archival record shows", Aptheker writes. According to her, the party was not only male-dominated, but also male-centered, fiercely anti-feminist and deeply sexist and homophobic:

Male superiority was assumed in matters of theory and political analysis; women were objects of sexual prey in ways we would now call sexual harassment; women and children were victims of domestic violence and worse.<sup>1837</sup>

In her study of women and CPUSA, Rosalyn Baxandall draws quite a similar picture of the party as Aptheker in her critique of Weigand's book. Baxandall refers, for example, to the case of Mary Inman, who was purged from the party in the 1940s because of her views on housework as productive labor. Baxandall points out that while in the 1940s half of the party membership were women, they remained a distinct minority in the party leadership.<sup>1838</sup> In the 1960s many young female activists joined the party, but "many of those who joined left quickly, as it was hard to put up with the ageing, bureaucratic, culturally and politically stagnant, conservative leadership". According to Baxandall, the CPUSA never saw sexism as a similar problem in the U.S. society as it saw racism. "The CPUSA dismissed the second wave of feminism [of the 1960s and 1970s] as it had the first, as bourgeois", Baxandall writes.<sup>1839</sup>

Dorothy Healey criticized the CPUSA's attitude towards feminism in a 1977 interview. Just like Baxandall, she chided the party for not taking part in the new wave of feminism that emerged in the 1960s. According to Healey, the party leaders failed to understand the true nature of women's oppression:

The Party's position reduces the question of women's oppression to simply the class question of exploitation. This is really genuine ignorance. It just doesn't understand

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<sup>1837</sup> Aptheker 2002/2003, 521-522. Bettina Aptheker discusses CPUSA's sexism also in her 2006 autobiography *Intimate Politics*. Her criticism of the party and Gus Hall has been earlier discussed in the chapter concerning the 1968 occupation of Czechoslovakia. See Aptheker 2006, 4-5 & 104-105.

<sup>1838</sup> Also Elizabeth Gurley Flynn thought that women were inadequately represented in the CPUSA leadership in the 1940s. "Women comprised nearly half of the party by 1944, yet only a quarter of the twenty-eight-member national committee was female, and Flynn was the only woman on the governing political committee", Flynn biographer Helen C. Camp writes. See Camp 1995, 173.

<sup>1839</sup> Baxandall 1993, 156-159. Also feminist historian Jane Loaden criticized CPUSA on similar grounds as Aptheker and Baxandall. According to her, the CPUSA was – like all other American political parties – a male supremacist organization that subordinated legitimate feminine needs to other objectives. According to Daniel Rosenberg, CPUSA's disregard concerning gender equality issues continued until the early 1990s when many female members interested in these issues left the party. See Klehr 1978, 71 and Rosenberg 2019, 6.



the relative autonomy of oppression that rises above the class question, that crosses class lines.<sup>1840</sup>

Ellen Schrecker sees the CPUSA's relationship with gender equality issues in a slightly more positive light than Aptheker and Baxandall:

Attention to women's issues was not, it is true, central to the world of American Communism. Nonetheless, by the 1940s the party was relatively more attuned to what would now be considered feminism than any other political organization, even if, as was often the case, its egalitarianism was more rhetorical than real. Still, lip service was preferable to silence; and the discussions about "male chauvinism" in the CP's publications at least acquainted folks with the problem. Moreover, to the extent that the female activists and intellectuals within the communist orbit concerned themselves with what was then called the "woman question", they actually constituted a kind of missing generation within American feminism. They criticized the cultural as well as economic and political, subjugation of women, exposing sexism within their own movement as well as in the outside world. And they had an impact: Party publications stopped running pictures of bathing beauties; party schools taught women's history; some party couples even shared the housework. In the 1950s this was radical indeed. It was, therefore, no coincidence that a number of the New Leftists who shaped the women's liberation movement in the late sixties were red diaper babies from communist homes.<sup>1841</sup>

Looking at Operation Solo documents, the issues related to women, gender equality and feminism did not seem to be hot topics within the party leadership in the 1960s. These issues are hardly ever mentioned in the documents.<sup>1842</sup> They were also scarcely discussed in Gus Hall's speeches and pamphlets especially during the first half of the decade. In a sample of ten Gus Hall pamphlets from the 1960s, the issues related to women were not discussed at all before 1966 when Hall dedicated one page of his 80-page pamphlet *For a Radical Change – The Communist View* to issues related to youth and women.<sup>1843</sup> Hall's awareness of the issues related to women seems to have grown during the 1960s, because in 1969 he dedicated one whole page of his 96-page pamphlet *The Revolutionary Process*

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1840 Wiener 1977, 38. According to Healey, the CPUSA was the only organization on the left that opposed the Equal Rights Amendment, which the feminists were advocating in the 1970s. "In New York you had the spectacle of the Communist Party and the John Birch Society as the main opponents of the ERA", Healey said. In Healey's opinion, not even Angela Davis – who was the most prominent female CPUSA member in the 1970s – expressed views related to feminism which got "beyond Gus Hall's narrow approach". See Wiener 1977, 39.

1841 Schrecker 1998, 386 -387. Schrecker continues: "American Communism also empowered women by encouraging them to become politically active. Though the CP's top leadership remained overwhelmingly male, women often had considerable influence at the neighborhood level. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, for example, they organized consumer boycotts and set up day care centers; in the fifties they circulated peace petitions and worked for racial integration." See Schrecker 1998, 387.

1842 One of the few exceptions was Beatrice Johnson's letter to Gus Hall in April 1966. In her letter Johnson criticizes the CPUSA's new party program for paying too little attention to the problems of women. Johnson was *The Worker's* correspondent in Havana, Cuba. See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on May 13, 1966; OSD, part 103, page 156.

1843 See Hall 1966, 50-51. Vast majority of this one page is dedicated to the youth issues, however. The six sentences focusing on women mainly praise women's role in peace and civil rights movements. *For a Radical Change – The Communist View* consists of Hall's report and concluding remarks to CPUSA's 18<sup>th</sup> national convention in June 1966.

to these issues.<sup>1844</sup> In February 1970, he finally published an article in *Political Affairs* on women's liberation.<sup>1845</sup>

If one looks at Harvey Klehr's comprehensive study on the CPUSA's central committee members, the claims concerning male domination in the party seem justified. The women had traditionally been grossly underrepresented in the central committee. "In 1936, women made up 26.1 percent of the party membership, but only 12.8 percent of the Central Committee members were women. In 1944, 46 percent of party members were women, but only 20 percent of the Central Committee members were", Klehr writes.<sup>1846</sup>

Also when one looks at CPUSA's organization in 1961, claims of male domination seem to be justified. In the party's 11-member national board there was only one female member, chairwoman Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.<sup>1847</sup> In the 59-member national committee the situation was slightly more balanced as ten committee members were women.<sup>1848</sup> Among the 13 district chairmen named in a HUAC report, only one was a woman, Dorothy Healey, who led the Southern California district.<sup>1849</sup>

Along with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Dorothy Healey, the most high-ranking women in the CPUSA leadership in the early 1960s were Betty Gannett and Helen Winter.<sup>1850</sup> As mentioned earlier, Winter played a central role in CPUSA's clandestine money transactions but she was not a prominent figure like Flynn or Healey.<sup>1851</sup> She seems to have been one

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1844 See Hall 1969, 78.

1845 In his article Hall pointed out that struggle for women's liberation must be "closely related" to the class struggle. "Any attempt to deal with the struggles for the liberation of women as a thing in itself, separated from the overall struggle is self-defeating – it becomes a classless dead-end", Hall wrote. See Hall 1970a, 11.

1846 Klehr 1978, 75. According to Klehr, between 1921 and 1961, 29 women served on CPUSA's central committee which was 13.7 percent of all central committee members. He writes: "Women did face obstacles in the CPUSA: their advancement was slower than that of comparable men and only a handful were able to remain at the party's highest levels for more than a brief time. As in most political parties, men dominated the policy positions within the CPUSA. In spite of its professed commitment to equality, the party was unable or unwilling to ensure that more than a few women occupied Central Committee positions for long periods of time." See Klehr 1978, 81-82.

1847 In her study concerning women and the CPUSA, Rosalyn Baxandall calls Elizabeth Gurley Flynn a "token woman" in the party leadership. See Baxandall 1993, 154.

1848 According to Harvey Klehr, the number of women in the national committee in 1961 was the largest ever. See Klehr 1978, 75.

1849 *Structure and the Organization of the Communist Party of the United States*, 575-576, 578 & 582-583. According to the HUAC report, the CPUSA had 21 districts in 1961. Healey was the first female district leader in the CPUSA. She led the Southern California district for 20 years between 1949 and 1969. See Wiener 1977, 25 & 38.

1850 In addition to the four women mentioned above, also Miriam Friedlander, Flora Hall, Geraldine Lightfoot, Mildred McAdory, Charlene Mitchell and Juanita Wheeler sat in CPUSA's national committee in 1961. None of these six women served, however, in prominent party functions except Charlene Mitchell who was CPUSA's presidential candidate in 1968.

1851 In May 1965, Helen Winter acted as the chairman of the CPUSA's reserve fund committee. While she held such a position, she still did not know all details of the CPUSA's financing. When Gus Hall discussed the money deliveries with the Soviets in October 1966, he said that only he and Childs brothers knew all details. Hall told the Soviets that Winter "may have figured out the source of this money but is not aware of the amounts received or other details". See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on May 20, 1965; OSD, part 89, page 49 and report from FBI's Chicago

of Gus Hall's most trusted persons in the party, handling large sums of money and taking care of important party matters.<sup>1852</sup>

Betty Gannett had been in the party since the early 1920s and had, like so many other party leaders of the 1960s, worked as an organizer in the Midwest. In 1950 she became the party's educational secretary but a few years later she was convicted under the Smith Act and spent two years in jail. As mentioned earlier, in 1963 she became the executive editor of *Political Affairs*. In Dorothy Healey's opinion Gannett was a victim of the CPUSA's internal inequality between men and women:

If any man had had one-tenth the ability Betty had he would have been on the national secretariat from the beginning, but she was always relegated to subordinate positions. The only time when she was on the top was in the period of the underground when she and Pettis Perry were left in charge of the open national leadership. After the trials and the underground period, she was bumped back downstairs to become editor of the *Political Affairs*, which was not a highly regarded post. She always resented the male supremacy at work in the Party, although it wasn't until shortly before her death in 1970 that she was able to define it for what it was.<sup>1853</sup>

Gannett is seldom mentioned in the Operation Solo documents while Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the party's chairwoman from 1961 until her death in 1964, is much more frequently featured in the documents. The documents reveal that the relationship between Hall and Flynn was far from being frictionless. Hall did not hold Flynn in very high regard although the Soviets admired her.<sup>1854</sup>

Flynn was 20 years older than Hall and representative of a completely different generation. Already in her youth she had as an orator taken part in numerous well-known strikes around the United States. Through such actions she had become a well-known character within the American left. The famous Wobbly singer Joe Hill, for example, had named her "the Rebel Girl" in his song.<sup>1855</sup> Such a legendary figure was indeed an asset for the

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office to the Director on November 1, 1966; OSD, part 109, page 220.

1852 As mentioned earlier, in June 1965 Helen Winter was holding \$25 000 of CPUSA's reserve funds. She also received significant sums of Solo money for CPUSA's "national expenses". For example, in March 1967 she received \$50 000 for such purpose and in December 1967 she received similar sum for "national CP office expenditures for 1968". See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 4, 1967; OSD, part 109, page 46 and report from FBI's New York office to the Director on January 4, 1968; OSD, part 120, page 23.

1853 Healey & Isserman 1993, 178. While Healey praised Gannett's capability, she also criticized her abrasiveness and her actions during the so-called "white chauvinism campaign" of the early 1950s which aimed at eliminating racism from the ranks of the party. According to Healey, Gannett "wreaked a lot of havoc" during the campaign. Other CPUSA members had similar opinions concerning Gannett. According to communist writer Howard Fast, Gannett was "a stern watchdog of the party line as she saw it". During the white chauvinism campaign Gannett wanted to expel Fast because he had used improper language in one of his novels. In Carl Ross's opinion, "there was no narrower, more sectarian person in the whole CP structure than Betty Gannett". See Fast 1990, 299 and Carl Ross's oral history interview transcript, part III, 21.

1854 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on November 17, 1960; OSD, part 25, page 143. Morris Childs's message from Moscow after discussions with the Soviets: "Gus Hall should be advised to keep Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's name prominent in CP circles. She is admired by the Soviets."

1855 For more on Flynn, see, for example, *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 133-135

CPUSA which wanted to be seen as the representative of the U.S. working class. According to Harvey Klehr, Flynn was placed on the CPUSA's central committee "as a symbol of the party's ties to an older American radical tradition".<sup>1856</sup> Flynn's Irish American background was also a valuable factor for the party in which Western Europeans and also persons with Catholic background were under-represented.

Operation Solo documents contain several examples of Hall's dismissive and even contemptuous attitude towards Flynn. In September 1960 she was visiting Moscow. When Morris Childs traveled to Moscow, Hall told him that he wished that Flynn would remain in the Soviet Union until the end of the year. However, under no circumstances should she travel to China because the Chinese might be able to influence her, Hall warned. "She is not too astute politically speaking", Hall said to Childs.<sup>1857</sup>

While Flynn was in Moscow in the fall of 1960, the Soviets arranged two international conferences of the CPs in order to settle the Sino-Soviet dispute. Although Flynn was the vice chairwoman of the CPUSA at the time, she was not the party's leading representative at these conferences but Morris Childs flew in from the United States. Not surprisingly this angered Flynn who told Childs that she felt she had been "slighted". The decision was made by Hall, who most likely considered Childs politically more astute than Flynn.<sup>1858</sup>

Flynn became the chairwoman of party after Eugene Dennis's death in January 1961. During Dennis's chairmanship the position still had some political significance – although Dennis's health problems had largely prevented him from taking part in party activities during the last year of his life – but with Flynn's appointment the job became "primarily symbolic", as her biographers point out.<sup>1859</sup> For the communists Flynn was a useful "mass

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and *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 229-230.

1856 Klehr 1978, 120.

1857 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on September 23, 1960; OSD, part 25, page 57. Two weeks earlier Morris Childs was told in meeting with Eugene Dennis and Gus Hall that he should tell Elizabeth Gurley Flynn that she was "writing entirely too much". It is unclear whether it was Dennis or Hall who made this comment, but looking at Hall's later comments concerning Flynn, it is very likely that Hall did not disagree with such an opinion. See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on September 9, 1960; OSD, part 24, page 100.

1858 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on November 4, 1960; OSD, part 25, page 127 and report from FBI's New York office to the Director on November 25, 1960; OSD, part 25, page 151. Helen C. Camp discusses Flynn's political astuteness in her Flynn biography. According to Camp, Flynn was "impatient with theory" and "not comfortable dealing with abstract questions". "She was primarily an activist and not an intellectual, an idealist not an ideologue", Camp writes. In Flynn's opinion, the CPUSA's language should have been simplified. Party rhetoric, she complained, should have been "simple and intelligent [...] not marked by clichés and obscure use of words". Camp points out that Flynn was an exceptional character in the CPUSA leadership as she came straight into the top of the party when she joined it. Thus Flynn "had not served an ideological apprenticeship in the CP". "Other leaders often attributed her 'errors' to her syndicalist conditioning", Camp writes. See Camp 1995, 123, 144 & 200.

1859 Camp 1995, 294 and Vapnek 2015, 171. According to Helen C. Camp, Flynn "was probably named to squeeze out Ben Davis, who also wanted the position and might have been a viable rival for Gus Hall". While historians see Flynn's position as largely symbolic, Senator James Eastland – who was the chairman of the senate's internal security subcommittee – saw it differently in 1961. In his opinion, Flynn's recent return from the Soviet Union was no coincidence. It implied that the Soviets had designated her as the new chairwoman and that she had brought back from Moscow "a new plan for Red world conquest". See Camp 1995, 294-295.

figure” with wide connections to liberals and radicals outside the CPUSA. “Her poise and ability to gain access to the influential and well-to-do served the Communist Party as it had the IWW”, Helen C. Camp writes.<sup>1860</sup>

Flynn felt that she got along fine with Hall<sup>1861</sup>, but the feeling was not mutual. This could be seen in January 1964 after Flynn had written an article on the Sino-Soviet dispute for *Political Affairs*. In her article, Flynn told about her experiences in the two international CP conferences in which she took part in 1960, the 50-party meeting in Bucharest in June and the 81-party meeting in Moscow in November. Flynn’s straightforward article made it clear that in the Sino-Soviet dispute she – and the CPUSA – sided with the Soviets.<sup>1862</sup>

Although the article did not directly contradict the CPUSA’s official line in relation to China – quite to the contrary – it was too much for Gus Hall. In his opinion, the article “reflected an undesirable intimacy between the CPUSA and the Soviets”.<sup>1863</sup> Hall agreed with the Canadian CP leader Leslie Morris who had said that in her article Flynn “displayed excessive partisanship for the Soviet position with respect to the China-Soviet dispute”.<sup>1864</sup> Apparently Hall was thoroughly annoyed with the party chairwoman because in a discussion with Jack Childs he described Flynn as “senile and disruptive” and told him that the CP leaders were going to “sack” Flynn from the chairman’s post.<sup>1865</sup> It is unclear whether the CPUSA leaders eventually took any measures to sack Flynn. In any event, she was still the party’s chairwoman when she died in Moscow in September 1964 at the age of 74.<sup>1866</sup>

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1860 Camp 1995, 144 & 167.

1861 Vapnek 2015, 171. According to Vapnek, Flynn “got along fine with Hall, who had grown up in a Wobbly family of Finnish miners in Minnesota, but most people found him inflexible and resistant to change”. Dorothy Healey was irritated by Flynn’s adaptive approach towards Hall because “in Party meetings she was always very careful not to say anything unacceptable to Gus or to the Soviet Union”. See Healey & Isserman 1993, 174.

1862 In the beginning of her article, Flynn explains the reasons for writing it: “Today, when the Chinese Communists have thrown discretion in comradely relations to the winds and are publicly attacking all other parties who do not agree with them, including the CPUSA, and this without even a word of warning, it becomes my duty to acquaint my comrades with whatever information I have on the earlier stages of these differences and on attempts that were made to resolve them within the framework of the international Communist movement.” See Flynn 1963, 22.

1863 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on January 6, 1964; OSD, part 53, page 124.

1864 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on January 3, 1964; OSD, part 53, page 123.

1865 Teletype message from FBI’s New York office to the Director on January 22, 1964; OSD, part 56, page 44. The complicated relations between the communist countries were not Flynn’s speciality. According to Helen C. Camp, Flynn was “never comfortable with the intricacies of international relations”. She saw herself more as a “labor agitator” than “an expert on foreign affairs”. See Camp 1995, 148.

1866 Operation Solo documents contain a wealth of material related to Flynn’s last days and death in Moscow. Among other things, the documents contain information concerning Dr. Harry Epstein’s report on Flynn’s autopsy in Moscow. Epstein was present during the autopsy. According to Epstein, two things caused Flynn’s death: “Sclerosis of the liver owing to alcoholism and fatty degeneration of the heart”. Hall was glad that Epstein had participated in the autopsy “because that squelched all rumors that the Russians are incompetent as physicians and further verified the fact that the Russians were not the cause of Flynn’s death”. Interestingly, Helen C. Camp’s Flynn biography gives us a completely different cause of death: “Acute gastroenterocolitis, an inflammation of the lining of the stomach and intestines, aggravated by thromboembolus blood

#### 5.1.4. CPUSA intellectuals

As demonstrated in the chapter dealing with Gus Hall's relationship with the New Left of the 1960s, Hall did not hold intellectuals in very high regard. This was also the case when the intellectuals in question were CPUSA members.

Herbert Aptheker – who was often touted as the CPUSA's leading theoretician – became very familiar with Hall's attitude towards intellectuals during his CPUSA years. Aptheker's above-mentioned expulsion from the post of the editor of *Political Affairs* was just one example of the troubled relationship between him and Hall. Although Hall was, for example, ready to recommend Aptheker as the recipient of the Lenin Peace Prize in 1965 and 1966, the two men clashed many times over various issues before 1991 when Aptheker – like hundreds of other party members – left the CPUSA. In the 1960s they disagreed, for example, on the CPUSA's relationship with Marxists outside the party. Aptheker wanted to reach out to Marxists gathered around *Monthly Review* journal<sup>1867</sup>, but Hall was strictly against such measures.<sup>1868</sup> Later they disagreed on Aptheker's writings, the legal defense of Angela Davis, the American Institute of Marxist Studies and numerous other issues.<sup>1869</sup>

According to Herbert Aptheker's daughter Bettina Aptheker, Gus Hall and her father did not clash publicly:

I think there was always a lot of tension, but they were civil to each other. My father had real feelings for Henry Winston, but he always kept his distance from Gus Hall. [...] Gus disliked my father and he was hostile to him, but they were both civil to each other in public.<sup>1870</sup>

According to Dorothy Healey, intellectuals like Aptheker were in principle highly respected in the Hall-led party but were pushed aside when it came to policy-making. "Aptheker was widely known as the Party's 'theoretician', but inside the Party everyone knew that his opinions didn't count for much in determining policy. [...] The only role the Party

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clot in the lung artery". Camp does not discuss Flynn's alleged alcoholism in her biography, but she does mention, for example, that spaghetti and red wine was one of her greatest passions. Camp also mentions how Flynn enjoyed consuming alcoholic beverages when she was staying with Dr. Marie Equi in Portland, Oregon during the U.S. prohibition. See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on September 14, 1964; OSD, part 68, page 221 and Camp 1995, 135, 270 & 321.

1867 *Monthly Review* is an independent socialist journal which was founded in New York City in 1949 by economists Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman. In the 1960s the editors of the journal strongly sympathized the Cuban revolution. Sweezy's and Paul A. Baran's 1966 book *Monopoly Capital* became an important source of inspiration for the New Left intellectuals. For more on *Monthly Review*, see, for example, Renton 2004, 122-138.

1868 Murrell 2015, 246-247. Gus Hall criticized *Monthly Review* and *Monopoly Capital* repeatedly in his book *Imperialism Today*. Also Hyman Lumer and George Wheeler attacked *Monopoly Capital* in their articles in *Political Affairs* in February 1967. See Lumer 1967, 11-25; Wheeler 1967, 26-35 and Hall 1972a, 308-315 & 365-367.

1869 Murrell 2015, 275, 279-280, 290-291, 294-295 & 299. American Institute for Marxist Studies was an independent organization founded by Herbert Aptheker in the 1960s to bring together U.S. Marxists. Gus Hall wanted to bring the organization under CPUSA control and finally succeeded in the 1980s. See Murrell 2015, 317.

1870 Interview with Bettina Aptheker in Santa Cruz, California, August 2010.

leaders permitted intellectuals to play was that of providing a rationale for whatever the current Party line might be”, Healey writes in her autobiography.<sup>1871</sup>

Healey was not the only person who paid attention to the troubled relationship between the CPUSA and its intellectual members. The CPUSA’s lawyer John Abt, for example, saw the party in a similar way. “The organization, from its inception, being self-defined as a ‘party of the working class’, always had elements of anti-intellectualism and even distrust for its ‘petty bourgeois’ members”, Abt writes in his autobiography.<sup>1872</sup> According to Bettina Aptheker, “intellectuals were seen [in the CPUSA] as unreliable allies to the working class, with the potential to corrupt Marxism”.<sup>1873</sup>

Sam Webb – who became Gus Hall’s successor as the CPUSA’s leader after Hall’s death in 2000 – saw the party’s relationship towards intellectuals in a similar way. “They were not encouraged. They were underappreciated and underutilized. That was a part of the communist party culture. The emphasis was on the working class and many leaders were suspicious of intellectuals”, Webb said.<sup>1874</sup>

According to Jay Schaffner and Michael Zagarell – who both joined the CPUSA in the 1960s – the relationship between the party leadership and party intellectuals was far from being frictionless. In Zagarell’s opinion, Hall “never wanted any intellectuals around him” and he “led the party to an anti-intellectual direction”. “If you weren’t a worker, you were suspect”, Zagarell described Hall’s attitude.<sup>1875</sup> According to Schaffner, Hall did not want anyone challenging him from within the party:

The general secretary of the party was a fountain on all knowledge and understanding. This was the case in all Marxist-Leninist parties. Intellectuals were a challenge to that. In all communist parties there was a tension between the leadership and the academics. This was the case also with the U.S. party. [...] Marxism-Leninism was considered to be a science. General secretary was seen as the interpreter of that science.<sup>1876</sup>

The distrust towards intellectuals was not a new phenomenon in the CPUSA. According to historians of American communism, especially William Z. Foster was “profoundly suspicious of intellectuals as a social group”.<sup>1877</sup> According to James G. Ryan, Foster

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1871 Healey & Isserman 1993, 224.

1872 Abt & Myerson 1993, 212.

1873 Aptheker 2006, 216.

1874 Interview with Sam Webb in Kingston, New York, September 2016.

1875 Interview with Michael Zagarell in New York City, October 2013. According to Zagarell, Hall’s anti-intellectualism could clearly be seen also later when he ran for president: “When he ran for office, the slogan was ‘Put a steel worker in the White House’. Well, the average steel worker wasn’t really convinced by that because their attitude was that the president of the United States should know more than what a steel worker knows. In Hall’s mind and in other party leaders’ minds this was a powerful idea. But it wasn’t a powerful idea among average Americans who expected the president of the United States to have a degree in college and to be expert on something, economics, politics or something.”

1876 Interview with Jay Schaffner in New York City, October 2013. Hall’s successor Sam Webb saw Hall in a very similar way. According to him, Hall was a typical product of the communist movement. “In communist parties everywhere the leader was the fountain of all wisdom. He decided the party line, he had a lot of authority.”

1877 Barrett 1999, 181. According to Aileen S. Kraditor, “professionals and intellectuals were

“displayed open anti-intellectualism” and had a troubled relationship with New York -based intellectuals in the party.<sup>1878</sup> Long-time CPUSA member George Charney pointed out in his autobiography that Foster “liked his class struggle simple and clear”. In Charney’s opinion, “intellectual activity congealed” in the party after 1945, when Foster became the party leader “and the high priests took over to impose an authoritarian rule”.<sup>1879</sup> According to New York communist Vera Weisbord, “the Foster faction prided itself on being proletarian, and on having a monopoly on this distinction, for they were always denouncing the others as petit-bourgeois and intellectual (a term uttered with scathing contempt)”.<sup>1880</sup>

Gus Hall, who was a close follower of Foster in the late 1940s and early 1950s, may have inherited some of this attitude from his mentor. According to Dorothy Healey, Hall’s conception of Marxism was primitive and vulgar when compared to his predecessors like Eugene Dennis and Earl Browder:

Quite often when you’re talking publicly you have to popularize issues, but in the speeches to the Central Committee and to the Party membership you will find the most vulgar expressions of economic determinism, of primitive Marxism, a kind that was never present in Party leaders’ speeches in past decades. Go all the way back and you’ll never find this kind vulgar Marxism being projected – not by Gene Dennis, not by Browder.<sup>1881</sup>

Herbert Aptheker was of course not the only CPUSA intellectual who had to experience Hall’s negative attitude. According to Operation Solo documents, Gus Hall did his best to make sure that economist Victor Perlo remained pushed aside in the party.<sup>1882</sup> Perlo had been a party member ever since the 1930s. He was also known for his involvement in

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considered unreliable by nature” by the CPUSA: “A disproportionate part of the membership consisted of students, intellectuals and professionals [...] and they were more exposed to the enemy’s theories. The Party had to take greater care to ensure their orthodoxy.” According to Harvey Klehr, “proletarian origin was a potent proof of loyalty and solidarity [in the CPUSA] and a middle-class background was a stigma to be lived down”. At the same time in the 1930s and 1940s, however, the party constantly became more and more middle-class. See Klehr 1978, 33 and Kraditor 1988, 106.

1878 Ryan 1997, 47 & 81.

1879 Charney 1968, 185 & 223. According to African American author Richard Wright – who was a CPUSA member in the 1930s – the party’s relationship with the intellectuals was problematic already before 1945. During his membership Wright was told that “intellectuals don’t fit well into the Party” and he got an impression that “communists hated intellectuals”. Wright explained this hatred by referring to the unequal conditions in Russian before the revolution. See *The God That Failed*, 128 & 154.

1880 Quoted in Barrett 1999, 115. Also Barrett pays attention to the tense relationship between Foster and New York -based CPUSA intellectuals, whom the Fosterites called “City College boys”. “His [Foster’s] animosity toward the ‘City College boys’ might have derived partly from the frustration he felt at not having a better education himself and from a certain insecurity when it came to theory and ideology”, Barrett writes.

1881 Wiener 1977, 27.

1882 According to Michael Zagarell, Perlo was not the only economist within the party who had a difficult relationship with Hall. Also Ed Boorstein ended up clashing with Hall: ““For Gus, people came and went, like Ed Boorstein. When he didn’t like what Vic Perlo have to say, he started praising Ed Boorstein. He would say, well, this guy is brilliant. But then Boorstein started to raise some problems about what Gus was saying, so he dumped him also. That was the way he worked. You tried not to get on the wrong side because you knew there would be repercussions.” See interview with Michael Zagarell, New York City, October 2013.



espionage for the Soviet Union during WWII. He was a leader of a spy ring which consisted of people working for, for example, the U.S. War Production Board, the U.S. Senate and the Office of Strategic Services which was the predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>1883</sup> The Perlo spy ring was revealed in 1945 by Elizabeth Bentley who had helped running the Soviet espionage activities in the United States during WWII. Like most of the spies revealed by Bentley, Perlo was never convicted for his activities. The U.S. Justice Department decided not to bring espionage charges against the spies because besides Bentley's testimony the prosecutors had very little evidence.<sup>1884</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s Perlo wrote numerous books on economics and U.S. foreign policy for the CPUSA's publishing companies International Publishers and New Outlook Publishers. Among them was, for example, *How the Soviet Economy Works*, which was based on an interview with the Soviet first deputy prime minister Anastas Mikoyan.<sup>1885</sup>

Perlo's writings were apparently widely read among the editors of *World Marxist Review*, because the Prague-based journal of the international communist movement was interested in Perlo's contributions. In February 1964 *World Marxist Review* wanted Perlo to take part in an economic symposium in Prague, but Hall prevented his trip. According to Hall, Perlo was "nuts" and "did not know what he was talking about".<sup>1886</sup> Later Hall prevented Perlo from becoming the U.S. correspondent of *World Marxist Review* by saying that he did not have confidence in Perlo.<sup>1887</sup> In January 1965 when Victor Perlo was invited to speak at the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Hall said that he "had no objections but instructed that the CP of the Soviet Union be advised that Perlo would not be speaking for the CPUSA".<sup>1888</sup>

While Aptheker and Perlo could remain in the party despite their disagreements and differences with Hall, not all noted CPUSA intellectuals had the same privilege. One of the CPUSA's most honored theoreticians was kicked out from the party for good during the first years of Hall's leadership. Alexander Bittelman – who was born already in 1890 – had been in the CPUSA ever since its birth in 1919. In the 1920s he was deeply involved in the factional fights within the party. During that decade he also travelled frequently to

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1883 For more on Perlo spy ring, see, for example, Haynes & Klehr 1999, 116-129 and Weinstein & Vassiliev 1999, 223-237.

1884 Haynes & Klehr 1999, 129. Although the members of the Perlo group could not be prosecuted in the 1940s, Haynes and Klehr argue that Soviet documents in Moscow's archives and disclosure of the so-called Venona materials in 1990s "make their culpability very clear".

1885 In 1960 Perlo spent three months in the Soviet Union at the invitation of the Institute of World Economics and International Relations. During this trip Perlo travelled widely in the country and had the opportunity to conduct an interview with Mikoyan. See Perlo 1961, 5.

1886 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on February 24, 1964; OSD, part 58, page 79.

1887 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on November 3, 1964; OSD, part 72, page 35.

1888 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on January 7, 1965; OSD, part 75, page 4. Operation Solo documents do not offer any explanations for Hall's negative attitude towards Perlo, but Hall's reserved stance towards intellectuals in general may explain the phenomenon. It is also possible that Hall did not want Perlo to be seen as a representative of the CPUSA because of his past as a spy ring leader. Hall may have wanted brush Perlo aside in order to dispel the image of the CPUSA as an organization of Soviet spies. Apparently later the relationship between these two men got better. In the 1980s Perlo served as the chairman of the party's economics commission. In the 1990s Perlo – who in 1992 celebrated his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday – remained in the CPUSA with Hall and other hardliners after the 1991 split of the party. See Klehr 1988, 11 and Haynes & Klehr 1999, 129.

Moscow, representing the CPUSA in the Comintern. In the 1930s and 1940s Bittelman clashed frequently with CPUSA leader Earl Browder, pushing for more militant policies and warning against embracing Franklin D. Roosevelt too enthusiastically. In the 1950s he was – like so many other party leaders – indicted and convicted for violating the Smith Act.<sup>1889</sup> After his release from prison in May 1957, Bittelman called for a re-evaluation of the CPUSA's policy and a less doctrinaire approach to socialism. In October 1957 Bittelman published in *Daily Worker* a series of 12 articles in which he adopted some of the very positions he had so fervently denounced when they had been held by Browder.<sup>1890</sup>

In his articles, Bittelman proposed a peculiarly American road to socialism. He suggested that American communists strive for new, intermediate goal of “welfare state” which would precede an eventual “peaceful and constitutional transition” to a communist system in the United States. Bittelman's views angered especially his old ally William Z. Foster who in 1957 was leading the most militant wing in the CPUSA. Not surprisingly, Foster accused Bittelman of being a revisionist like John Gates, the chief editor of *Daily Worker*.<sup>1891</sup> Foster was not, however, the only one who was angered by Bittelman's writings. According to Joseph Starobin, Bittelman's views also “roused the ire” of such centrists as Eugene Dennis and Gus Hall.<sup>1892</sup>

In 1959 Bittelman announced plans to publish his views in a book form. Although the party leadership threatened him with dire consequences if he published it, the book *A Communist Views America's Future* was released in September 1960. Following the book's release the national secretariat of the CPUSA instructed Bittelman's local party club in Westchester, New York to terminate his membership. The secretariat accused Bittelman of violating the “Party principles of democratic centralism” and “insistent defiance of Party discipline”. According to the secretariat Bittelman was guilty of “departure from Marxism-Leninism” and “bourgeois individualism”. His views of capitalism evolving into communism were a “reformist and revisionist” deviation from true Marxism-Leninism. When Bittelman's party club terminated his membership in November 1960 and the national committee affirmed the action in January 1961, thus ended the membership of one of the founders of the CPUSA, which had lasted for more than 40 years.<sup>1893</sup>

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1889 For more information on Bittelman's lengthy party career, see *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, 31 and *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 29-31.

1890 For a summary of Bittelman's expulsion process, see, for example, Draper 1960, 432-433 and Howe & Coser 1962, 562. Bittelman's expulsion was discussed among other things in his HUAC hearing in November 1961. See *Structure and the Organization of the Communist Party of the United States*, 560-561.

1891 *Structure and the Organization of the Communist Party of the United States*, 560.

1892 Starobin 1972, 243.

1893 *The New York Times*, November 24, 1960; *The Worker*, December 4, 1960 & January 24, 1961 and *Structure and the Organization of the Communist Party of the United States*, 561. During the first years of Gus Hall's leadership the party did not only kick out members whose thinking went too far to the right, but also those who went too far to the left. In January 1961 Homer B. Chase, CPUSA's district organizer in the New England district, was expelled from the national committee. He was accused of “sectarian” and “ultra-left dogmatist” deviations and “irresponsible anti-Soviet statements”. According to Chase, Khrushchev's attacks against Stalin were unjustified and against the interests of the working class. He also saw Mao Tse-tung as “an outstanding Marxist-Leninist”. As mentioned earlier in this study, also Milton Rosen and Mortimer Scheer – who then founded

### 5.1.5. Midwestern party members

Irving Howe and Lewis Coser point out in their history of the CPUSA that there was a significant change in the party leadership after the 17<sup>th</sup> national convention in 1959 although the top names in the party – Hall, Dennis, Davis, Flynn – were familiar:

The main centers of “revisionism” had been the East and West Coast branches, while those in the Midwest remained comparatively orthodox. As a result, the new National Committee contained a heavy proportion of “practical party workers” from the Midwest, Communist organization men who would not be troubled by theoretic speculation; and of these Gus Hall [...] was the prime example.<sup>1894</sup>

The national committee had 59 members in 1961. Fifteen of them represented the Midwestern states.<sup>1895</sup> This was in line with CPUSA’s membership figures because in 1961 roughly every fourth member came from these twelve states.<sup>1896</sup> The Midwest was represented by some close associates of Gus Hall, like Carl and Helen Winter from Michigan and Morris Childs, who represented Missouri.<sup>1897</sup> Some Midwestern representatives – like Ohio’s Anton Krchmarek<sup>1898</sup> and James West<sup>1899</sup> from Illinois – would later serve in important CPUSA functions. The most high-ranking representative of the Midwest was of course Chicago’s Claude Lightfoot who in 1961 served as the CPUSA’s vice chairman together with Henry Winston.<sup>1900</sup>

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Progressive Labor Party – were in 1961 expelled from the party for similar reasons. See *Structure and the Organization of the Communist Party of the United States*, 559-560.

1894 Howe & Coser 1962, 563. Howe and Coser mistakenly claim that Hall became the general secretary of the party only after Eugene Dennis’s death in 1961. Hall became general secretary already in 1959 in the 17<sup>th</sup> national convention, where Dennis was elected as the national chairman.

1895 *Structure and the Organization of the Communist Party of the United States*, 575-576. The figures mentioned here are from 1961.

1896 See Ernie Lazar’s collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 1).

1897 *Structure and the Organization of the Communist Party of the United States*, 575-576. Childs lived in Chicago so it is slightly surprising that he represented Missouri in the national committee. Missouri was not a major membership state for the CPUSA. According to FBI statistics, in 1961 there were 49 CPUSA members in Missouri. See Ernie Lazar’s collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 1).

1898 Anton Krchmarek represented the CPUSA together with Carl Winter at the congress of Romanian Workers’ Party in July 1965. See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on June 28, 1965; OSD, part 91, page 88.

1899 James West represented the CPUSA at the congresses of the CPs of Czechoslovakia and Mongolia in May and June 1966. He had spent two years in Moscow in the 1930s as the representative of Young Communist League in the Young Communist International. In 1977 he moved to Prague where he worked in the staff of *World Marxist Review*. After returning to the United States in 1983 West became CPUSA’s international secretary. See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on June 6, 1966; OSD, part 106, page 191-192. For more information on West’s party career, see *People’s World*, April 29, 2005.

1900 Based on Operation Solo documents, Gus Hall’s relationship with Claude Lightfoot seems much less problematic when compared to his relationships with other prominent African American CPUSA members like Ben Davis and James Jackson. In December 1967 the FBI classified Lightfoot as “a staunch supporter of Gus Hall”. Perhaps because of his good relationship with the general secretary, Lightfoot made several lengthy trips in the 1960s representing the CPUSA not only in Canada, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe but also in India, African countries and Cuba. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on December 21, 1967; OSD, part 119, page 171.

The Midwestern representation was not limited to these fifteen committee members, however. The Midwest had a disproportionately large representation in the national committee because a large number of New York representatives had some kind of connection to the Midwest. New York – by far the CPUSA's biggest membership state – had 28 representatives in the committee. At least seven of them had strong connections to the Midwest: Philip Bart<sup>1901</sup>, Gus Hall, Clarence Hathaway<sup>1902</sup>, Arnold Johnson<sup>1903</sup>, Hyman Lumer, Jack Stachel<sup>1904</sup> and William Weinstone<sup>1905</sup>.

This group of men was indeed influential in the CPUSA in the very beginning of the 1960s, because five of them sat in the 11-member national board of the CPUSA. In addition to general secretary Hall, organizational secretary Bart, educational secretary Lumer, press director Stachel and Hathaway, who did not have a specific portfolio, sat in the national board.<sup>1906</sup> And while Arnold Johnson was not a member of the national board, he still played a significant role in the CPUSA in the 1960s as the party's public relations director.<sup>1907</sup> William Weinstone was perhaps the least influential member of this group, but he did, for example, represent the CPUSA together with Morris Childs in Budapest in June 1968 in a meeting preparing an international conference of communist parties.<sup>1908</sup>

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1901 Phil Bart served as an organizer of the Young Communist League in Detroit in his youth. Later in the 1930s he served as a CPUSA organizer in Cleveland, Ohio and as an organizational secretary in the CPs of Indiana and Ohio. In the early 1950s – during the so-called underground years – Bart operated as the party's organizer in the area that covered among others Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, North and South Dakota and Wisconsin, so he indeed had a thorough knowledge of the Midwest. See *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.*, 89-90. *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.* can be found in Ernie Lazar's collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 2).

1902 Clarence Hathaway was a Minnesota-born trade union and party veteran who had, among other things, served as a CPUSA organizer in Chicago. Tim Weiner claims in his *Enemies – A History of the FBI* that Hathaway was an FBI informer. Weiner's claim is based on Operation Solo documents. The documents Weiner refers to do not, however, show unambiguously that Hathaway indeed was an informer. The source of these doubts concerning Hathaway was the archives of the CCCPSU, according to which Hathaway had been an informer for the FBI in 1920. See Weiner 2012, 50 and report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on March 14, 1960; OSD, part 19, pages 29-32. For more on Hathaway, see Klehr 1984, 26-27 and *The New York Times*, January 25, 1963.

1903 Arnold Johnson was a son of Swedish American parents from Seattle, Washington, who had a background in Christian socialism and a degree in theology. He had joined the CPUSA in 1936 and had served as the state secretary and the chairman of the Ohio CP in the 1940s before Gus Hall. See *The New York Times*, September 28, 1989 and Pecinovsky 2019, 28-29.

1904 Stachel had served as district organizer in Michigan in 1929-31 and had been involved in organizing workers in the auto industry. See *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 369.

1905 Just like Stachel, Weinstone had also worked as district organizer in Michigan in the 1930s and had been involved in organizing workers in the auto industry. See *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 411.

1906 *Structure and the Organization of the Communist Party of the United States*, 578.

1907 In 1961 Johnson was considered to be a Fosterite and was thus not wholly trusted, which may explain why he was not member of the national board. Later during the decade he seems to have become one of Hall's closest associates, taking care of numerous confidential issues. In 1966 Johnson accompanied Hall during his two-and-half-month trip which covered Uruguay, several Eastern and Western European states, the Soviet Union and Mongolia. For doubts concerning Johnson, see report from FBI's New York office to the Director on May 9, 1961; OSD, part 30, page 38.

1908 Operation Solo documents show clearly that Gus Hall had only limited confidence in Weinstone when it came to his Budapest meeting participation. In Hall's opinion, Weinstone's role was only to act as a front to Childs who wanted to stay out of limelight. Before Weinstone left

Looking at the composition of CPUSA's national committee and national board in the beginning of 1960s, it seems that Howe and Coser were right about the CPUSA's leadership. The leadership consisted largely of "practical party workers" from the Midwest who were not "troubled by theoretic speculation". Many of the key players in the party leadership had been involved in organizing workers in the 1920s and 1930s and many of them had also spent some time in Moscow during the same decades working for the Comintern or studying at the International Lenin School.<sup>1909</sup> Howe and Coser were not the only ones paying attention to the strong representation of the Midwest in the party leadership. According to Dorothy Healey, Gus Hall brought with him to the party leadership an "Ohio gang" of which Arnold Johnson – Hall's old associate from the 1930s – was a one example.<sup>1910</sup> While these "practical party workers" dominated the party organs, so-called revisionists of the East and West Coast branches were a tiny minority within the national committee. In the national board they were not represented at all.<sup>1911</sup>

### 5.1.6. Finnish American party members

If the Midwest was well represented in the party leadership in the beginning of 1960s, one traditional ethnic CPUSA group – which to a large extent lived in Midwestern states like Minnesota and Michigan – was almost totally absent. The Finnish Americans, who in the early 1920s were by far the biggest ethnic group in the party, were 40 years later represented only by Gus Hall.

In 1922 the Workers' Party of America – the predecessor of the CPUSA – had little more than 12 000 members of which more than 5 800 – i.e. more than 48 percent of all members

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for Budapest, Hall had a talk with him to make sure that he does not get the CPUSA in trouble by "saying wrong thing at a wrong time". According to Hall, Weinstone had "displayed some talent" in doing that. Hall told Weinstone to follow the lead of Morris Childs. If he was ever in doubt, Hall said, he should follow the lead of the CPSU – then he would never go wrong. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on May 29, 1968; OSD, part 124, page 149 and report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on June 17, 1968; OSD, part 124, pages 203-204.

1909 Out of the eleven members of CPUSA's 1961 national board, six had extensive experience in organizing workers (Hall, Flynn, Lumer, Potash, Stachel and Hathaway) and likewise six had been in Moscow in the 1920s or 1930s in matters related to Comintern or Lenin School (Hall, Winston, Lightfoot, Potash, Stachel and Hathaway). Genderwise and agewise the national board was quite homogenous: all of its members were men except Elizabeth Flynn and except two persons born in the 1890s (Flynn and Hathaway) they were all born between 1900 and 1914.

1910 Healey & Isserman 1993, 183. Originally the term "Ohio gang" refers to a group of politicians surrounding President Warren G. Harding in the early 1920s. Harding had become acquainted to many of these men while being a state-level politician in Ohio. Some members of the gang became involved in financial scandals during Harding's presidency. Following Harding's sudden death of a heart attack in 1923, many members of the gang were removed from their powerful positions by Harding's vice president and successor Calvin Coolidge. See, for example, Gentry 1991, 122.

1911 The strongest foothold of "revisionism" in CPUSA's national committee in the early 1960s was the district of Southern California which was represented by Benjamin Dobbs, Dorothy Healey, Charlene Mitchell and Pettis Perry. According to Healey's autobiography, at least she and Benjamin Dobbs were critical of the party leadership already in the early 1960s. See Healey & Isserman 1993, 173.

– were members of a Finnish-language section of the party.<sup>1912</sup> This proportion decreased rapidly during the next decades due to several factors. A large part of the Finns left the party during the Bolshevization campaign in the mid-1920s. Many Finns left the party also because of the 1929-30 dispute concerning the cooperatives. Thousands of party members moved to the Soviet Union in the early 1930s to build the workers' dream society during the so-called Karelian Fever. In the early 1930s the share of the Finns in the party membership had already shrunk to less than ten percent.<sup>1913</sup>

The decrease of the Finnish CPUSA membership continued throughout the 1930s. While the old communists gradually aged and died, the younger generation did not fill the ranks of the party. The children of the communists were not interested in their parents' ideology. Instead they took advantage of the opportunities the American society gave them: they went to school, learned English, got themselves an education and a job. Many second-generation American Finns were strongly attracted to American mass culture and rebelled against their ethnic background and the cultural mores of the Finns, including their radical political thinking.

International politics also affected the CPUSA membership of Finnish Americans. When the Soviet Union attacked Finland in November 1939, Finnish American communists had to ask themselves whether they should support their old homeland or the first workers' state. Some remained loyal to the Soviet Union but many Finns were alienated from the CPUSA ranks.<sup>1914</sup>

What do the Operation Solo documents tell us about the role of the Finnish Americans in the CPUSA in the 1960s? To what extent did Gus Hall have connections with Finnish American communists? Very little. Finnish American communists are mentioned in the Operation Solo material only couple of times. But while they are not frequently mentioned, Hall seems to have trusted them, because he considered his Finnish-background comrades as possible associates in dealing with the CPUSA's clandestine finances. In March 1960 Hall suggested to Morris Childs and Eugene Dennis that Finnish American Helen Kruth could be used as a courier and a depository of the CPUSA's secret funds. According to Hall, Kruth knew Otto Kuusinen and his family personally and had handled the CPUSA's funds already in the past. Hall said that he could "swear by her". Kruth lived in Trumansburg in the eastern part of the state of New York. Apparently Childs and Dennis did not see Kruth as a potential associate, because she is never again mentioned in the Operation Solo documents.<sup>1915</sup>

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1912 Glazer 1961, 42 and Kostiainen 1978, 138.

1913 Kostiainen 1978, 192.

1914 According to Carl Ross, the Winter War was a fatal blow for Finnish American communism: "It [the Winter War] shattered the influence of the Left. Nobody was conscious at the time of how disastrous the effect was. [...] In the 1929-30 co-op situation the Communists lost the organizational mass base which they had but in the 1939-40 situation they really lost their intellectual or political credibility. They were literally wiped out." See Carl Ross oral history interview transcript, part II, 70.

1915 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on April 1, 1960; OSD, part 20, page 43. Pennsylvania-born Helen Kruth had a thorough knowledge of the Soviet Union as she had spent five years in the country in 1929-1934 mainly studying in Leningrad. After her return from the Soviet Union she mainly lived in New York working for the Party. In the 1970s she edited Finnish

Another long-time Finnish American communist seems to have acted as a money depository for Gus Hall. In 1967, when Hall was considering different options for depositing the CPUSA funds, one of the alternatives was to “salt” some of the money with Matt Savola in Wisconsin. Two years earlier the FBI’s thorough report on the CPUSA’s funds had revealed that \$10 000 were held by “Hall’s friends in Cleveland and Wisconsin”. It is of course not certain that the FBI’s 1965 report refers to Savola but it is highly likely. Hall and Savola had known each other since the 1930s, when Savola had worked as an organizer for the International Woodworkers of America in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.<sup>1916</sup>

The absence of Finnish American communists from Operation Solo documents is not surprising when one looks at the CPUSA’s membership figures in Michigan and Minnesota, the two traditional Finnish states in the United States. According to FBI statistics, in 1961 there were 203 CPUSA members in Michigan and 183 members in Minnesota.<sup>1917</sup> Such figures were very modest compared to the early 1920s, when the Workers’ Party of America had almost two thousand members in Minnesota, northern Wisconsin and northern Michigan.<sup>1918</sup>

While CPUSA’s membership in these two traditional Finnish states was very low, Gus Hall desired to see a stronger CP in his birth state. In a press conference in Minneapolis in February 1964 Hall said that the CPUSA was ready to support the Minnesota communists financially and in other ways “to raise the work of the Communist movement to a higher level”. According to Hall, this would also make the labor movement and the civil rights movement stronger in Minnesota. “For the good of Minnesota, I would pledge that we do everything we can to build the Communist movement within the state”, Hall said.<sup>1919</sup>

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American labor newspapers *Työmies Eteenpäin* and *Naisten Viiri* in Superior, Wisconsin. In 1978 she joined Helvi Savola in leading the Minnesota-Dakotas CP. She was married to Helsinki-born Niilo Kruth who had studied in Moscow’s International Lenin School and who fought and was wounded in the Spanish civil war. Niilo Kruth died in 1964. Later Helen Kruth got married to George Leiviska, another Finnish American veteran of Spanish civil war. See CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 115, folder 14 and Juusela 2003, 433.

1916 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on June 23, 1967; OSD, part 115, page 238. Savola was, among other things, one of the leaders in the 1937 lumberjack strike in Michigan. Among the loggers Savola was known as the author of the slogan “Lumberjacks of the world unite – you have nothing to lose but your bedbugs”. After WWII Matt and his wife Helvi – who had worked as his secretary before their marriage – learned that because of his communist activities Matt could no longer find employment within timber industry. In the early 1950s they moved to Wisconsin where they ran the local co-op store for more than twenty years. They retired in 1972, but soon Gus Hall – whom the Savolas had known since the late 1930s – asked them to fill the post of Minnesota-Dakotas CP district organizer which they did. Matt died in 1977 but Helvi continued leading the Minnesota CP until the late 1990s. She died in November 2006 in Wisconsin at the age of 91. See CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 115, folder 14; *People’s Weekly World*, Sept 24, 1994; *City Pages*, Oct 6, 1999; *The Community Dispatch*, July 1999; *People’s World*, Jan 12, 2007 and Kaunonen 2009, 36.

1917 According to the FBI statistics, the CPUSA’s overall membership in 1961 was 5 262 members. New York was by far the biggest membership state with its 2 006 members (38 percent). Michigan’s share of CPUSA’s membership was 3.9 percent and Minnesota’s share was 3.5 percent. See Ernie Lazar’s collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 1).

1918 In 1923 the Workers’ Party had 1 783 members in Minnesota, northern Wisconsin and northern Michigan. 85 percent of these members – 1 516 persons – were Finnish Americans. In Minnesota the party had 623 Finnish American members. In the whole state of Michigan, the party had 1 215 Finnish American members. See Kostianen 1978, 146 & 212.

1919 Quoted in *Communist Activities in the Minneapolis, Minn. Area*, 1687.

There is no information on whether the CPUSA actually increased its support in its Minnesota district, but if it did, the results remained meagre. In 1965 the CPUSA had only 157 members in Minnesota. There is no information on Minnesota's membership figure in 1964, but in comparison with the 1961 figure Minnesota membership had decreased by 141 percent.<sup>1920</sup>

According to FBI informer Ruthann Withrow, who was a member in the Minnesota party from 1958 to 1961, the party was struggling with ageing membership. According to Withrow, the Minnesota party members were "afraid that they will all die off and it [the party] won't continue". Without young members it was difficult for the CPUSA to argue that it was the movement of the future, Withrow pointed out.<sup>1921</sup>

Hall's explicit willingness to support the communists of Minnesota may be explained by his deep affection for his birth state.<sup>1922</sup> Hall visited Minnesota and its northern mining range frequently, staying with his brothers with whom he went hunting and fishing which were his favorite hobbies.<sup>1923</sup> His brothers were not actively involved in the communist party activities in Minnesota but through Hall they became connected to the CPUSA finances. Hall used his brothers in northern Minnesota as a depository for CPUSA funds, just like he probably did with Matt Savola in Wisconsin.<sup>1924</sup>

Whereas "Hall's friends in Cleveland and Wisconsin" held only relatively small sums of CPUSA money, Hall was ready to deposit much larger sums with his brothers. In July 1967 he flew to Duluth with Morris Childs carrying \$250 000 in a black club bag.<sup>1925</sup> Hall left the money to his relatives. According to Hall, the brothers planned on burying part of the money on Hall's brother's property. "Some portion of it will be hidden elsewhere at his brother's residence so that it will be readily available when Hall calls for it", Childs reported to the FBI.<sup>1926</sup> Some months later Hall told Childs that it had been decided that "the money should be placed in a sealed steel container, probably a cylinder" and this container would then be "buried in concrete inside the home of one of his brothers".<sup>1927</sup>

Hall's affectionate relationship with his state of birth is also reflected by the fact that as the general secretary of the CPUSA, he was eager to help his old Minnesota friends when

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1920 According to FBI statistics, Michigan's membership figure had dropped to 180 in 1965 which was 11 percent less than in 1961. See Ernie Lazar's collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 1).

1921 *Communist Activities in the Minneapolis, Minn. Area*, 1723.

1922 The feeling was apparently mutual, at least to some degree. According to FBI informer Norman John Boehnke, the Minnesota CP was proud of the fact that the general secretary Gus Hall came from Minnesota. See *Communist Activities in the Minneapolis, Minn. Area*, 1673 & 1759.

1923 Interview with Dennis Halberg in Superior, Wisconsin, August 2008.

1924 In the 1960s Hall also implemented a lengthy project to acquire rare Arabian stallions from Eastern European countries to his brothers Toivo and Veikko Halberg in Northern Minnesota. Operation Solo documents contain detailed information concerning this venture. The project will be studied more closely in Appendix 3 of this study.

1925 The Minnesota trip is also mentioned in Barron 1995, 154.

1926 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on July 27, 1967; OSD, part 116, pages 137-138.

1927 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on November 7, 1967; OSD, part 118, page 53. The Operation Solo documents released so far do not contain any further information concerning this \$250 000.



they visited the Soviet Union in the 1960s. In April 1965 Hall sent several messages to the Soviets concerning the Moscow visit of his old friend Knuti Seitaniemi, who was a lumberjack and an active CP member.<sup>1928</sup> Seitaniemi was coming to Moscow for the May Day celebration. As Seitaniemi was a decorated war hero, Hall suggested that he could also join the “20<sup>th</sup> celebration of the victory over Hitler Fascism” later in May together with Robert Thompson, another decorated CPUSA WWII veteran. Hall also wished that the Soviets could offer Seitaniemi medical treatment for his war wounds as he still had bomb splinters in his leg.<sup>1929</sup> In addition to that, Hall asked the Soviets to help Seitaniemi to return to the United States via Finland where Seitaniemi had relatives.<sup>1930</sup>

In addition to Seitaniemi, Hall helped in a similar way Ernest Koski, business manager of Työmies Eteenpäin, the Finnish American left-wing newspaper published in Superior, Wisconsin. Koski and his wife had taken part in an international peace conference in Helsinki in July 1965 and wanted to travel to the Soviet Union after the conference. Hall wrote to the Soviets that Koski and his wife “should be treated like comrades and not like ordinary tourists”.<sup>1931</sup>

Hall’s eagerness to help his Finnish American comrades and the confidence he felt towards his “countrymen” can be seen as indications of his Finnish American identity. According to several interviewees, Finnishness was an essential part of Hall’s identity.<sup>1932</sup> According to them, Hall often made references to his Finnish American background and cracked jokes

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1928 Seitaniemi’s first name is spelled in different ways in different sources, alternatively Knuti, Knute or Knut. His family name is familiar to Minnesota history enthusiasts, because Seitaniemi’s family house in Waasa Township, Minnesota is listed on National Register of Historic Places. The house was built in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century by Knuti’s father Alex Seitaniemi who had immigrated to the United States from Sodankylä in northern Finland. Knuti Seitaniemi lived in the house until his death. See *Duluth News Tribune*, January 3, 2011.

1929 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on April 29, 1965; OSD, part 85, page 58. Seitaniemi served in the U.S. Army from September 1942 to September 1945. He fought in the Battle of Attu on the Aleutian Islands and later in the Marshall Islands. He was wounded in action in February 1944. He was awarded several decorations, including Purple Heart. See *Hometown Heroes – The St. Louis County World War II Project*, 287.

1930 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on April 23, 1965; OSD, part 86, page 4. According to Operation Solo documents Seitaniemi travelled to Finland from the Soviet Union in June 1965. He apparently spent several months in Finland, because in September Gus Hall told Jack Childs that Seitaniemi was in Finnish Lapland. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on September 15, 1965; OSD, part 93, page 196.

1931 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on July 12, 1965; OSD, part 91, page 119. Koski and Hall may have known each other since their youth as Koski was born in 1908 in Nashawauk, Minnesota which is not far from Hall’s birth place in Cherry, Minnesota. As a young man, Koski attended courses arranged by Young Communist League and took part in communist activities. It is unclear, however, whether Koski was a member of the CPUSA in the 1960s.

1932 According to Bettina Aptheker, Hall “was proud of his Finnish heritage, proud of his working class heritage and proud of being a Minnesotan”. See interview with Bettina Aptheker in Santa Cruz, California, August 2010.



*Gus Hall arriving to the birth country of his parents on August 22, 1966. At Helsinki-Vantaa airport he was welcomed by Ville Pessi, the general secretary of the Finnish Communist Party SKP and Anna-Liisa Hyvönen, the SKP's secretary of international affairs. On the left, Arnold Johnson, the CPUSA's public relations director.*

Source: Kansan Uutisten arkisto

about his Finnishness.<sup>1933</sup> This could be seen also in some newspaper reports.<sup>1934</sup> Hall could also refer to “old Finnish sayings” like “quarantining one dog does not eliminate rabies” – which, however, does not sound very Finnish to a contemporary Finn.<sup>1935</sup>

Hall's Finnish identity burst into full bloom during his visit to Finland in August 1966. As a part of his tri-continental trip which lasted for almost three months, Hall spent three days in his parents' native country following an invitation by the Communist Party of

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1933 Betty Smith and Jarvis Tyner paid attention to Hall's Finnish jokes in the interview with the author. According to Jarvis Tyner, “there were thousands and thousands of jokes about being a Finn”. “Gus used to tell a lot of jokes about Finns. He made all jokes jokes about Finns, it did not matter where they originally came from. He translated all jokes into being Finnish jokes”, Smith said. See interview with Betty Smith in New York City, August 2007 and interview with Jarvis Tyner in New York City, August 2007.

1934 See *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 18, 1981. During his speech at the University of Pennsylvania in November 1981 Hall cracked a joke in which Hall explained Finnish American radicalism by referring to Finns incapability of making money within American capitalism: “Two Finns bought a truckload of watermelons in Texas for one dollar apiece, he told the students. They hauled them up to Chicago where they sold them for a dollar apiece. Something's wrong, said one, turning to the other, we're not making any money. I suppose, said his companion, we'll have to buy a bigger truck.”

1935 *Daily World*, October 5, 1976. According to Michael Myerson, “Gus often referred to old Finnish proverbs, but nobody knew whether they actually were Finnish proverbs or if he just made them up”. Hall apparently used these “old Finnish sayings” often, because among his papers there is an undated handwritten birthday greeting card which says “There's an old Finnish saying:” on the cover page and “Happy Birthday, Gus!” on the inner page. The card was signed by numerous party members including Claude Lightfoot. See CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 194, folder 11 and interview with Michael Myerson in New York City, August 2010.

Finland. Hall and his delegation were hosted by general secretary Ville Pessi and Anna-Liisa Hyvönen, the cultural secretary of the communist party.<sup>1936</sup>

The media found Hall interesting because of his Finnish background and he was interviewed by the press, radio and television. Hall saw Finland as “a crossroads between the two social systems” and emphasized “the great significance of the participation of the Communist Party in the government”. According to him, the Finnish CP was “a mature party from which we have much to learn”.<sup>1937</sup>

Hall’s cousin living in some small town far from Helsinki saw him on national television and on the next day called the Finnish CP headquarters. The cousin urged Hall to come back and visit all of Finland instead of mere Helsinki. This wish was repeated by the Finnish party leadership. Following all this, the visit apparently had a strong influence on Hall. “During the course of his stay in Finland, Hall displayed great nationalism and ‘almost became a Finn’. Throughout his stay he spoke the Finnish language”, Morris Childs reported to the FBI.<sup>1938</sup>

## 5.2. Varying accounts of Gus Hall’s personality

### 5.2.1. Gus Hall according to his contemporaries

Before studying what Operation Solo documents reveal about Gus Hall’s personality it may be useful to look at how Hall’s contemporaries described his personality.

Hall’s CPUSA comrades gave highly varying accounts of the party leader in their autobiographical writings. Some, like his fellow Smith Act defendant John Williamson, highly praised Hall’s personality and his leadership skills, while others, especially female party members like Bettina Aptheker, Peggy Dennis and Dorothy Healey criticized Hall severely in their autobiographies.

According to Williamson, Hall was “a devoted communist and a courageous fighter against the class enemy” as well as “a defender of party principles and unity”. While being an industrial worker with little formal education, he had “through much self-education, reading and participation in working-class struggles become a worker-intellectual and fine party leader”.

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1936 *The Worker*, September 4, 1966 and report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 4, 1966; OSD, part 109, pages 264-265.

1937 *The Worker*, September 4, 1966 and report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 4, 1966; OSD, part 109, pages 264-265. In August 1966 Finnish People’s Democratic League – which was dominated by the communists – had three ministers in coalition consisting of 15 ministers. In the parliament FPD was the third biggest party with 41 MPs in the 200-member parliament.

1938 *The Worker*, September 4, 1966 and report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 4, 1966; OSD, part 109, pages 264-265.

Gus was a very warm person, easy to talk to and gifted in finding a common language with his listeners while putting across the most complex political argument. Gus also had that characteristic of Foster's – an ear or feel for what the factory worker or man in the street was thinking at a given moment. Reading Gus's reports, speeches and articles here in England these last years, I see a tremendous growth in his comprehension of Marxist-Leninist theory and its application to American conditions.<sup>1939</sup>

Also CPUSA's veteran leader William Z. Foster praised Hall for being a defender of the party's unity. CPUSA journalist Art Shields was in Moscow during the last months of Foster's life and discussed the CPUSA's situation with the veteran leader. "I admire Gus Hall. It was right that he should have become the general secretary of our Party. Gus was a worker himself for many years and he knows the importance of unity", Foster said according to Shields.<sup>1940</sup>

Such views were shared by many CPUSA members who – according to Daniel Rosenberg – described Hall by calling him "the very model of a working class leader", "a worker – bone and sinew" and "a man of the masses". Hall was "undiluted by intellectualism" and "a worker who rises from class consciousness to theoretical powers, but never loses the feeling of being just a worker".<sup>1941</sup>

However, there were many critical voices as well. Many CPUSA activists were critical of Hall's leadership skills. John Abt's view of Gus Hall was almost opposite to Williamson's opinion. "My sense was that he was far too bureaucratic for a post that, above all and especially at this time, required a keen ear and respect for others' thoughts", Abt wrote.<sup>1942</sup>

According to Abt, Hall was not good at handling disagreements:

He was always open to consulting with me as long he was assured that there would be a unanimity of views. But if he thought I was likely to give him advice he considered unwelcome, he avoided dealing with me directly, preferring to dispatch a subordinate.<sup>1943</sup>

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1939 Williamson 1969, 170-171. Williamson lived in Britain – the country of his birth – when he wrote his memoirs. Williamson was deported to Britain in 1955 after he had served his Smith Act prison sentence. If Williamson could have stayed in the United States after his prison sentence, he would have been a likely member of Hall's "Ohio gang" as he served as CPUSA's district organizer in Ohio in the 1930s. After his deportation to Britain, Williamson was an active member in the British communist party. For more information on Williamson, see *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 418.

1940 Shields 1971, 49. According to Daniel Rosenberg, Foster had supported Hall for general secretary in 1959. In Foster's opinion, Hall "had the stuff from which a Party leader could be made". See Rosenberg 2019, 11.

1941 Rosenberg 2019, 11. Not all CP members quoted by Rosenberg were fascinated by Hall. Benjamin Davis, for example, told James Jackson not to trust Hall. Several members found his everyman persona an act. Simon Gerson, the Party's electoral specialist, called him a "demagogue". Another member criticized Hall – and others around him – for being "too insular, too rigid and too closed to criticism". See Rosenberg 2019, 12.

1942 Abt & Myerson 1993, 237.

1943 Abt & Myerson 1993, 237. Another typical feature of Gus Hall – according to Abt – was lateness in payments. Abt could only receive his lawyer fees from the CPUSA after he had threatened to resign. See Abt & Myerson 1993, 239-240.

Some members like Junius Scales were disappointed by Hall's performance as the party leader:

Gus Hall, whom I had known since the late forties, had seemed to me a rock of unpretentious common sense and honesty. However, when he had finished his Smith Act sentence, he returned to lead the Party with a sectarianism, a pro-Soviet devotion and dullness that startled those who had known him earlier.<sup>1944</sup>

Peggy Dennis, Ben Dobbs and Dorothy Healey accused Hall of misleading them when he was campaigning for the leading post in the party 1959. According to Peggy Dennis, Hall "offered himself as being all things to all people" during his 1959 campaign and "played hard on the still-existing doubts and dissatisfactions of both Fosterites and former Gates people"; the two opposite groups within the CPUSA.<sup>1945</sup> Dennis accused Gus Hall of spreading false information concerning her husband Eugene Dennis during his 1959 campaign. Hall claimed that Eugene Dennis had surrendered to the authorities in 1951 when he was supposed to go underground like Hall, Gil Green, Henry Winston and Robert Thompson did. According to Peggy Dennis, the arrangements through which her husband could have gone into hiding failed surprisingly in July 1951.

In his campaign in 1959 to oust Gene as general secretary, Gus Hall revived a weird version of that incident. Travelling about the country garnering support for himself in the Party's top post, Hall spread the story that in 1951 Gene had deliberately violated the decision that he was to go underground, opting instead for what Gus called "the security and safety of prison".

When these stories came back to us, Gene merely shrugged, saying if anyone believed Gus' tale, then a denial on his part wouldn't make any difference. I was furious. Hall's sick view of prison as a haven of safety and security appalled me and I asked Gene angrily "How does Gus presume to know what happened to you on that night?"<sup>1946</sup>

California-based Dobbs expressed his disappointment in harsh terms:

When Gus Hall first came out here in 1959 he charmed me completely. Oh yes! And he was so self-critical. 'We're going to have a critique of the Soviet Union. They should have checks and balances, oh, absolutely.' Just lied like a bastard. Dorothy and I were completely behind him.<sup>1947</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Morris Childs saw Hall in a highly negative light. According to him, Gus Hall was "by nature exploitive and avaricious, and the deprivations of prison intensified his greed", because "during his incarceration, neither the party nor anyone in it gave any help whatsoever to his wife and children, and he was determined that they would never again be impoverished".<sup>1948</sup> Childs did not share Williamson's idea of Gus Hall as a warm person because he saw Hall as a "cold, humorless, robotic caricature of a bomb-throwing

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1944 Scales & Nickson 1987, 381. George Charney saw Hall in similar light in his memoirs. Charney was disappointed when it turned out that Hall – whom Charney had considered as "the soul of moderation" – was following the political line of William Z. Foster. See Charney 1968, 252.

1945 Dennis 1977, 237.

1946 Dennis 1977, 209.

1947 Quoted in Healey & Isserman 1993, 173. Dorothy Healey's view of Hall's California visit is similar but she expresses it in a more subtle manner. See Healey & Isserman 1993, 172-173.

1948 Barron 1995, 62.

Bolshevik”, who was disliked by most people. “He is a man without a friend in this world”, Childs described Hall.<sup>1949</sup>

In Dorothy Healey’s opinion, Gus Hall was “swept away by a vision of his own brilliance”.<sup>1950</sup> According to her, the general secretaryship of a communist party was usually “a lifetime sinecure” and the internal power dynamics at the top of the party were closer to feudalism than to socialism. In her opinion, Hall knew how to use such a system to his own advantage:

The general secretary is the lord; he surrounds himself with loyal vassals, each in charge of a minor fiefdom which is his to keep as long, and only as long, as he enjoys his lordship’s continued favor. When things proceed smoothly, the lord doesn’t interfere with the minor fiefdom’s surrounding him. So the editor of *The Worker* could run it as he saw fit, and the various district chairmen could run their local operations as they saw fit, as long they didn’t rock the boat, which was a great incentive for staying on good terms with the general secretary. There are all kinds of subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which Gus has learned to reinforce his power. There are extra funds available for vacations for Party leaders, and he gets to decide who gets those. When Party delegations are made up to travel to the Soviet Union or Cuba, his choices will get first priority. If you want to publish a book Gus can make it very easy for you to do so, through International Publishers or by finding you a ghost-writer if that’s what you need. It’s a very effective patronage system.<sup>1951</sup>

Another party veteran Gil Green had a very similar view of Gus Hall with Dorothy Healey. In his opinion, Hall was “a man taken up with his own importance”. According to Green, Hall controlled all money flows within the party and bribed people to do what he wanted. “Gus Hall does what he wants. Envelopes go all over”, Green said in an interview.<sup>1952</sup>

## 5.2.2. Interviewees’ views on Gus Hall

My interviewees’ views on Gus Hall were somewhat divided. Hall’s relatives tended to see him in a positive light whereas most of the CPUSA members interviewed were critical of their leader.

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1949 Barron 1995, 61. Childs also described Hall as an “ignoramus” who once asserted that ballet is just an excuse for pornography and that Bolshoi Ballet should be more accurately named the “Bolshoi Burlesque”. In addition to these descriptions, Childs also calls Hall “insufferable”, “thuggish and uncultured” and “an egotist”. While being all this, Childs points out, Hall was “not stupid”. See Barron 1995, 138, 204 & 233.

1950 Healey & Isserman 1993, 175.

1951 Healey & Isserman 1993, 176. In another context Healey criticized Hall for being unrealistically optimistic and detached from the reality of the party. Referring to the author of the 1952 bestseller *The Power of Positive Thinking*, Healey called Hall “the Norman Vincent Peale of the left wing”. “We were always winning everywhere. Everything was historic, everything was wonderful, never was there any analysis of what was happening in the real world, of the weaknesses of the Party, the problems, the handicaps to be overcome”, Healey said in a 1977 interview. See Wiener 1977, 26.

1952 Stephanson 1993, 319-321. Also prominent CPUSA member Michael Myerson accused Hall of improper use of party funds. “Packets of money in envelopes are given on the q.t. to the [...] inner circle in times of need”, Myerson said. See Rosenberg 2019, 12.

Hall's niece Kristin Koskela saw him as a warm and humorous uncle, who was never glum and who always knew how to look at the positive aspects of things – and who made delicious but super-heavy pancakes without sparing butter and cream.<sup>1953</sup> Hall's nephew Dennis Hallberg remembered him as a tough and tenacious fighter for his cause who did not allow the adversities of life to discourage him – and who loved deerhunting out in the woods of Minnesota.<sup>1954</sup>

The views of the CPUSA members were by no means identical. Some interviewees – mainly those who remained in the CPUSA after its split in 1991 – described Hall in a highly positive manner whereas some of the others criticized Hall severely.

Betty Smith – who stayed in the party through the turmoil of the early 1990s – describes Hall as “a very nice person, a very grandfatherly person”. According to her, Hall was a reasonable, persuasive and reconciliatory man.

He would listen to you and perhaps disagree with you. I think people who disagreed with him, they would actually concede to many points that he made. I think he had a reputation of seeking agreement and avoiding polarization. He always tried to bring things to some sensible conclusion.<sup>1955</sup>

Jarvis Tyner – another party remainder – described Hall even more positively. Tyner had joined the party in the 1960s and knew Hall well after decades of close co-operation in the party. Tyner was, for example, Hall's vice-presidential candidate in the presidential elections of 1972 and 1976.

First and foremost he was a worker. He had kind of a warm sense of humility of a working class person, but at the same time he was a strong leader of the party. He had a fighting spirit and a strong belief in what he was fighting for, and an uncompromising opposition to war, racism and exploitation. He just would not compromise.

He was an excellent organization man, he knew how to run the party. He was the unifier and rebuilders of the party and he played a leading role getting the party to come out publicly more. He had a good sense of humour, he was always laughing and his reports to the national leadership were always full of bits of humour. He has strong intellect and an extraordinary grasp of political tactics. He led the party from relative isolation to an open public presence in the country.

In social occasions he was always pleasant. He was a good man, he loved his family. He would just inundate you with stories about his grandchildren. There must have a hundred thousand times he told stories about his grandchildren and how that they were developing and the things they would say. He loved his wife Elizabeth and I

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1953 Interviews with Kristin Koskela in Cherry, Minnesota, August 2008 and Virginia, Minnesota, May 2010.

1954 Interview with Dennis Hallberg in Superior, Wisconsin, August 2008. According to Hallberg, Hall came to Minnesota for hunting not every year but many times. “He enjoyed being out in the woods. We would always get a deer because my dad and I and my uncle Butch we were all good hunters. We could always get plenty of deer. I remember a couple of times that Gus shot his own buck. He enjoyed being out there”, Hallberg said. According to him, Hall and his family loved venison. If Hall was driving back to New York he would pack the frozen venison in the trunk of his car and take it with him to New York. If Hall was not driving he shipped the venison to New York some other way.

1955 Interview with Betty Smith in New York City, August 2007.

think they had a very strong marriage, held together by the common political views and struggle.<sup>1956</sup>

Bettina Aptheker, who left the party already in 1981 after recurring clashes with Hall, described Hall as a patronizing sexist and an anti-intellectual bully in her autobiography.<sup>1957</sup> In the interview with the author of this study Aptheker emphasized Hall's social skills as an explanation for his successful career in the CPUSA:

He was very affable, very charismatic. He would "work a room". [...] If you were in a meeting, let's say like a conference or something, and there was a couple hundred people, he'd go all around all the delegates from all the different states. And he'd shake your hand, refer to you by your first name. He knew everybody. He had an ability to remember things about your family. He tried to develop a personal rapport with everybody.<sup>1958</sup>

While praising Hall's social skills, Aptheker – who after leaving the party made a career in the academic world and served as professor of feminist studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz – did not see Hall as "much of a Marxist theoretician". According to Aptheker, he had a "very limited capacity in that regard".<sup>1959</sup> Several other interviewees also doubted Hall's theoretical skills and profound knowledge of Marxist classics. Hyman Berman, a Minnesota labor historian who knew Hall personally, considered Hall "a very limited person":

He had the idea that he was one of the leading Marxist theoreticians in the English-speaking world. I doubt he ever read the classical texts of Marxism-Leninism, but that's what he thought. [...] He was fundamentally a bureaucrat. He held his position with great political skill.<sup>1960</sup>

According to Jack Kurzweil, Northern California communist who joined the party in 1962, Hall was stuck in the version Marxism-Leninism as it had been taught to him in his youth:

He was very shallow and very narrow in his thinking and very frightened of ideas that were not his or did not conform to an orthodoxy. [...]

There were many people in the party like Gus who had been given lessons in Marxism-Leninism at some point of their lives. For them that was it. They were

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1956 Interview with Jarvis Tyner in New York City, August 2007.

1957 Aptheker 2006, 104-105 & 216.

1958 Interview with Bettina Aptheker in Santa Cruz, California, August 2010. Dorothy Healey's son Richard Healey also praised Hall's social skills while he otherwise was critical of him. Richard Healey got to know Hall well in the summer of 1959 when Hall's family was living in Healeys' home in Los Angeles during Hall's tour around the country. Three years later Healey – who then was a college student – invited Hall to speak at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. "He was incredibly warm and friendly and a fun guy to hang out with. He was a very likeable man unlike some of the party leaders", Healey said. See interview with Richard Healey in New York City, October 2013.

1959 Interview with Bettina Aptheker in Santa Cruz, California, August 2010.

1960 Interview with Hyman Berman in Minneapolis, Minnesota, August 2008. Michael Myerson, who was a prominent CPUSA member from the late 1960s until the early 1990s, also questioned Hall's knowledge of Marxism-Leninism: "I don't think he ever really studied it after leaving the Lenin School. But there were Marx scholars in the party leadership. If he needed a Marx quote he could just ask them. He didn't know the classics but he could always find someone who knew. William Weinstone, for example, always fed him with quotes when he needed them." See interview with Michael Myerson in New York City, August 2010.



ideologically frozen. They could say Marxist sounding things, but there was no sophistication or any kind of deep thought.<sup>1961</sup>

Long-time party members Michael Myerson and Daniel Rubin pointed out that Hall had very little contacts with anyone outside the CPUSA. “His sources of information were quite limited, he was not a big reader”, Rubin said.<sup>1962</sup> Matthew Hallinan and Michael Zagarell, who both joined the party in the 1960s, were astonished by Hall’s meager – or even non-existing – interest in the affairs of other CPs. Hallinan remembered a trip to Moscow with Hall in 1969. For Hallinan that trip was the beginning of his disillusionment with Hall. During the trip Hall and Hallinan met a delegation from North Vietnam:

Gus Hall gave an overview of the role of the CPUSA which was totally inaccurate. He acted as if the peace movement was the communist party. [...] A representative of the North Vietnamese delegation asked Hall “So would you like to hear how things are going for us now?” Gus Hall looked at his watch and said “No, we have to go to another meeting.”

I just sweated all over, I felt so horrible that our party wasn’t doing anything that it should have been doing and the North Vietnamese guy had offered a chance for us to listen to what is going on in his country and Gus Hall didn’t have time for it. I went in my room and I didn’t come out for about four hours. I said something is not right here.<sup>1963</sup>

Michael Zagarell had a similar experience with Hall when he returned from a three-week trip to North Vietnam in 1970. Zagarell and his travel companions Jay Schaffner and Tony Monteiro had met with Vietnamese leaders during their lengthy trip, but Gus Hall was not interested in discussing the trip with the travelers. Zagarell was astonished – after all, Vietnam was the hottest topic in international politics at the time and also a major issue within the international communist movement.<sup>1964</sup>

Zagarell and Jay Schaffner – another prominent CPUSA member who joined the party in the 1960s – saw Hall in very negative light especially when it came to party finances. According to Schaffner, Hall was “a corrupt individual”:

He always claimed he lived on social security, but that was not true if you look at Solo documents. [...] He was very corrupt, he couldn’t keep party money and his own money separated.<sup>1965</sup>

Like many other party members, Zagarell pointed out that Hall “liked to live well”: he always travelled in first class and during his travels never stayed in party members’ homes

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1961 Interview with Jack Kurzweil in Berkeley, California, August 2010.

1962 Interview with Daniel Rubin in New York City, October 2013.

1963 Interview with Matthew Hallinan in Berkeley, California, August 2010.

1964 Interview with Michael Zagarell in New York City, October 2013. Some years later Zagarell experienced similar fate when he in Mexico met the leaders of the Communist Party of El Salvador: “At that time, there was a civil war in El Salvador and the United States was deeply involved in it. You would think an American communist party leader would be interested to hear about the views and estimates of the Salvadoran party. Once again, Gus Hall was not interested. He didn’t want to know. His attitude towards Salvadoran party was like who cares.”

1965 Interview with Jay Schaffner in New York City, October 2013. Much like Jay Schaffner, Jack Kurzweil also considered Hall to be a corrupt person. Kurzweil saw his Yonkers house, his horse deals and his chauffeur as signs of his personal corruption. Hall’s horse dealings will be studied closely in Appendix 3. See interview with Jack Kurzweil in Berkeley, California, August 2010.

but in hotels. Unlike most other party members, Hall had a good medical insurance coverage. Hall's three-bedroom house in Yonkers was not extravagant, but with its sauna, underground garage and large garden it was far more luxurious than party members' dwellings on average.<sup>1966</sup>

According to Zagarell and Schaffner, Hall used the money coming from Moscow to control and direct the party:

No one in the leadership was told about this money. It went to Gus and Gus spent it the way he wanted to spend it. He used the money as a political tool within the party. If you supported him, he made money available to you. There are comrades who he bought homes for. When I was young, he bought me a car. He bought me a Volkswagen, a year old Volkswagen when I first came in. And he would do this, but if you disagreed with him that would dry up. [...] He controlled the money.<sup>1967</sup>

Many people in the party were totally depending on Hall financially. They did not come from wealthy families and had no other source of income. Many of those who were depending on Gus remained with him after the party split [in 1991]. At the same time many of those who were not depending on him left the party. You could say that he bought his support.<sup>1968</sup>

When the interviewees described Hall's personality, certain characteristics were mentioned repeatedly. Hyman Berman, for example, described Hall "a person who over the years became very impressed by his own importance and was very self-centered".<sup>1969</sup> Bettina Aptheker said that Hall "saw himself as a very important historical figure".<sup>1970</sup> Michael Myerson also described Hall as being "very self-centered" and "a braggart", who tried to woo young communists to become his supporters by telling them how great he was. "Like Louis XIV who thought that 'the state is me' Gus thought that 'the party is me'. Loyalty to him was a sign of a good communist", Myerson said.<sup>1971</sup>

According to Sam Webb – Gus Hall's successor as the CPUSA's top leader – Gus Hall was "very vain" and "he thought a lot of himself". "He did everything to avoid being challenged. He didn't take kindly to criticism, he turned critics into enemies", Webb described.<sup>1972</sup> Michael Zagarell saw Hall in a very similar way. "You could not have a real reciprocal

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1966 Interview with Michael Zagarell in New York City, October 2013.

1967 Interview with Michael Zagarell in New York City, October 2013. Also Schaffner claims that Hall used cars as a reward for devoted party members: "Gus was bought a new car every two years. It was explained that this was done for security, that he needed a most up-to-date vehicle. The old car would go to the most loyal district organizer at the time." See interview with Jay Schaffner in New York City, October 2013.

1968 Interview with Jay Schaffner in New York City, October 2013. Sam Webb describes Hall's party finances in a very similar way as Schaffner and Zagarell: "Gus used money as a political tool to keep people in his camp. There's no question about that. He controlled the party's finances and in many cases he used the money to strengthen his own position. He bought favors from people." See Interview with Sam Webb in Kingston, New York, September 2016.

1969 Interview with Hyman Berman in Minneapolis, Minnesota, August 2008.

1970 Interview with Bettina Aptheker in Santa Cruz, California, August 2010.

1971 Interview with Michael Myerson in New York City, August 2010.

1972 Interview with Sam Webb in Kingston, New York, September 2016. Sam Webb served as the CPUSA's chairman from 2000 to 2014.

discussion with him. He did not really listen to other people, especially if they did not agree with him”, Zagarell said.<sup>1973</sup>

According to Hyman Berman, Hall could hold a grudge for decades against those who had left the CPUSA. Berman witnessed such an incident in Mesaba Co-op Park in Minnesota in the summer of 1977. As mentioned earlier in this study, Mesaba Co-op Park was – and still is – a gathering place for Finnish American and other left-wing radicals near Hibbing, Minnesota.<sup>1974</sup> In the summer of 1977 a summer festival was arranged in honor of Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party politician John T. Bernard.<sup>1975</sup> The festival drew hundreds of Farmer-Labor activists, Spanish civil war veterans, communists and other progressives to Mesaba Park. Among them was former communist Carl Ross who had left the CPUSA in the late 1950s. As mentioned earlier, Hall and Ross – both of them Finnish Americans – had known each other since their early youth when they both had taken part in the Young Communist League activities in Minnesota. According to Berman, their encounter in 1977 was “icy”:

The chair of the celebration was Gus Hall. During a break, Gus Hall came over to me to say hello. Carl was standing next to me, and I said, “Oh, you two guys know each other”. He looked at Carl and turned around and said, “I don’t know him”.<sup>1976</sup>

According to Berman, comparing Gus Hall and Carl Ross may help explaining Hall’s rise to the very top of the American Communist Party. The two Finnish Americans were roughly the same age and they had similar working-class background. They both progressed well in their careers in the Communist Party, as Berman points out:

The other person in the Finnish community that rose up into that point was Carl Ross. And they were both in leadership positions at the same time, but Carl Ross did not have the temperament to be the kind of manipulator and the kind of political schemer that Gus Hall was.<sup>1977</sup>

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1973 Interview with Michael Zagarell in New York City, October 2013. According to Zagarell, one could take advantage of Hall’s vanity and further his or her own ideas in the party machinery. “If you had an original idea, you would be wise not to raise it at a meeting. You would be wise to discuss it with Gus first privately and then often Gus would present it as his own idea”, Zagarell said.

1974 Mesaba Park is located only a few miles from Hall’s birthplace in Cherry, Minnesota. As mentioned earlier, Hall claims in his autobiographical writings that his father played a central role in founding and building Mesaba Park. In addition to that, Hall himself took part in building the dance pavilion in Mesaba Park in the late 1920s. See Gus Hall’s autobiographical manuscript, 21.

1975 John Bernard was elected as a Farmer-Labor representative to the U.S. congress in 1936. He became famous by being the only congressman who voted against Spanish arms embargo in January 1937. Bernard saw a Spanish arms embargo as pro-fascist because Hitler and Mussolini were already backing Franco. Bernard had close ties with the communists already in the 1930s, but there is no evidence that he was a CPUSA member. According to John Earl Haynes, Bernard accepted a Communist Party membership card at the Mesaba Park event which was called Johnny Bernard Memorial Picnic. At the time, Bernard was 84 years old. See Haynes 1984, 30 & 224.

1976 Interview with Hyman Berman in Minneapolis, Minnesota, August 2008. This incident is also mentioned in a slightly different form in Carl Ross’s oral history interview transcript, part IV, p. 14.

1977 Interview with Hyman Berman in Minneapolis, Minnesota, August 2008. In the late 1940s, when Gus Hall was the chairman of the Ohio CP, Carl Ross served as the leader of the Minnesota CP.

### 5.2.3. Gus Hall's personality in light of Operation Solo documents

While Operation Solo documents give us a good picture of Gus Hall's political line in the 1960s, they also tell us a lot about Hall's personality. They tell us, for example, about Hall's intense – if not furious – reactions to disagreements with Italian communists, with Nicolae Ceausescu and Fidel Castro.<sup>1978</sup> These incidents have been discussed in earlier chapters of this study. In addition to these reactions, Operation Solo documents reveal several other recurring features in his personality.

Hall could be described, for example, as an impatient and highly demanding superior. As Hall's close assistants, the Childs brothers did indeed experience this aspect of his personality. According to Jack Childs, Hall could become “enraged” if Childs did not immediately deliver him the Solo funds he had requested. On March 14, 1962, for example, Hall requested Childs to give him \$2 000 which he intended to give to George Meyers, a Baltimore CP functionary.

Being busy with other matters, NY 694-S\* did not go immediately to his safe deposit box for the money. Some hours later, Hall demanded to know why the informant had not delivered the money as yet and severely reprimanded NY-694-S\* for delay, stating that when he asked for money he wanted it immediately and not when the informant might decide to give it to him.<sup>1979</sup>

The fact that Solo funds were kept in safety deposit boxes created a problem, because Hall could ask for funds in the evening or during the weekends or holidays. Hall was against keeping Solo funds in banks or in rented safety deposit boxes and he assumed that the Solo funds were available for the Childs brothers at all times. As a solution to this problem, it was decided that Jack and Morris Childs would have \$50 000 available at their homes:

As a result of extended discussion at the recent Solo conference, it was agreed that in order to allay this apprehension by the informants, the sum of \$50 000 might be furnished to each informant to retain within his sole control in order to have this sum available in the event Hall should make a demand for such a substantial amount of money outside of normal banking hours. [...] We recognize that Bureau assistance might be necessary in order to prepare secure depositories in the informants' homes in the event that is the location at which the informant intended to maintain these funds.<sup>1980</sup>

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1978 Apparently Hall was not the first communist leader who was not good at handling political disagreements. According to Italian communist Ignazio Silone, who visited Moscow frequently in the 1920s, this was a recurring feature among the Russian leaders: “What struck me most about the Russian Communists, even in such really exceptional personalities as Lenin and Trotsky, was their utter incapacity to be fair in discussing opinions that conflicted with their own. The adversary, simply daring to contradict, at once become a traitor, an opportunist, a hireling. An *adversary in good faith* is inconceivable to the Russian Communists.” See *The God That Failed*, 101. Italics in the original.

1979 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on March 29, 1962; OSD, part 41, page 164. NY 694-S\* was the FBI code for Jack Childs.

1980 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on November 8, 1967; OSD, part 118, page 63. See also report from FBI's New York office to the Director on January 25, 1966; OSD, part 99, page 40 and letter from the Director to FBI's New York office on January 31, 1966; OSD, part 99, pages 31-32.

At least Jack Childs agreed with the FBI that a hidden safe would be installed at his home for the \$50 000 in cash.<sup>1981</sup>

Morris Childs experienced Hall's demanding personality especially during their mutual travels. After Hall's ten-week trip to Latin America, Europe and Asia in 1966 Childs's handlers in the FBI recommended a \$1 000 award for him as the trip had been so exhausting – partly because of Hall's "unreasonable demands":

The rigors of more than two months of constant pressure left him in a state of total physical and mental exhaustion. At the time of his return to the U.S. CG 5824-S\* [Morris Childs] has characterized this latest mission as the most difficult and trying mission he has ever undertaken, purely from physical standpoint. Gus Hall kept his party constantly on the go in a whirlwind tour of every country he visited, requiring more than fifty airplane flights plus numerous long motor and boat trips, frequent changes of climate and diet and even a camel ride in the wilds of Mongolia. In addition, the numerous high level meetings kept CG 5824-S\* under constant mental pressure as did his efforts to fulfill the unreasonable demands of Gus Hall for treatment that can be described as nothing less than royal. [...]

This last trip was by far the most difficult and arduous because of the fact that he [Morris Childs] was forced to play the role of "nursemaid" for Gus Hall.<sup>1982</sup>

Also during Gus Hall's visit to Montreal in August 1967 Morris Childs had to go through the trouble of catering to the luxurious taste of CPUSA's general secretary:

CG 5824-S\* arrived in Montreal, Quebec, Canada early on 8/22/67 and made contact with representatives of the CPC to inspect the quarters which had been reserved by them for Gus Hall and his party. Sam Walsh had rented three rooms that could sleep six to eight people but upon inspection it was determined that they were in a slum area of Montreal and CG 5824-S\* realized that Gus Hall would be very unhappy with such arrangements. Therefore, although CG 5824-S\* reimbursed Walsh in the amount of \$200.00 for the rental of these rooms, they were not used by anyone during the course of the visit. [...]

CG 5824-S\* then, after some difficulty, arranged new lodgings for the entire party at the St. Gabriel Lodge located in the Laurentian Mountains about 50 miles outside Montreal.<sup>1983</sup>

Being the leader of the communist party in the world's mightiest capitalist power, Gus Hall had saw himself as an important figure in the international communist movement. Following his central position, Hall expected to be treated as a significant communist leader by other communist parties. If this did not take place, Hall reacted strongly, as happened when Hall was not informed early enough about the Soviet leadership change in October 1964 when Nikita Khrushchev was removed from office. As has been mentioned earlier in this study, Hall was "extremely upset" and "in a very bad and foul mood" after

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1981 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on December 14, 1967; OSD, part 119, page 37.

1982 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on November 17, 1966; OSD, part 110, pages 54-55.

1983 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on August 31, 1967; OSD, part 117, pages 27-28. Sam Walsh was the leader of the CP in Quebec. St. Gabriel Lodge was located in a well-known downhill skiing and resort area.

the incident because the Soviets embarrassed him and put him in a “very bad position” by not informing him about the pending changes.<sup>1984</sup>

Another clash with the Soviets took place in August 1966 when Hall landed in Moscow for his first visit to Soviet Union since his years in the International Lenin School in the early 1930s. Hall’s return to Soviet Union had started badly already in Paris where Hall had problems with visas at the Soviet embassy. Later when Hall was boarding the Aeroflot plane in Paris, the airline representatives refused to give him first-class seating although he had a first-class ticket. Eventually, Hall was allowed to sit in first class but he was served only economy class food.<sup>1985</sup>

Hall’s mood did not get any better when he was met at the airport by M.A. Suslov and P.B. Grishin only and not by Leonid Brezhnev. Suslov was a member of the Soviet political bureau and a secretary of CPSU’s central committee and Grishin was an alternate member of the political bureau. Because of this, Hall felt “slighted”. Brezhnev’s absence and the problems experienced during the trip to the socialist motherland almost led to a major crisis in the relations between the CPUSA and the CPSU. “Because of all of the foregoing items, Hall’s mood was not too good at the time he arrived and he was almost considering an early departure from the country”, Childs reported.<sup>1986</sup>

Apparently also Suslov and Grishin could sense Hall’s dissatisfaction. “The CPSU leaders who met Hall advised him that Brezhnev had intended to be there but urgent business had taken him from the city and a personal meeting would be arranged as soon as Brezhnev returned”, Childs told.<sup>1987</sup>

Not only did the Soviets treat Hall disrespectfully in Moscow but also on the other side of Atlantic. On November 7, 1966 – less than three months after Hall’s Moscow visit – the Soviets arranged at the United Nations in New York City a celebration in honor of the October revolution of 1917. Hall was “extremely irked” by the deplorable reception he got at the celebration. “I might as well have been a man from the street”, Hall said to Morris Childs.<sup>1988</sup>

In early 1968 Hall had a similar experience with the Hungarians. The CPUSA delegation – including Gus Hall – was travelling to Budapest for a consultative meeting of the world’s CPs. Hall was irritated by the fact that the CPUSA delegates had to deliver photos and visa applications to the Hungarian United Nations mission “just like a bunch of tourists”. When someone at the mission complained that Hall had not visited the mission personally but had sent a messenger instead, Hall lost his temper. “Hall stated that if the Hungarians want to see him, they can come to see him at his office”, Childs reported.<sup>1989</sup>

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1984 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on October 20, 1964; OSD, part 71, page 14.

1985 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 4, 1966; OSD, part 109, page 260.

1986 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 4, 1966; OSD, part 109, page 260.

1987 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 4, 1966; OSD, part 109, page 260.

1988 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 22, 1966; OSD, part 110, pages 60-61.

1989 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on February 26, 1968; OSD, part 120, pages 254-255.

As mentioned earlier, Hall's irritated reactions in the above-mentioned cases can be explained by the fact that he saw himself as a central figure in the international communist movement and expected to be treated as such. Not only did Hall see himself as a central figure in the international communist movement, but he also wanted to strengthen his position. In September 1964 Hall spotted a possibility to improve his standing within the international movement after the Italian party leader Palmiro Togliatti had died in August 1964. "Hall stated that as a result of the death of Togliatti, who was considered the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> most important theoretician in the international communist movement, Hall would like to replace Togliatti in the international communist hierarchy", Jack Childs reported. According to Childs, Hall saw a trip through Latin America as a way of obtaining "the prestige necessary for him to become an authority on the Western world with relation to international communism".<sup>1990</sup>

### 5.3. Gus Hall as a representative of his generation

As Ellen Schrecker points out in her *Many Are the Crimes – McCarthyism in America*, where and when people joined the CPUSA shaped their experiences in the party:

A black sharecropper in Alabama belonged to a very different kind of organization than did a Jewish housewife in Bronx, a Polish autoworker in Detroit, a Finnish farmer in Minnesota or an Ivy League -educated screenwriter in Hollywood. Timing was as important as place. Especially during the Popular Front period of the 1930s and 1940s, when the party moderated its revolutionary stance and sought to join the mainstream, the activities of American Communists [...] were often indistinguishable from those of the non-Communists with whom they worked. Before and after the Popular Front, the party was more militant and sectarian organization that was largely isolated from American life.<sup>1991</sup>

Maurice Isserman also pays attention to generational differences and the special nature of the Popular Front period in one of his articles. Referring to Nathan Glazer's study *The Social Basis of American Communism*, Isserman points out that different generations of Jewish communists reacted differently to the events of 1956, namely Khrushchev's revelations concerning Stalin and the suppression of the Hungarian uprising. According to Isserman, "the older generation of foreign-born Jewish Communists in the United States tended to stick with the Party" whereas "the exodus from the Party was centered in the younger generation of non-Yiddish speaking, native-born Jewish Communists".<sup>1992</sup> Isserman writes:

Those who left the CP in 1956-1958 did so because they had taken the political slogans of the Popular Front years seriously, and had finally decided that an "Americanized" American Communism was not in the cards. [...] The dissenters

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1990 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on September 14, 1964; OSD, part 68, pages 220-221. Hall's trip through Latin America never materialized in the 1960s. He did travel to Uruguay in 1966 as a part of his ten-week world tour, but this can hardly be considered a proper tour of Latin America.

1991 Schrecker 1998, 9.

1992 Isserman 1980, 49. See also Glazer 1961, 164-165.

could no longer accept the Soviet model of socialism and concluded that American socialism should be built on the foundation of the country's democratic traditions and institutions and not, as they had earlier assumed, on the ruins of "bourgeois democracy".<sup>1993</sup>

Although Isserman only writes about the Jewish CPUSA members in the above sentences, it is likely that similar generational divide took place also in other membership groups in the party, perhaps excluding the African American members.<sup>1994</sup> At least Junius Scales, a white non-Jewish party member, paid attention to the difference between the members who had joined the party in the late 1920s and in the late 1930s. Scales, who was born North Carolina in 1920, joined the party in 1939. "Now remember, I came into the Party very late in the thirties, but most of those who had come in ten years earlier came into a rigid Stalinist thing", he said to an interviewer in the early 1970s.<sup>1995</sup>

If one looks at the CPUSA's top leadership in 1961, it would seem that the party had a shortage of active members born in the 1920s and 1930s. Of the eleven members of the CPUSA's national board in 1961, not one was born during those decades or even during the latter half of the 1910s. The youngest member of national board was James Jackson, who was born in 1914. Gus Hall, the general secretary of the party, was among the youngest members of the national board as eight of its members were older than Hall, the oldest ones being Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (born in 1890) and Clarence Hathaway (born in 1892).<sup>1996</sup>

More important than the years of birth are of course the years of joining the party which can tell us something about the motivations of the individual party members and about the circumstances in which they joined the party. We do not know when national board member Hyman Lumer joined the party, but this information is available for all other national board members. Interestingly, all ten national board members had joined the

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1993 Isserman 1980, 49. Also Dorothy Healey pointed out in an interview that in the late 1950s the CPUSA lost many able and experienced leaders "particularly from my generation of the thirties" – apparently thus referring to the generation that joined the party in the 1930s. See Wiener 1977, 33.

1994 As for example Al Richmond and Sara Rzeszutek have pointed out, the African American members of the CPUSA were more focused on such domestic issues as racism and civil rights in the United States than on the development of the international communist movement and were therefore perhaps not strongly affected by the events of 1956. See Richmond 1973, 430 and Rzeszutek 2015, 5.

1995 Friedman 2009, 44. Coming from the Southern states, Scales's focus was primarily on fighting racism and improving the conditions of the working people, not so much on following the Soviet policies. This tension between the national and international aspects of communism is a recurring theme in Scales's memoirs. It can be seen, for example, when he writes about his associates, most of whom had grown up in the Young Communist League in the 1930s: "Developing a political line was not, for them, a matter of imitating something in European or Soviet experience, or of acting on a Soviet hint, or of delving into Stalinist theory. They knew that a new party line had to withstand heckling on a Brooklyn street; it had to withstand the scrutiny of hard-boiled communist union leaders and shop stewards who must try to sell it to rank-and-file workers." See Scales & Nickson 1987, 288.

1996 *Structure and Organization of the Communist Party of the United States*, 578. The aged national board of the CPUSA experienced several changes during the early and mid-1960s as Hathaway died in 1963, Davis and Flynn in 1964 and Stachel in 1965. According to *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, severe illness ended Hathaway's political career already in 1961. See *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 187.



party before the Popular Front period which started after the seventh congress of the Comintern in 1935: Clarence Hathaway and Irving Potash had been in the party ever since its foundation in 1919, Phil Bart, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Gus Hall and Jack Stachel had joined the party in the 1920s and Ben Davis, James Jackson, Claude Lightfoot and Henry Winston had joined the party in the early 1930s.<sup>1997</sup>

One can of course not draw far-reaching conclusions from the party entry years of individual communists, but in this case one can say, however, that the members of the CPUSA's national board in 1961 did not – with the possible exception of Hyman Lumer – join the party primarily in order to fight against fascism and to support the Spanish republicans in the country's civil war. Likewise it is probable that they were not first and foremost focused on changing the American society gradually in co-operation with other left-wing and liberal organizations which was one of the central features of the Popular Front period. Rather their party membership had most likely been inspired by the October revolution in Russia in 1917 and a will to change American society by means of a proletarian revolution. As Ellen Schrecker perhaps would have put it, their mindset was more militant and sectarian as it was among those who joined the party after the seventh congress of the Comintern. The African American national board members Davis, Jackson, Lightfoot and Winston – who all joined the party in the early 1930s – were perhaps not so strongly affected by the Russian revolution as their main motivation to join the party most likely was the fight against racism.

Kimmo Rentola has looked at Finnish communists from a generational point of view in his article *Kommunismmin kahdeksan kohorttia* (“Eight Cohorts of Communism”). Rentola's analysis is loosely based on the ideas of German sociologist Karl Mannheim, according to whom generations – or age cohorts – actualize themselves through experiencing certain historical events. According to Mannheim, “individuals who belong to the same generation, who share the same year of birth, are endowed, to that extent, with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process”.<sup>1998</sup> Mere chronological contemporaneity does not, however, produce a common generational consciousness. Contemporaneity becomes sociologically significant only when it also involves “participation in the same social and historical circumstances”. The formative experiences and early impressions of youth play a central role here as the individual carries them with him or her throughout his or her life. “All later experiences then tend to receive their meaning from this original

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1997 The party entry years of Davis, Flynn, Hall, Hathaway, Potash, Stachel and Winston can be found in *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left* and the corresponding information concerning Bart, Jackson and Lightfoot can be found in FBI's *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.* The exact timing of Bart's joining is not clear as the FBI document says that he became a party member “about 1930”. It is likely, however, that Bart joined the party already in the 1920s because – according to the FBI – he started studying in International Lenin School in 1930 or in 1931. Bart was issued a passport for travelling to Europe in December 1929. See *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 443-444 and *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.*, 41, 61 & 87. *Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.* can be found in Ernie Lazar's collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 2).

1998 Mannheim 1952, 290.

set, whether they appear as that set's verification or its negation and anti-thesis"; Mannheim writes.<sup>1999</sup>

In his analysis Rentola finds a very similar pattern among the Finnish communists as Schrecker and Isserman see among the American communists. The eight cohorts of Finnish communists detected by Rentola contain among others the cohorts of so-called "Red orphans" and "Republicans". The "Red orphans" were born – roughly – between 1897 and 1910. The name of the cohort refers to the fact that many of its members had lost his or her parents or a father in the bloody Finnish civil war between the so-called reds and whites in 1918. According to Rentola, members of this cohort were "too young to take part in the revolution personally, but old enough to see and understand what was taking place". Many representatives of this cohort studied in the Communist University of the National Minorities of the West in Leningrad or in the International Lenin School in Moscow. Lenin and later Stalin were among this cohort's greatest heroes and Carl Gustav Mannerheim – the leader of the "white" troops in the Finnish civil war – was the worst villain. "Sucked in by the October Revolution, they grew attached to the Soviet Union and they stayed with it", Rentola writes.<sup>2000</sup>

The cohort of "Republicans" was born between 1911 and 1919. For their political thinking the Spanish civil war and the Popular Front ideology of the 1930s were formative factors. For them Francisco Franco and Adolf Hitler were the worst villains while "La Pasionaria" – Dolores Ibarruri, one of the leaders of the Republican Spain – was the greatest hero. The Republican cohort included Aarne Saarinen, who in 1966 became the chairman of the Finnish CP – and the party's actual leader instead of general secretary Ville Pessi who had led the party since 1944. Saarinen's relationship with the Soviet Union was not at all as admiring as Pessi's relationship had been – after all, Saarinen had fought against the Soviets in the Finnish army in WWII.<sup>2001</sup>

Although Gus Hall never lost a parent in the Finnish civil war, he was in many ways similar to the Finnish "Red orphans". While Minnesota was far from St. Petersburg, he followed international news already as a young kid and was – much like the Finnish "Red orphans" – "a very much involved 8-10-year-old in the political storm and hysteria that followed the first socialist revolution".<sup>2002</sup> Also for him Lenin and Stalin – the latter at least for couple of decades – were major heroes. Like many Finnish "Red orphans", Hall studied in Moscow's

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1999 Mannheim 1952, 298. See also Pilcher 1994, 490.

2000 Rentola 1992, 78-79 & 82-83. Veli-Pekka Leppänen discusses the "Red orphans" more thoroughly in his *Kivääri vai äänestyslippu? Suomen kommunistisen puolueen hajaannus 1964-1970* ("Rifle or a ballot paper? The division of the Finnish communist party 1964-1970"). According to Leppänen, the obedience of this group to the Soviet Union was "seamless" and Finland's eastern neighbor remained their "mental homeland" for their whole lives. See Leppänen 1999, 142.

2001 Rentola 1992, 78-79 & 86.

2002 Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 15.

International Lenin School.<sup>2003</sup> One could indeed say that he was “sucked in by the October Revolution” and that he “grew attached to the Soviet Union and stayed with it”.<sup>2004</sup>

#### 5.4. Gus Hall’s instrumentalist approach to history

On August 25, 1973 the CPUSA’s *Daily World* newspaper published Gus Hall’s column, in which he congratulated the Finnish American *Työmies* newspaper for its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In the same column Hall also commented on the history of Finland, the country of his parents’ birth:

In the period before the Second World War the government of Finland was a fascist government. They were in collusion with Hitler-fascism. Jointly they were building bases in Finland that were to serve as a second front of the fascist attack against the Soviet Union. The result was the Soviet-Finnish war.<sup>2005</sup>

Such a view of Finnish history is somewhat distorted. One could even say that every single sentence in the Hall’s four-sentence passage is in some way inaccurate. The government of Finland before the world war, for example, was not fascist. The coalition led by prime minister A.K. Cajander – which was in power from March 1937 until December 1939 – consisted of the National Progressive Party, the Social Democrats, the Agrarian League

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2003 Hall was by no means the only top leader of the CPUSA who had studied in the Lenin School. According to the FBI and other sources, no less than six of the eleven members of CPUSA’s national board in 1961 – Bart, Hall, Hathaway, Lightfoot, Potash and Winston – had studied in the International Lenin School in the 1920s or 1930s. See *Who’s Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.*, 5, 43, 56, 73-74 & 92 and *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, 186 & 317. *Who’s Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, U.S.A.* can be found in Ernie Lazar’s collection of FBI documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (Web site 2).

2004 The similarities between the life stories of Gus Hall and Ville Pessi, the most prominent Finnish “Red orphan”, are striking. Pessi was eight years older than Hall and lived mainly in Finland, but otherwise their life stories are remarkably similar. Both men were born in poor working-class families and both men received minimum schooling. Both went to work as lumberjacks already as a teenager but later became metal workers. Both men became labor union activists and communist party members already in their youth. They both studied in Moscow’s International Lenin School in the early 1930s. Both men were imprisoned because of their political activities and both became general secretaries soon after they were released from prison, Pessi in 1944 and Hall in 1959. Both men served as the party leaders for decades, Pessi until 1969 and Hall until 2000. As party leaders they both acknowledged the undisputed leading position of the Soviet Union in the international communist movement. Both men had close connections with CPSU’s leaders in Moscow and both served as the recipients of CPSU’s financial support in their countries. Probably the biggest difference in the life stories of Hall and Pessi can be found when one looks at the WWII years, when Finland and the United States were fighting on opposite sides. Whereas Hall joined the U.S. Navy, Pessi spent the war years behind the bars. Another big difference in their life stories was of course Pessi’s career as a member of Finnish parliament between 1945 and 1966. A good overview of Pessi’s life can be found, for example, in Holopainen & Lehdistö 1979 and *Suomen Kansallisbiografia* 7, 650-651.

2005 *Daily World*, August 25, 1973. Hall’s view of Finnish history in the the late 1930s followed the CPUSA’s official WWII line which portrayed the Finns as Fascists. According to Helen C. Camp, also Elizabeth Gurley Flynn adopted this line although she at first thought that the Soviet attack against Finland in November 1939 was difficult to defend. See Camp 1995, 149.

and the Swedish People's Party of Finland, none of which could be described as fascist. The Patriotic People's Movement – the only fascist-minded party in Finland during the 1930s and 1940s – was in opposition before the war and never was a central power in Finnish politics.<sup>2006</sup>

Furthermore, no joint Finnish-German military bases were being built in Finland – or in any other country – before WWII. Finland was not in collusion with Nazi Germany before the war – unlike the Soviet Union, which in August 1939 signed the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with the Nazis, thus dividing Eastern Europe into spheres of Soviet and German influence. Thus the reason for the Soviet-Finnish war was not the non-existent joint German-Finnish military bases in Finland, as Gus Hall claims, but rather Soviet Union's will to expand its territory and take over Finland – in accordance with the Russo-German Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

This was not the first time Hall claimed that Finland was a fascist country during WWII. He had presented the same claim already in a radio speech in Cleveland in December 1944. In his radio speech Hall claimed that German submarines and air forces used bases in Finland to attack Allied convoys on the Arctic Ocean on their way to the Soviet port of Murmansk.<sup>2007</sup> The Germans did have several submarine and air force bases in Norway which they used for attacking the Allied convoys on the Arctic Ocean, but the German air force bases in Finland were located far from the Arctic Ocean and were thus not used for such a purpose. There was also no submarine base in Liinahamari, Finland's only port on the Arctic Ocean.

Hall's distorted views of Finnish history are not the only examples of his carefree attitude towards historical facts. Also when he describes his own family background and life story, one can find several unreliable claims. Hall's claims of his forefathers taking part in a "liberation movement" or in "the Finnish fight against Russian and Swedish aggression" in Finland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example, are unconvincing as there were no liberation movements and no fight against Russian and Swedish aggression in Finland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2008</sup>

Moreover, Hall's claims about the poverty of his childhood home seem to be somewhat exaggerated. According to Hall, his family was the poorest in the area and lived in "semi-starvation".<sup>2009</sup> The starvation of young Arvo Halberg must have been only temporary, however, at least if one looks at the outcome. At the age of fifteen he was already six feet tall and weighted nearly 200 pounds and was thus considered to be suitable to work as a

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**2006** In fact Cajander's government – which Hall accuses of being fascist – attempted to outlaw Patriotic People's Movement in 1938 but the legal process ended in an unfavorable outcome for the government.

**2007** Gus Hall's radio speech on December 30, 1944. CPUSA Records (TAM 132), Box 208, Folder 7.

**2008** See Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 10 and *Range View*, Fall 1990. As mentioned earlier, the so-called national awakening that took place in Finland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was largely a cultural and academic phenomenon and it cannot be called a political liberation movement. Furthermore it mainly took place among the educated elite and not in a large extent among landless peasants. The struggle against the Russian Russification measures in Finland started only in 1899 when Gus Hall's father was already living in the United States.

**2009** Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 10 and Bonosky 1987, 8.

lumberjack.<sup>2010</sup> The poverty and semi-starvation were also not so serious that they would have stopped the Halberg boys to take part in local activities such as gymnastics club Reipas and brass band Kaiku.<sup>2011</sup>

Hall's recollections of his days as a lumberjack also do not seem wholly reliable, as the working conditions at his logging camps were so very deplorable. It is of course possible that young Arvo unluckily happened to end up working at the worst logging camps of all Minnesota, but some details in his recollections are hard to believe, like the claims that lumberjacks were fed with quarters of beef full of worms or that Hall had to sleep in a same bunk bed with a dead man.<sup>2012</sup>

Also some claims concerning Hall's strike and trade union activities are not wholly credible. For example, Hall's claims concerning his and the CPUSA's role in Teamsters' strike in Minneapolis in 1934 contradict the views of labor historians. While Hall claimed that the CPUSA played a central role in winning the strike, labor historians – and even at least one representative of the CPUSA – pointed out that the Soviet-minded communists were not a significant power in a strike which was led by the Trotskyists.<sup>2013</sup>

Likewise it is highly unlikely that Phil Murray, the devotedly Catholic and anticommunist leader of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, would have offered Gus Hall a well-paid job in the SWOC organization after the 1937 Little Steel Strike, as Hall claims.<sup>2014</sup> CIO leader John L. Lewis had said earlier that using communists as SWOC organizers was only a temporary arrangement and that the SWOC would later get rid of them.<sup>2015</sup> According to one labor historian, Murray started weeding communists out of the SWOC in 1938.<sup>2016</sup> At the same time, Hall had become widely known because of his alleged participation in a bombing incident in Warren, Ohio during the steel strike. In light of all this information, Hall's claim of Murray offering him a well-paid job in the SWOC organization is not at all credible.

Yet another example of a problematic feature in Hall's autobiographical narration is his relationship with his studies in Moscow's Lenin School. In a 1934 trial in Minneapolis he admitted that a little earlier he had spent almost two years in Europe, mainly in the Soviet Union.<sup>2017</sup> After the Minneapolis trial, Hall never publicly talked about his time in the workers' fatherland. At the same time, the biographical texts published by the CPUSA and the CPSU claimed that in 1932 – when he in reality was in the Soviet Union – Arvo

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2010 Bonosky 1987, 8-9.

2011 Interview with Kristin Koskela in Virginia, Minnesota, May 2010. Also Hall's claims of his parents' ideological development raise some questions. Hall claims that his father – whom Hall tends to represent as an orthodox Marxist-Leninist – disagreed with the IWW syndicalists already in 1916 when an IWW-led mining strike took place in Minnesota's Mesabi Range. IWW orator Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, however, recalls getting acquainted with Gus Hall's parents during the 1916 strike as Matt Halberg was one of the strikers. *Daily Worker*, October 19, 1951; Flynn 1973, 213 and *Duluth News-Tribune*, November 2, 1980.

2012 *Daily World*, December 31, 1977; *Duluth News-Tribune* Nov 2, 1980; *Newsweek*, February 20, 1984 and *The Park Hill Reporter*, August 1994.

2013 Carl Ross oral history interview transcript, part I, 88-89; Hall 1987, 349 and Palmer 2013, 212.

2014 Hall 1972b, 2 and Hall 1976, 4.

2015 Levenstein 1981, 48.

2016 Levenstein 1981, 51.

2017 *Communist Leadership*, 19.

Halberg was in Minneapolis leading unemployment demonstrations or a Teamsters' strike.<sup>2018</sup> As mentioned earlier in this study, both of these events in reality took place in 1934. It may of course be a coincidence that CPUSA and CPSU biographers all made the same mistakes when writing about Gus Hall's life in the early 1930s. A skeptical reader may, however, come to the conclusion that the writers have purposefully been given erroneous information in order to cover up the fact that Hall actually spent almost two years in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s.

Looking at these numerous problematic points in Hall's autobiographical narration, one can come to the conclusion that his personal past – and history in general – were not something that one should necessarily approach with truthfulness and accuracy primarily in mind. Rather one gets an impression that for Hall a personal past – and history in general – were something that could be modified and processed for advancing certain personal and political aims. Finland in the late 1930s, for example, could be represented as a fascist country closely colluding with Nazi Germany because with such a narration one could justify Soviet Union's attack to Finland in November 1939 which for many Finnish American communists was a highly touchy issue.

Likewise one could advance one's career in the communist movement by having the right kind of personal past. Hall's background was truly proletarian, but he wanted to make it even more so by exaggerating certain features of his childhood and youth. By overstating the poverty of his childhood home or the miserable working conditions in Minnesota's logging camps, Hall could strengthen his image as a communist leader with roots deep in proletarian soil. And by overstating his success as a union organizer, Hall could build up a picture of himself as a full-fledged labor leader, a sort of a latter-day William Z. Foster who had become a nationally known figure as the leader of 1919 steel strike.

According to Igal Halfin, communist autobiographies were not always wholly truthful as “details could be pruned, embellished or ignored” and as “autobiographies allowed applicants to rewrite their selves, communist style”.<sup>2019</sup> This seems to have been the case also with Gus Hall. Hall rewrote his personal past to make it even more suitable for his personal pursuits. Similarly he could rewrite, for example, the history of his parents' country of birth. For him the past was not an object of impartial scrutiny but rather a storage of tools from which he could find instruments for advancing aims both personal and political.

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2018 Jackson 1970, 48; Meyers 1970, 57; North 1970, 10 and Lapitsky & Mostovets 1985, 28.

2019 *A Dictionary of 20th Century Communism*, 142.

## 5.5. Conclusions

What can be said of Gus Hall as a party leader in light of Operation Solo documents? Firstly, based on Operation Solo documents one cannot accuse Hall of racism as some CPUSA members did in the 1980s. Hall did have problematic relationships with some African American party members – especially Ben Davis and James Jackson and to some extent also with Henry Winston – but the core of these problems did not lie in the fact that Davis, Jackson and Winston were African Americans. The problems in these relationships can rather be explained by ideological factors – as was the case with Ben Davis – and by personality traits – as was the case with Jackson and Winston.

Neither can Hall be easily accused of antisemitism – on the contrary. Party members with a Jewish background played a very central role in the CPUSA in the 1960s. Most of Hall's closest associates in the party had a Jewish background. This was the case especially when one looks at the CPUSA's finances and the secret Soviet financial assistance to the party. Almost all of the persons dealing with these issues had a Jewish background.

In addition to party members with a Jewish background Hall got along especially well with party members who had some kind of connection to the American Midwest and who had in the past been involved in the trade unions – just like Hall himself had been. It is not an exaggeration to say – as historians Irving Howe and Lewis Coser do – that in the 1960s “practical party workers” from the Midwest – “Communist organization men who would not be troubled by theoretic speculation” – had a strong position in the CPUSA leadership. One could even speak of an “Ohio gang” which Hall brought with him to the party leadership, as Dorothy Healey does.

Although Hall had close connections with many Midwestern party members, one Midwestern membership group – from which Hall himself came from – was practically non-existent in the CPUSA in the 1960s. Only 40 years earlier Finnish Americans had been by far the largest membership group in the American Communist Party, but in the 1960s Finnish American members are mentioned very rarely in the Operation Solo documents. At the same time, Minnesota and Michigan, where a large part of Finnish Americans lived and which had been major membership states in the 1920s, had become states of low communist activity.

While Hall got along well with many party members with a Jewish background and with many Midwestern party members, there were – in addition to African American members – two membership groups with which he had recurring problems: CPUSA intellectuals and female party members. Hall had constant squabbles with Herbert Aptheker, who was often considered to be the party's leading intellectual. One of these squabbles resulted in Aptheker's expulsion from the position of the editor of party journal *Political Affairs*. Economist Victor Perlo was also kept on the sideline of the party although his works were valued within the international communist movement. Another party intellectual Alexander Bittelman was treated even more crudely. After being a member of the party for more than 40 years, he was kicked out because of his “reformist and revisionist” thinking.

If one reads the autobiographies of Bettina Aptheker, Dorothy Healey and Peggy Dennis, Hall's relationship with female party members indeed seems troubled. These three women cannot of course speak for all female members of the CPUSA, but Operation Solo documents and other sources support their criticism of Hall and the party. The CPUSA was in the 1960s far from being at the forefront in the struggle for gender equality and women's rights and its leader did not consider these issues as weighty political topics. Hall's attitude towards the CPUSA's top female leader Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was not wholly respectful, but it is difficult to judge whether this was a consequence of his alleged sexism. Flynn's position as the party's chairwoman was largely symbolic and she was brushed aside when dealing with serious party matters.

What can be said of Hall's personality in light of the Operation Solo documents? There were some features in Hall's personality that repeatedly stand out in the Operation Solo documents. He could be called a hot-tempered and volatile politician, especially in the case of political disagreements. He was also an impatient and demanding superior, who could "severely reprimand" his subordinates if they were not swift enough. In addition, Hall considered himself as one of the most important leaders in the international communist movement and was thoroughly insulted if the Soviets or Hungarians, for example, failed to treat him as such. After Palmiro Togliatti's death in August 1964 Hall hoped to replace him as "world's 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> most important communist theoretician" but this did not take place during his lifetime.



### III Final conclusions

A nasty freezing wind was blowing on the streets of Cleveland on Friday, December 5, 1991 when the CPUSA assembled for its 25<sup>th</sup> national convention at the Sheraton City Center hotel. If the weather outside was unwelcoming, the atmosphere inside the hotel was not much more amiable. The disagreements within the party, which had existed at least since the mid-1980s, had swelled into a full-blown crisis. As a consequence, the convention was arranged under the protection of armed Cleveland policemen.<sup>2020</sup>

The CPUSA had gathered to the most severe crisis meeting in its 72-year history. The discontent toward the long-time party leader Gus Hall had boiled over earlier in the fall when around one-third of the party membership had signed “An Initiative to Unite and Renew the Party”, a proposal forwarded by party veteran Charlene Mitchell and her associates. It was not the first time the dissatisfaction had surfaced, but never had it taken such an organized form. The last straw that seems to have caused the rebellion was Gus Hall’s favorable stance to the hardline communist coup attempt in the Soviet Union in August 1991. As the anti-Gorbachev coup started, Hall was supporting it, but backtracked after the attempt failed.

Although the initiative was rather moderate in its demands for internal democracy within CPUSA, it was too much for Gus Hall. Many supporters of the initiative – many of them from New York or Northern California – were shut out from the convention as one could enter the meeting only with a leadership-approved pass. Security guards kept all others out. Those initiative supporters that were able to enter the convention found themselves in an awkward situation. Speakers critical of Hall were silenced with “Gus, Gus, Gus” chants. As initiative supporter James Jackson – a leading party member since the 1930s – got up to speak, his microphone was cut off. Another initiative supporter Herbert Aptheker – also a veteran member since the 1930s – was ignored by the convention chair and ridiculed by the pro-Hall participants.

The convention ratified the continuation of Hall’s leadership in the party and simultaneously excluded all initiative signers from the new National Committee. The editor of California-based *People’s Weekly World* newspaper was also changed to a person more loyal to Hall. Hall wanted to have no more connections to the dissidents which he saw as “right opportunists”.

Although Hall continued as the CPUSA’s leader also after the Cleveland convention until 2000, it can be seen as a sort of a first finale to Hall’s career. The CPUSA had been a minuscule organization already before the Cleveland meeting, but after the meeting it lost hundreds of members, including the party’s nationally then most famous member

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2020 This description of the Cleveland convention is based on Aptheker 2006, 493-495 and Murrell 2015, 330-334.

Angela Davis and a large number of well-known party veterans such as Herbert Aptheker, Gil Green, James Jackson and Charlene Mitchell. Many of the dissidents who had left the CPUSA joined the new organization formed by the anti-Hall Communists, the Committees of Correspondence (CoC). According to Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, the CoC gathered in less than a year around 1400 members, which probably was more than what was left in the CPUSA. If the CPUSA had been a minimal player on the field of American politics already before December 1991, after the Cleveland meeting the party continued to exist as a truly marginal and insignificant crowd.

One of the starting points of this dissertation was to study whether the characterizations of Gus Hall presented by top experts on American communism are accurate. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes described Hall as “an unyielding Stalinist” in their history of the CPUSA. Likewise Peter Kivisto – specialist on Finnish American communism – wrote that Hall’s “political ideas appear to have been hermetically sealed in the ideological mausoleum erected by Stalin”. Robert Service called Hall “a dullard devotee of the USSR” while Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps wrote that in the early 1990s no one better personified the image of the “fossilized left” than Gus Hall.<sup>2021</sup>

Looking at the events of the fall of 1991 and at the Cleveland national convention, it would seem that the Hall characterizations of Service and Brick and Phelps are not very far from the truth. Supporting the failed coup attempt of August 1991 can be described as an act of a fossilized devotee of the USSR. The characterizations by Klehr and Haynes and Kivisto are, however, slightly more problematic. Considering the atrocious crimes committed by Joseph Stalin, to call someone a Stalinist is indeed an extreme statement.<sup>2022</sup> If one only looks at Hall’s writings in the late 1940s and in the early 1950s, one can call Hall a Stalin sympathizer or perhaps even a Stalinist, but if one looks at his career as a whole, such a description would be incorrect. During his lengthy general secretaryship he did not promote policies that could have been called distinctly Stalinist. One could have perhaps called Hall a Stalinist in the early 1960s if he had supported the political line of the Chinese communists – who aggressively criticized Khrushchev for his de-Stalinization policy – but instead of the Chinese, Hall was a steady follower of Khrushchev.<sup>2023</sup>

Describing Hall’s lengthy political career with one “-ism” is a difficult – if not impossible – task as his opinions tended to change over time. Perhaps the best “-ism” to use in this connection would be opportunism, so radical were some of the shifts in his political

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2021 See Kivisto 1984, 195; Klehr & Haynes 1992, 176; Service 2007, 127 and Brick & Phelps 2015, 268.

2022 As the concept of Stalinism is somewhat loaded, some historians avoided using it or have used it with caution. Joni Krekola represents this line of thought as he remarks that “serious scholars have been careful to label anyone as a Stalinist”. See Krekola 2006, 16.

2023 According to Jozef Wilczynski, the eight main features of Stalinism were following: absolute and repressive dictatorship of the proletariat, ruthless elimination of rivals, extensive use of secret police and terror, extreme disregard of human rights and rule of law, centralized directive system of planning and management of the national economy, the idea of “socialism in one country” (opposing Trotsky’s idea of “permanent revolution”), exploitation of foreign communist parties to serve the interests of the Soviet Union and personality cult. Based on Hall’s 1960s policies, it indeed cannot be said that he would have supported the above ideas. See Wilczynski 1981, 565.

thinking. As shown in this study, Hall's radio speeches in the early 1940s followed closely the political line of the CPUSA's general secretary Earl Browder – who wanted to Americanize the CPUSA and dispel the image of the CPUSA as the American branch of the CPSU – but after Browder's expulsion in 1945 Hall's speeches became explicitly more Soviet-minded and orthodoxly Marxist, thus following the line of the new party leader William Z. Foster. Another change of mind – not so radical, though – was seen in the late 1950s when Hall became a Khrushchev-minded “centrist” after being closer to Stalin and Foster in the beginning of the decade.

One of the greatest strengths of Hall seems to have been his excellent political situational awareness and his “eye for the game”. Hall could well sense where the favorable winds were blowing from and he could well position himself in these winds. He was capable of seizing an opportunity when there was one. This could be seen especially well in the end of 1950s when Hall managed to rise to the post of the permanent general secretary of the CPUSA. Such a feature may also explain Hall's lengthy tenure as the CPUSA's top leader.

Of course pure luck – or coincidence – also played a role in Hall's career development. As several writers have pointed out, Hall was luckily away from New York and the party inner circles both in 1945 when Browder was ousted from the leadership and in the late 1950s when the party underwent a massive crisis following Khrushchev's 1956 revelations concerning his predecessor Joseph Stalin.<sup>2024</sup> In 1945 Hall was in the Navy – serving on the Pacific island of Guam – and in 1956 he was in Leavenworth federal penitentiary in Kansas, so in both cases he could emerge as a fresh face untarnished by the party crises. In the late 1940s he did not have suffer for his Browderism – unlike Morris Childs, for example – and in 1959 he could enter the party leadership as a middle-of-the-road candidate whose earlier Stalin sympathies and close relationship with William Z. Foster could now be pushed aside.

As this study to a large extent focuses on the 1960s, how could one then describe Hall's changing political line during that decade? One potential answer to this question can be found in Hall's own vocabulary. As shown in this study, the concept of proletarian internationalism had a central role in Hall's vocabulary in the 1960s. On several grounds this concept can be seen as a befitting description of Hall's political line during that decade.

Firstly, the prefix “proletarian” was a central part of Hall's identity. In his biographical writings Hall strongly emphasized his working-class background and his experiences as a lumberjack and a steelworker in Minnesota and Ohio in the 1920s and 1930s. Such a background remained a great asset in the international communist movement in the 1960s, although the CPSU had in its 22<sup>nd</sup> congress in 1961 declared that the Soviet Union was no longer a dictatorship of the proletariat but “a state of the whole people”. For Hall especially important were his experiences as a labor organizer in Ohio in the 1930s which he and his party always remembered to mention even in the most concise biographical texts. This is of course understandable as the communist organizers like Hall played an important role in establishing the CIO in the 1930s which can be seen as one of the most significant contributions of the communists in American political life.

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2024 See Healey & Isserman 1993, 172 and Camp 1995, 293.

As a proletarian background was a major asset in the international communist movement in the 1960s, Hall did not play down the harsh experiences of his childhood and youth. Instead, one could rather say that he sometimes exaggerated some features of his life story to strengthen his image as a truly proletarian leader. Hall's background was truly proletarian, but he wanted to make it even more so by overstating certain features of his childhood and youth. By overstating the poverty of his childhood home or the miserable working conditions in Minnesota's logging camps, Hall could strengthen his image as a communist leader with roots deeply in proletarian soil. And by overstating his success as a union organizer – in the 1934 Teamsters strike in Minneapolis or in the 1937 Little Steel Strike, for example – Hall could build up a picture of himself as a full-fledged labor leader, a sort of a latter-day William Z. Foster, who had become a nationally known figure as the leader of 1919 steel strike. In a similar way, Hall could distort the history of Finland – the birth country of his parents and many other Finnish American communists – to pursue his political ends.

Hall's "proletarianism" could also be seen in his relationship to Marxist theory. Although Hall hoped to be recognized as one of the most remarkable theoreticians of the international communist movement, his approach to Marxism was not profoundly theoretical. Instead of a being an insightful thinker, Hall was rather, as Irving Howe and Lewis Coser pointed out, a "practical party worker from the Midwest" who "was not troubled by theoretic speculation".<sup>2025</sup> As a consequence, Hall's relationship with the CPUSA's intellectuals like Herbert Aptheker was tense and troubled. This was even more the case with New Left intellectuals not belonging to the CPUSA, whom Hall continuously criticized and called "petty-bourgeois radicals".

Hall was not the only "practical party worker from the Midwest" in the party leadership in the early 1960s. On the contrary, as party veteran Dorothy Healey pointed out, Hall brought with him to the leadership an "Ohio gang" of his old associates from the Midwest.<sup>2026</sup> In addition to their Midwestern background, they also resembled Hall in other respects: most of them came from a working-class family and had worked in the labor movement in the 1930s. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Hall wanted to see the CPUSA as a party of true proletarians from the heartland of the United States, not so much as a party of academic intellectuals or middle-class white-collar workers from the East or the West coast. In this sense Hall was close to his earlier mentor William Z. Foster.

In addition to being emphatically proletarian, Hall was an explicit internationalist. His interpretation of proletarian internationalism included the idea of the Soviet Union as the undisputed leader of the international communist movement. Hall spoke passionately for the unity of the world communist movement and in order to promote this unity he actively advocated the arranging of international conferences for the world's CPs, establishing a mutual news service for these parties and – even – establishing a new international body comparable to the Comintern.

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2025 Howe & Coser 1962, 563.

2026 Healey & Isserman 1993, 183.

Hall's proletarian internationalism manifested itself also as sharp criticism of all parties that in some way challenged the leading position of the Soviet Union in the international communist movement. In relation to the Chinese, Hall made his viewpoint clear by staunchly supporting Khrushchev's policy of peaceful co-existence. He criticized the Chinese for glorifying war "in an infantile manner". Unlike the Chinese, Hall did not rule out the possibility of achieving a peaceful solution to the Vietnam War through negotiations. Like Khrushchev, Hall believed that socialism could beat capitalism through peaceful competition in political, social, economic, technological and cultural spheres. To the Chinese, such thoughts were revisionism and capitulationism.

Just like the Chinese, the Cuban communists were also criticized by Hall before 1968 when the Cubans moved their foreign policy into more Soviet-minded direction. Like the Soviets, Hall first considered Fidel Castro to be a petty bourgeois intellectual, an adventurer and a romanticist. Hall could not accept Cuba's policy of exporting revolution and supporting guerrillas in Third World countries. For Hall Cuba's policy of exporting revolution was an example of "petty bourgeois nationalism". In Hall's worldview this was a major offence – it was after all the complete opposite of his proletarian internationalism.

In addition to the Chinese and Cuban heretics, Italian "polycentrism" and Romanian "national communism" also got a negative reception from Hall – so negative that hot-tempered Hall ended up personally quarreling with Italian communists visiting in New York and with Nicolae Ceausescu in Bucharest. He had little understanding for any views which were not in line with his – and the Soviet Union's – proletarian internationalism. It was therefore not surprising that Hall instantly accepted the occupation of Czechoslovakia by five Warsaw Pact countries in August 1968. Just like the Soviets, he saw the operation as the defense of socialism against the threat of counter-revolution. Both Hall and the Soviets emphasized that "the interests of the proletarian struggle in any one country should be subordinated to the interests of the struggle on a world-wide scale", as Lenin put it. Internationalism was once again the key concept – the idea that communist parties build socialism together and while doing so, they do not back out from the common front. If a party for one reason or another had difficulties toeing the line, other parties could provide fraternal assistance.

Considering all this it is legitimate to ask whether the Soviets dictated the political line of Gus Hall and the CPUSA, as the FBI's director J. Edgar Hoover repeatedly claimed.<sup>2027</sup> In light of Operation Solo documents, my answer to this question is negative. The relationship between Hall and the Soviets was more subtle. In the Operation Solo documents – which reveal the contents of the communications between Moscow and Hall – there is hardly any direct orders or directives from the CPSU to the CPUSA. The relationship between the two parties was not an evident relationship between a master and an underling – as Hoover represented it – but rather a one of a sponsor and a sponsee. The CPUSA followed the policies of the CPSU, but it was not following any direct orders but rather it followed a political line which it assumed to be compatible with Moscow's policies. In doing this Hall once again showed his excellent "eye for the game" – after all, he was able to increase the

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2027 See Hoover 1969, 87-88.

CPUSA's annual subsidies from Moscow from \$200 000 in 1959 to more than \$1 million in 1967 (and almost \$2.8 million in 1980 if the figures of John Barron's book *Operation Solo* are correct).<sup>2028</sup>

If Hall managed his relations with the Soviets well, the same thing cannot be said about his performance in American politics. Although Hall in his biographical writings repeatedly remembered the 1930s – when the U.S. communists were, for example, building the CIO along with others – as a golden decade of the CPUSA, he was not able to bring the party back to mainstream politics in the United States. On the contrary, the party remained more or less marginalized all through the 1960s despite the considerable wave of leftist radicalization that flushed through American campuses and civil rights organizations during the decade. As shown in this study, many New Left activists considered the CPUSA as staid, bureaucratic, dogmatic and outdated with its emphasis on the working class and its ideological closeness with the Soviet Union. Some organizations refused to cooperate with the CPUSA because of its communist ideology. The CPUSA did manage to align itself with other left-wing organizations when organizing anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, but otherwise the party's role in the radical movements of the 1960s remained limited. The CPUSA's own youth organization the W.E.B. Du Bois Clubs – founded with great expectations in 1964 – could never really catch the wind in its sails and was disbanded before the radical decade ended. The CPUSA's role in the feminist and environmental movements was nonexistent. At the same time, the CPUSA was not able to strengthen its position within the labor movement.

Hall's performance as a party leader is especially weak when the CPUSA is compared with some of its fraternal parties in Western Europe. In the early 1960s when the CPUSA had around 5 000 members, the French CP had more than 400 000 members and the Italian CP had around 1.6 million members. Even the CP of tiny Finland had about 50 000 members in 1962.<sup>2029</sup> The United States is of course a very different society in comparison with Italy, France or Finland, but still the U.S. party membership figure is strikingly low. It can be partly explained by, for example, the numerous legal proceedings initiated by U.S. authorities from the late 1940s onwards or by the FBI's COINTELPRO operations targeted against the party, but these are not sufficient explanations. Better explanations can be found by looking at the American society as a whole: its high standard of living, its high social mobility and the absence of class identities, its large-scale immigration and the heterogeneity of its working class and, finally, its two-party system which severely hampers the efforts of third parties to break through into U.S. politics. And as Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks point out, two fundamental features of American culture – its individualism and its antistatism – should also be paid attention to when explaining the weakness of socialism in the United States.<sup>2030</sup>

As pointed out earlier, Hall was in many respects very similar character to William Z. Foster, who is often considered as one of the most important American communists of all times. Both of them had a solid proletarian background, little formal education and strong links

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2028 Barron 1995, 340.

2029 For Finnish, French and Italian CP membership figures see Hodgson 1979, 244.

2030 Lipset & Marks 2000, 97, 124, 235 & 266.

to the American Midwest. Both of them had worked as a trade union organizer and a leader in a steel strike and both of them were more “practical party workers” than experts on Marxist-Leninist theory. In addition to all that, both men readily recognized the leading position of the Soviet Union in the international communist movement.

Both Foster’s and Hall’s life stories were similar also in the sense that neither of them could make the CPUSA flourish in terms of membership figures and societal significance – rather quite the opposite. Following the tumultuous events of 1956, Foster’s reign as CPUSA leader ended in chaos and mass exodus from the party in the late 1950s. During the last years of Hall’s lengthy reign, the CPUSA – already a small fraction – split into two, which, of course, can be seen as a consequence of the collapse of international socialism. The surrounding circumstances were of course challenging for both Foster and Hall, but could they have managed any better if they would have followed different policies?

In his excellent biography *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism*, James R. Barrett argues that Foster’s dogmatic version of Marxism-Leninism – which “reflected Soviet perspectives more than American political realities” – “contributed mightily to the organization’s [CPUSA’s] deterioration”. According to Barrett, “the tragedy of Foster’s political life was to suppress his own initiatives and instincts and those of two generations of other political activists in the name of Communist discipline”.<sup>2031</sup>

This could also be seen as the tragedy of Hall’s political life. He never became a political leader with a role to play in the mainstream American politics. It may not be a gross exaggeration to say that Hall made his biggest positive contribution to the American society as the local level organizer of the Steelworkers Organizing Committee in Ohio in the 1930s. That was the decade during which the social significance of the CPUSA was as at its greatest – and it was the decade that Hall longingly remembered in his later writings.

How come Hall’s CPUSA was unable to enter the mainstream political discussion in the United States with the help of the millions of dollars it received from the Soviet Union? American society, its political culture and political system were of course in many ways an unfavorable environment for any left-wing political grouping – as was pointed out already in the introduction of this study – but the CPUSA’s performance was staggeringly weak also in comparison with other left-wing groups. For example, the candidates of the CPUSA’s Trotskyist arch enemy Socialist Workers’ Party – which did not have a big foreign financial backer behind it like the CPUSA had – beat the CPUSA’s candidates with a clear margin in the presidential elections of 1968, 1972 and 1976.<sup>2032</sup>

Many factors, of course, affect the election results, but in light of such figures one can raise questions of the usefulness of the Soviet financing for the CPUSA. Was the Soviet financing actually counterproductive for the CPUSA, as one of the former CPUSA members interviewed for this study suggested? According to Jay Schaffner, the Soviet

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2031 Barrett 1999, 276-277.

2032 In the 1968 election SWP’s Fred Halstead got 41 000 votes whereas CPUSA’s Charlene Mitchell got only little more than 1 000 votes. In 1972 almost 53 000 Americans voted for SWP’s Linda Jenness whereas only 26 000 voted for Gus Hall. In 1976 SWP’s Peter Camejo gathered 91 000 votes whereas Gus Hall gathered less than 59 000 votes. See *Congressional Quarterly’s Guide to U.S. Elections*, 694-695.

financing became a sort of a vicious circle for the party. In order to receive financing from Moscow, the party had to reach a certain level of Soviet-mindedness. This led the party to an increasing isolation from the American political life which in turn made it increasingly difficult to raise money domestically – which, in turn, made the party even more dependent on Soviet financing.<sup>2033</sup>

Be that as it may, it is highly unlikely that Gus Hall could have developed the CPUSA into a French or Italian style mass party even if it would have followed a political line closer to American political realities. Hall had many deficiencies as a political leader, but even without those deficiencies developing the CPUSA into European style mass party would have been an impossible task. American political system does not favor any third parties, but an even bigger challenge for left-wing groups is the prevailing American mindset, not least its pervasive individualism and antistatism.

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2033 Interview with Jay Schaffner in New York City, October 2013. Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen and Andrew Flinn see the CPUSA in a similar way in their study of the British Communist Party. See Morgan, Cohen & Flinn 2007, 8.



## Appendix 1. Soviet Union’s financial assistance to the CPUSA in 1960-1968

Source: FBI’s Operation Solo documents in <https://vault.fbi.gov/solo>

The figures of the Operation Solo documents are here compared with the figures of John Barron’s book *Operation Solo – The FBI’s Man in the Kremlin*.

	Cumulative total sum	Operation Solo document (part/page)	Annual sum	Cumulative total sum according to John Barron	Annual sum according to John Barron	Difference in cumulative total sum
End of 1960:	574 385	26/169	N/A	573 885	298 885	500
End of 1961:	944 385	40/42	370 000	943 885	370 000	500
End of 1962:	N/A	N/A	N/A	1 115 885	172 000	N/A
End of 1963:	1 699 991	56/30	N/A	1 699 491	583 606	500
End of 1964:	2 429 991	80/107	780 000	2 438 523	739 032	-8 532
End of 1965:	3 493 639	99/69	1 063 648	3 493 139	1 054 616	500
End of 1966:	4 237 468	111/81	743 829	4 236 968	743 829	500
End of 1967:	5 286 538	120/219	1 049 070	5 286 037	1 049 069	501

By the end of June 1968 the CPUSA had received:

6 316 538    125/228    1 030 000

## Appendix 2. The Albertson case in light of Operation Solo documents

One of the most notorious COINTELPRO operations against the CPUSA was the case of William Albertson. Albertson, an active party member in New York, was framed as an FBI informer in a mean operation. John J. Abt writes:

One morning in [late June] 1964 [...] a comrade in Brooklyn, who drove Bill Albertson home from a meeting the night before, found a peculiar document on the front seat of his car. On a sheet of yellow-lined legal-sized paper was what appeared to be a note, in Bill's handwriting and signed by him, addressed to the FBI, reporting on what had happened at a recent Party meeting. At the end of the note was a request for an increase in payments. The fellow who found the note turned it over to the Party leadership.<sup>2034</sup>

The party acted promptly and expelled Albertson in early July 1964. According to the party newspaper *The Worker*, the party had made a “thorough investigation” of Albertson and had “irrefutable evidence” that he had “operated as a police agent within the ranks of the party”. “Because the facts accumulated remove every shadow of doubt that Albertson lived a life of duplicity and treachery – posing as a dedicated defender of the workers’ interests while in actuality betraying them – the Communist Party of New York State has expelled him”, *The Worker* reported.<sup>2035</sup>

Albertson – a 54 years old national committee member with more than 30 years of Party membership behind him – protested fiercely. He claimed he had been framed by the FBI and offered to take a “lie-detector test, a truth serum test or any other test – psychological or otherwise”. All this was in vain as the Party held on to its expulsion ruling. Albertson – a broken man who till the end tried to prove his innocence – died in 1972 in a car crash. In 1975 his family learned from FBI's COINTELPRO documents that he had indeed been framed by the Bureau.<sup>2036</sup>

As the Operation Solo documents contain numerous references to Albertson case and as the case for a long time remained an open wound within the party, it may be worthwhile to have look at what Solo documents tell us about the case.

According to the earliest Solo documents concerning the case, the information that Albertson was an FBI informer seems to have come as a shock to Gus Hall. On July 12 – five days after the CPUSA's *The Worker* newspaper had reported on Albertson's expulsion

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2034 Abt & Myerson 1993, 256.

2035 *The Worker*, July 7, 1964 and *The New York Times*, July 8, 1964.

2036 Such an operation – creating false evidence that a subject is an informer – is called “putting a snitch jacket on” as civil liberties lawyer Frank Donner calls it in his thoroughgoing article on Albertson case. See Donner 1976, 13. Other good overviews of the Albertson case can be found in Donner 1980, 191-194; Davis 1992, 47-48 and Abt & Myerson 1993, 256-259.

– Hall sent his close associate Arnold Johnson to Chicago “in great secrecy” to discuss the matter with Morris Childs. The two men met at Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport. Johnson had with him the original document according to which Albertson would have been an FBI informer and eight pages of handwriting by Albertson.

Johnson told Childs that Hall wanted him to find two lawyers and – through them – two handwriting experts to study the “report” purportedly written by Albertson and a handwritten text by Albertson. One of the lawyers should be a non-Party or non-Left person and the other from the Left. These handwriting experts were to determine if there was the remotest possibility that the report was a forgery. In addition to these American analyzes, Hall wanted Childs to ask the Soviets for their account of the authenticity of the Albertson report. Hall wanted to have results from the experts – including the Soviet experts – on July 16, 1964 so he could study them before the national committee meeting.<sup>2037</sup>

Childs was not willing to travel to the Soviet Union on such a short notice so he asked his brother whether he could receive a Soviet opinion on the authenticity of the document through using his contacts in New York. Jack Childs said that it was not possible to receive a Soviet opinion within the time limit set by Hall. On July 13, Morris Childs received an opinion from a Chicago handwriting specialist which said that the “report” and the handwriting samples by Albertson were “positively written by the same individual”.<sup>2038</sup>

Apparently the party needed no Soviet opinions concerning the authenticity of the “report” to decide on Albertson’s future. A Solo document dated on July 24 reports to the Soviets that the CPUSA’s national committee had endorsed the decision of the New York district to expel Albertson. “Please delete from National Committee list Albertson as a CPUSA member and as a member of the National Committee and of the National Board”, the CPUSA wrote to the CPSU.<sup>2039</sup>

Although the CPUSA had already kicked Albertson out from the party, it decided to send the original “report” to the Soviet Union for an analysis by Soviet handwriting experts. The original document was taken to Moscow in September by Daniel Rubin. The Soviets were expected to give the document a “full treatment” and then give a secret and official report on its authenticity. At the same time, the CPUSA had set up an investigative committee to study the case. “According to Hall, the more the committee investigating the Albertson letter studies the situation, the more convinced they are of Albertson’s guilt”, Jack Childs reported to the FBI.<sup>2040</sup>

Daniel Rubin returned from Moscow in early October and brought bad news with him. According to the Soviets, the “Albertson letter” – as the document was now called – was a forgery. According to Jack Childs, Gus Hall was in a particularly bad mood after hearing the news. Hall said “very angrily” that the letter was going to cause the party “a lot of trouble” and that he did not want to discuss the topic with Childs.<sup>2041</sup>

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2037 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on July 13, 1964; OSD, part 66, pages 160-163.

2038 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on July 13, 1964; OSD, part 66, pages 160-163.

2039 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on July 24, 1964; OSD, part 66, pages 241-249.

2040 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on September 14, 1964; OSD, part 68, pages 218-221.

2041 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 13, 1964; OSD, part 70, pages

A few days later Hall was in a “much more mellow mood” when he again met with Jack Childs. Hall swore Childs to secrecy and told him more about Rubin’s trip to Moscow. “The Soviets had informed Daniel Rubin that merely looking at the Albertson letter was sufficient for them to realize that it was a forgery. The Soviets had said to Rubin, according to Hall, ‘Why didn’t you read it? If you had, you would have known from the beginning that it was a forgery’”, Jack Childs reported to the FBI.<sup>2042</sup> Hall said that he could not “publicly admit now that the Albertson letter is a forgery”. He said that he was going to send the original Albertson letter again to Moscow – this time with Morris Childs – so the Soviet experts could reanalyze the letter and “verify their opinions with respect to the authenticity of the document”.<sup>2043</sup>

In October 1964, the original Albertson letter and Albertson’s handwriting samples travelled back to Moscow with Morris Childs. This time the Soviet experts came to a conclusion which Gus Hall was hoping to hear: the letter was not a forgery.<sup>2044</sup> “There were too many common elements and shapes contained in the handwriting for it to have been prepared by anyone but the same person. [...] If this is not genuine then it is a ‘darn good job’”, Soviet experts told Childs.<sup>2045</sup>

Gus Hall was given a briefing on the matter in January 1965. He wanted to leave the matter behind – after all, it had troubled the party for more than six months already.

Hall stated that he is now going to put an end to the entire affair and will give a complete report on this information to the CPUSA Secretariat. Hall noted that Bob Thompson, a member of the CPUSA Secretariat, has suggested that the Albertson documents be turned over to some handwriting experts in England. However, Hall noted that in addition to the examination performed by the Soviet experts, this document has already been examined by experts in New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia and Los Angeles. The opinions of all the experts have been the same and Hall sees little point in any further examination. So far as Hall is concerned, the matter is finished.<sup>2046</sup>

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108-109.

2042 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 13, 1964; OSD, part 70, pages 108-109.

2043 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 13, 1964; OSD, part 70, pages 108-109. According to Jack Childs, Hall believed that the FBI had carried out a massive conspiracy-type operation to fool the CPUSA. “There are probably no more than 50 handwriting experts in the USA. When the FBI prepared this forged Albertson letter, the FBI had contacted these experts and advised them with respect to what analysis they should make in the event the Albertson letter should be submitted to them for examination. These experts were told by the FBI to state that the letter was ‘authentic’”, Hall said according to Childs.

2044 First Childs was told in Moscow that the Soviet experts had concluded that the Albertson letter was a forgery. Two days later, however, after Childs had already travelled back to the United States, the Soviets sent the CPUSA a message in which they considered the letter to be authentic. The Soviets explained the mix-up by saying that the Soviet handwriting experts had contradictory views about the case and the preliminary report had been written before the experts had formed a final opinion on the matter. See teletype message from FBI’s New York office to the Director on October 30, 1964; OSD, part 72, pages 15-20 and report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 2, 1964; OSD, part 72, pages 67-68.

2045 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 7, 1965; OSD, part 75, pages 16-20.

2046 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 7, 1965; OSD, part 75, pages 16-20.

But putting an end to the entire affair was not that easy. William Albertson repeatedly sent Gus Hall letters in which he protested against his expulsion. In September 1965 he submitted Gus Hall an article from *The Technology Review*, describing a handwriting computer developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Albertson had written a similar kind of letter in August, but had not received any answer.<sup>2047</sup> According to Albertson, the information in the article should lead to him being reinstated into the party. “It certainly substantiates what I have said all along as well as in my recent letter; namely that the document in question was ‘machine’ forged and that I was framed. I hope that the leading body will act soon on my proposals”, Albertson wrote to Hall.<sup>2048</sup>

In March 1966 Albertson sent Hall yet another letter. Albertson told Hall that during the last few months he had been in touch with Dr. Murray Eden who worked at the Department of Engineering of Massachusetts Institute of Technology. According to Albertson, Eden was the chief designer of the TX-O handwriting computer which had been mentioned in Albertson’s September letter to Hall. In response to Albertson’s inquiry, Eden had written that “computer-generated handwriting which had been modeled on the script of a single person would be very difficult to distinguish from the natural handwriting of that person”. Eden also pointed out that there were “several commercial computers available today, designed to do this kind of operation”. According to him, TX-O computer had been designed at Massachusetts Institute of Technology under a Department of Defense contract. Albertson requested that he would be reinstated into the party or that a test would be made using the TX-O computer.<sup>2049</sup>

If Hall considered the Albertson case to be closed, not all of his party members agreed with him. Long-time party member Helen Winter wanted to hear opinions of Soviet experts of Albertson’s claims that the so-called Albertson letter had been created with a handwriting computer. At the request of Winter, the CPUSA’s vice chairman Henry Winston took Albertson’s letter to Hall to Moscow where he discussed the topic with the CPSU officials, including the representatives of the security branch of the central committee of the CPSU. The Soviets said that it was “theoretically possible” to duplicate a person’s handwriting with a computer, but they “could not and would not state that that was the situation involved in the Albertson matter”. The Soviets also pointed out that while they had said that the Albertson letter was most likely written by Albertson, “they had never given one hundred percent conclusion that it was authentic”.<sup>2050</sup>

Operation Solo documents do not contain information on internal discussion that took place in the CPUSA concerning the Albertson case, but looking at the Solo documents one can gather that it was a hotly debated topic in the party. When Jack Childs travelled

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2047 In August Albertson had also attached an article on computer writing to his letter. The article in question had been published in *Science News Letter* in February 1963. See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on September 15, 1965; OSD, part 93, pages 205-206.

2048 Albertson’s letter to Hall and a copy of *The Technology Review* article can be found in CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 196, folder 4.

2049 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on June 6, 1966; OSD, part 106, pages 183-184.

2050 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on June 6, 1966; OSD, part 106, pages 183-184. Winston visited the 23<sup>rd</sup> congress CPSU’s in Moscow in March and April 1966. He was the leader of the CPUSA’s three-man delegation.

to Moscow in March 1967, “William Albertson case” was one of the three topics that Gus Hall wanted Childs to discuss with the Soviets.<sup>2051</sup> Childs took the original Albertson letter and Albertson’s handwriting samples once again to Moscow where they were once again analyzed. The Soviet analysis produced, once again, the same result: “Without a doubt Albertson was the author of the aforesaid letter”.<sup>2052</sup>

The CPUSA’s national committee discussed the Albertson case in its meeting in June 1967.<sup>2053</sup> The committee unanimously passed a resolution which well reflects the difficulty of the matter to the party:

Taking into account the fact that the original charges were founded on the belief that the evidence was irrefutable and concerned with the possibility that Albertson may be innocent of such a charge, we hereby withdraw the charge of stoolpigeon made against him. However, because we cannot close the books on this case at this time, we cannot in the best interests of the Party restore him to membership while this shadow is not completely removed. We believe all honest people will understand why this is necessary. It is to be hoped that in time we shall be able to conclude this case. We shall continue gathering evidence toward that end.<sup>2054</sup>

Albertson reacted to the resolution of the national committee in September 1967 by publishing an open letter to Gus Hall in the independent left-wing weekly *The National Guardian*. In his open letter – which covered nearly a half a page in the weekly – Albertson pointed out that the party’s national committee had “adopted a resolution completely withdrawing the charges used as a basis for my expulsion from the party three years ago”. Albertson criticized the party’s failure to publish an announcement of the withdrawal decision. He also suggested that the party’s failure to publish a vindication of his position might have been “an obscene method for ‘getting even’ for past political differences”.<sup>2055</sup> “I

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2051 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on March 28, 1967; OSD, part 113, pages 15-21. According to the document, the CPUSA’s national executive board had discussed the Albertson case in March 1967 and had instructed Childs to discuss the issue further with the Soviets. Gus Hall wrote a letter to the Central Committee of the CPSU, requesting the Soviet party to cooperate in the matter. Unfortunately the letter contains no further details about the CPUSA’s internal discussions.

2052 Teletype message from FBI’s New York office to the Director on April 20, 1967; OSD, part 113, pages 214-224.

2053 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on June 19, 1967; OSD, part 115, pages 149-174.

2054 The resolution of the national committee can be found in in CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 112, folder 10. According to John J. Abt, lawyers call this kind of outcome a “Scottish verdict”: “In Scotland there are three possible verdicts: guilty, not guilty and not proved.” See Abt & Myerson 1993, 257-258.

2055 *The New York Times*, September 8, 1967. It is unclear to what “past political differences” Albertson is referring to. According to Jay Schaffner, Gus Hall and William Albertson had disagreed on paying for Junius Scales’s legal costs after Scales had left party in the late 1950s, but Albertson – who was the treasurer of the Smith Act families defense committee – had given money to Scales. According to Schaffner, Hall had accused Albertson of stealing the party’s money. Schaffner’s view is not, however, compatible with Scales’s version of story. According to Scales, he was able cover his legal costs with former CPUSA money he got from George Charney who had also left the party. See Scales & Nickson 1987, 337; interview with Jay Schaffner in New York City, October 2013 and Rosenberg 2019, 23.

have no further desire to be associated with the present leadership of the Party through membership or otherwise”, Albertson concluded.<sup>2056</sup>

Although Albertson had “no further desire to be associated with the present leadership of the Party” he continued his attempts to be reinstated into the CPUSA. According to Jay Schaffner, Albertson had appealed for re-admission to the party at the party’s 1969 national convention, but to no avail.<sup>2057</sup>

Although Hall had considered the Albertson matter finished already in 1965, the case remained a source of disagreement within the party for decades to come. Prominent party members like Gil Green, William Weinstone and the party’s lawyer John J. Abt wanted the party to re-open the case and recognize its error.<sup>2058</sup>

In April 1981 Green delivered to the party’s central control commission photocopies of the FBI documents which had been obtained under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). According to Green, the documents showed that Albertson had been framed by the FBI and that the party should recognize its error. The secretariat of the central control commission came to a different kind of conclusion. “After the Secretariat studied this material, it unanimously concluded that nothing there constitutes any proof of the contention by Gil. Albertson is not named in any of this material, although it refers to seeking permission from FBI headquarters to frame some leading persons in the Party as informers”, Carl Winter writes in his report. According to Winter, the secretariat of the central control committee concluded that “there was no justification found for re-opening the case or taking any further action”. “I believe that this matter should be closed on the basis of this report. No good purpose can be served by continuing to rehash it. Only new evidence of a substantive character could warrant any renewed attention”, Winter wrote.<sup>2059</sup>

While the CPUSA saw no need to rehash the Albertson case, it was being rehashed in the courts as William Albertson’s widow Lillie Albertson sued the U.S. government for her husband’s treatment. The legal process continued for years and ended only in October 1989 when the parties found a settlement. The government agreed to pay \$170 000 to Lillie Albertson while admitting “no liability or fault on the part of the United States or its agents”.<sup>2060</sup>

Meanwhile the discontent concerning the CPUSA’s approach to the Albertson case continued within the party. As the CPUSA was getting ready for its 25<sup>th</sup> national convention in the end of 1991 – 27 years after the expulsion of William Albertson – the Albertson case was one of the many topics discussed in the party’s “pre-convention discussion bulletin”.

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2056 Quoted in Carl Winter’s Albertson case report to the CPUSA’s political bureau executive committee on August 3, 1981. The report can be found in CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 112, folder 10.

2057 Interview with Jay Schaffner in New York City, September 2013.

2058 Carl Winter’s Albertson case report to the CPUSA’s political bureau executive committee on August 3, 1981. The report can be found in CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 112, folder 10.

2059 Carl Winter’s Albertson case report to the CPUSA’s political bureau executive committee on August 3, 1981. The report can be found in CPUSA Records (TAM 132), box 112, folder 10.

2060 *The New York Times*, October 26, 1989. Lillie Albertson did not only sue the U.S. government for the fake letter incident but other lawless acts as well. The FBI recorded almost all the Albertsons’ telephone conversations for years, for example, without a warrant.

Referring to new FBI documents that had come into light, party member Ann Gurley from the Northern California district demanded in her bulletin contribution that the CPUSA “should apologize publicly, and as soon as possible, to the Albertson family”. In her opinion, the expulsion of William Albertson was “a tragic mistake” and correcting “the great injustice done to the Albertson family” would “improve the party’s credibility and its morality”.<sup>2061</sup> In addition to Gurley’s text, the Northern California district published a resolution on the Albertson case in the pre-convention discussion bulletin. According to the district, “leaving this tragic error unadmitted and uncorrected would be immoral” as “time will not ever erase this blot on the Party”.<sup>2062</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the CPUSA’s lawyer John J. Abt was one of the most ardent critics of the party leadership in relation to the Albertson case. In his autobiography, Abt points out that the party made severe mistakes in the very beginning of the case:

The Party leadership never really tried to investigate the matter before expelling him [Albertson]. There had been no serious checkup, no interviews with friends, comrades and co-workers, no attempt at surveillance. There had only been an immediate denunciation, which greatly disturbed me. *Only after it had already expelled him* did the party leadership begin to investigate the evidence against Albertson.<sup>2063</sup>

In Abt’s opinion, the Albertson letter was highly unconvincing and the party leadership should have suspected the authenticity of the letter from the very beginning:

In the course of my career, I have seen hundreds, even thousands of reports, letters and affidavits of paid informers, and this one conformed to none I had ever seen. It was addressed to “Joe” and signed “Bill”, an absolute violation of all known procedure. Stool pigeons are invariably given false names or code numbers. The “report” was also undated and worded so that a change in the date of its discovery would not affect its timeliness. In my experience it was also unheard of for an informer to ask, in writing, for a raise in pay.<sup>2064</sup>

As Abt was writing his memoirs in the early 1990s the CPUSA still had not changed its approach to the Albertson case.

The party leadership stills denies its own culpability in the Albertson case. Unquestionably the FBI is the culprit and the Party itself – not only the Albertson family – the victim. So it is shameful that instead of giving the FBI the bloody nose it deserved the Party leadership preferred to bury the case rather than acknowledge fallibility and simple human error. After so many years, the Party can no longer salvage whatever slight honor and integrity it might once have had in the matter.<sup>2065</sup>

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2061 *Dialog – Pre-convention Discussion Bulletin*, November-December 1991.

2062 *Dialog – Pre-convention Discussion Bulletin*, November-December 1991. According to the Northern California district, the CPUSA leadership had had the most recent FBI documents at least since January 1990, but to the district’s disappointment the party had not made an apology to the Albertson family.

2063 Abt & Myerson 1993, 257. Italics in the original.

2064 Abt & Myerson 1993, 257. Frank Donner makes similar remarks in his article on the Albertson case. See Donner 1976, 14-15.

2065 Abt & Myerson 1993, 259.



### Appendix 3. Gus Hall, the FBI and the strange case of Polish horses

One of the most peculiar elements in the Operation Solo material is the story of Gus Hall's horse dealings with the Eastern bloc countries, especially Poland. Hall acquired top quality Arabian stallions from Poland and other Eastern European countries for his brothers who had a horse farm in Northern Minnesota. While Gus Hall's horse dealings were known at least among some of his party comrades<sup>2066</sup> and while they are also mentioned in John Barron's book on Operation Solo<sup>2067</sup>, there is very little detailed information available on them. It is therefore appropriate in this study to look at what Operation Solo material tells us about these affairs. In addition to looking at Operation Solo material, I will also study the FBI documents related to a planned COINTELPRO operation which aimed at making the imported horses incapable of breeding.

Gus Hall's brothers Toivo and Veikko Halberg had a horse farm in Cherry, Minnesota. Toivo and Veikko were Hall's younger brothers – Toivo was born in 1912 and Veikko in 1914. The horse farm was not their only source of income as they also had a general store and a construction company in Cherry. They were entrepreneurial spirits and they seized opportunities offered to them. In the 1950s, for example, they sold many television sets and also installed television antennas in the Cherry area. In addition to televisions, they sold household appliances, fuels and agricultural supplies and also did forestry work. They bought their first Arabian horses in 1960. Partly thanks to their helpful older brother, their horse business grew significantly in the late 1960s and 1970s. Over the years they sold horses to, for example, singer Wayne Newton and film director Mike Nichols who were both known for their interest in Arabian horses.<sup>2068</sup>

According to Operation Solo documents, the aim of Hall's horse deals was to make money for the CPUSA.<sup>2069</sup> However, in Solo documents available for this study there was no indications that the party would have received any money from Hall's horse farmer

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<sup>2066</sup> As I interviewed former and current American communists, at least Matthew Hallinan, Jack Kurzweil and Jay Schaffner were familiar with Hall's horse deals. Jack Kurzweil saw Hall's horse deals as a sign of his personal corruption along with his house in Yonkers and his chauffeur. See interview with Matthew Hallinan in Berkeley, California in August 2010; interview with Jack Kurzweil in Berkeley, California in August 2010 and interview with Jay Schaffner in New York City in October 2013.

<sup>2067</sup> See Barron 1995, 186-187 & 303.

<sup>2068</sup> Statement by Toivo Halberg concerning FBI's counterintelligence operations against the Halberg horse farm, no date; interviews with Kristin Koskela and Marcy Steele in Cherry, Minnesota in August 2008 and interview with Dennis Hallberg in Superior, Wisconsin in August 2008. Dennis Hallberg is a son of Toivo Halberg and Kristin Koskela and Marcy Steele are daughters of Veikko Halberg.

<sup>2069</sup> One Solo document states, for example, that "as the Bureau is aware, the stallion is being purchased for breeding purposes, as a result of which the profits therefrom will be given to CPUSA". See report from FBI's New York office to the Director on December 21, 1965; OSD, part 98, pages 21-22.

brothers. Looking at the way Hall used Solo funds for his personal purposes and especially for supporting his children, it would not be surprising if Hall acquired the horses primarily in order to help out his brothers.

Operation Solo documents contain around 30 references to Hall's horse dealings with the Eastern Europeans. It is unclear how the whole process got started but looking at the documents it seems that Hall was the initiator. In the fall of 1961 – as Morris Childs was once again travelling to Moscow – Hall seems to have suggested to him that he would discuss with the CPUSA's Polish comrades donating a fine Arabian stallion to the American party. Childs opposed such a move. In a short message from Moscow to his brother Jack in New York, Morris Childs feared that "Hall's request for Polish stallions would result in CG 5824-S\* [Morris Childs] being laughed at by the Poles".<sup>2070</sup>

For Childs, the horse issue was apparently highly unpleasant and awkward. He did "make overtures" to the Poles at the CPSU's 22<sup>nd</sup> congress regarding Hall's "Arabian stallion proposal", but the Poles were not receptive.<sup>2071</sup> Hall had apparently suggested that after his Moscow visit Morris Childs would travel to Poland to continue the discussions on the horse issue, but after asking for permission from Hall, Childs eventually did not travel to Poland.<sup>2072</sup> Later Childs suggested to Hall that he would send his two brothers to Poland to discuss the horse issue.<sup>2073</sup>

After Morris Childs's unsuccessful overtures in the fall of 1961, Hall's horse dealings did not proceed for a couple of years. In September 1963, however, some progress could be observed. In addition to the Poles, Hall had apparently contacted also the Soviets in order to obtain a purebred stallion. After Morris Childs returned from one of his Solo missions to Moscow in August 1963, he could inform Hall that the Soviets had decided to donate a purebred stallion to their American comrades. According to the Soviets, the stallion – worth "many thousands of dollars" – was available for shipment to the United States whenever Hall so desired. Hall discussed the issue with a horse raiser – most likely his brother – whose name is redacted from the Operation Solo document. Perhaps a little surprisingly, the horse raiser's attitude towards the gift horse was somewhat skeptical. Initially the horse raiser was not eager to accept the stallion, but eventually he said that he "might be willing in the future to take a trip to the USSR to look at the stallion for purposes of determining whether it was the type they needed and if it would be worthwhile to bring back".<sup>2074</sup>

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2070 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on October 31, 1961; OSD, part 34, page 111. Although Hall most likely instructed Childs to discuss the horse issue with the Poles during his Moscow visit, for some reason the topic is not mentioned in the Operation Solo documents concerning Hall's pre-travel instructions to Childs. See report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on October 5, 1961; OSD, part 34, pages 25-37 and memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on October 9, 1961; OSD, part 34, pages 15-17.

2071 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on November 9, 1961; OSD, part 34, pages 138-139.

2072 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on November 20, 1961; OSD, part 34, pages 175-176 and report from FBI's New York office to the Director on November 22, 1961; OSD, part 34, pages 182-183.

2073 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on November 29, 1961; OSD, part 34, pages 198-199.

2074 Report from FBI's Chicago office to the Director on September 9, 1963; OSD, part 47, pages 68-70.

The Soviet horse donation did not, however, move forward. Within a few days Hall learned that because of new U.S. customs law, the importer of such an Arabian stallion would have to pay “an extremely high” duty.<sup>2075</sup> Hall ordered Jack Childs to send the Soviets a message in which he would thank the Soviets for their “very generous offer” but ask them to postpone the delivery of the horse. “In view of the possibility of new tax laws coming into effect we must think the matter over and hold it in abeyance”, Jack Childs wrote to the Soviets. Hall had apparently received an offer from the Poles, because in the same message Jack Childs asked the Soviets to “please notify Polish comrades we desire that their offer of horses also be held in abeyance for the same reason until next spring”.<sup>2076</sup> In mid-September the Soviets replied by writing that “your request to delay sending of colt is accepted” and that the “Polish CP is informed”.<sup>2077</sup>

Hall’s horse dealings were now once again stalled. Morris Childs did discuss the issue with the Poles when he visited the Polish embassy in Moscow in November 1963. Childs conveyed Hall’s thanks to the Polish United Workers’ Party for their generous gift horse offer but told them that the shipment of the stallion had to be postponed because of the U.S. tax laws.<sup>2078</sup>

In early 1964, however, things seemed to start moving, as Morris Childs reported from Minneapolis:

During his present trip to Minneapolis, Hall had again spoken to his brother and his brother now is in favor of accepting the offer of the gift of purebred Polish stallions. According to Hall, the new tariff law which the United States Government had been considering placing in effect against the importation of such horses has now been discarded and instead the United States Government is now attempting to increase the importation of these particular animals. In view of this, Hall noted that there is now good possibility that the Party may request in the future the delivery of the gift stallions offered to the Party, or at least accept the offer of the Poles.<sup>2079</sup>

Although the tax law problem was now overcome, the process proceeded only slowly. In the fall of 1964, the CPUSA delivered a letter to the Polish United Workers’ Party requesting that an invitation was issued to Hall’s brother to visit Poland “to take up this matter personally”.<sup>2080</sup> It is unclear whether such an invitation was ever received, but instead of Hall’s brother, CPUSA insider Isidore Gibby Needleman started taking care of Hall’s horse dealings in the spring of 1965. In March 1965, he travelled to the Soviet Union and some of the Eastern European countries. During this trip, he also visited Poland where he discussed the horse issue with the representatives of the Polish United Workers’ Party. Needleman

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2075 Memo from F.J. Baumgardner to W.C. Sullivan on September 12, 1963; OSD, part 48, pages 68-69.

2076 Memo from C.E. Downing to Mr. Conrad on September 12, 1963; OSD, part 48, page 59 and report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on September 19, 1963; OSD, part 48, pages 117-121.

2077 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on September 17, 1963; OSD, part 48, pages 203-204.

2078 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on December 16, 1963; OSD, part 52, pages 72-75.

2079 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on February 25, 1964; OSD, part 58, pages 83-84.

2080 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on November 3, 1964; OSD, part 72, pages 61-62.

was driven from Warsaw to a special farm where thoroughbred horses were raised. He was shown all the horses on the farm and asked which ones he wanted. Since Needleman knew nothing about horses, he was given a catalogue to study. The Poles hoped that the Americans would inform them about their choices by mid-July so the horse or horses could be shipped to the United States in September 1965. Gus Hall was “very happy” after hearing about Needleman’s trip which he considered to be a success.<sup>2081</sup>

Although Needleman’s visit to Poland was “a success”, the shipping of the Polish gift horse did not take place in September 1965. Gus Hall was frustrated by the slow-moving process and the fact that “all correspondence from the CPUSA had been ignored” by the Poles. In November as Morris Childs once again visited Moscow, he met with the Polish ambassador to whom he expressed Hall’s dissatisfaction. The ambassador promised to “check into this matter”.<sup>2082</sup> After a few days, the ambassador invited Childs to the Polish embassy:

Upon arrival at the Embassy, the CPUSA representative was met by the Ambassador who said “I have good news from Warsaw. I got a horse for Comrade Hall.” The Ambassador stated that the stallion would be ready any time that Comrade Hall could send someone to Warsaw to make arrangements to transport it to the United States. [...] He then noted that when they arrive in Warsaw to pick up the horse for Hall, they should contact the Foreign Minister of Trade, Witold Trampczynski, who handled this transaction and knows all the details.<sup>2083</sup>

As the process was finally proceeding, Hall did not waste time in sending his representatives to Poland. On January 3, 1966 Isadore Gibby Needleman and Hall’s brother Toivo Halberg travelled to Warsaw. Before their departure, they had several briefing sessions with Gus Hall who told them – among other things – that “if they were not satisfied with the pedigree of the horse or on the other details regarding the transaction, they should not hesitate to reject the offer”.<sup>2084</sup>

Needleman and Halberg returned to the United States in late January after a three-week journey during which they also visited the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and the GDR.<sup>2085</sup>

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2081 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on April 6, 1965; OSD, part 84, pages 143-148. Apparently Gus Hall was also ready to buy a horse from the Poles instead of receiving it as a gift. In March he received \$5 000 from the party funds for purchasing Polish breeding stallions. Isidore Gibby Needleman was supposed to take care of the actual purchase. It is unclear how this money was eventually used as Needleman did not buy any horses during his visit to Poland in the spring of 1965. See report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on April 5, 1965; OSD, part 84, pages 117-118.

2082 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director, November 23, 1965; OSD, part 96, pages 114-116.

2083 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director, November 23, 1965; OSD, part 96, pages 114-116.

2084 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director, January 17, 1966; OSD, part 98, pages 95-100. Needleman and Halberg were also told that they should “not to become involved in a price haggle or an argument with government trade representatives”. “If any problem should arise regarding this matter, they were instructed to contact the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party and explain that this was a matter previously raised and settled through the Polish Ambassador in Moscow”, Morris Childs reported.

2085 Toivo Halberg’s tour of Eastern Europe was surely a memorable experience for him. Halberg had never flown on an airplane before his trip. In general, he was not an avid traveler. According to Gus Hall’s wife Elizabeth, Toivo and his brother Veikko were “strictly hometown boys” who were not

According to Needleman, the negotiations with the Poles had been “a total success”. The Poles did not charge for the horse and they were perhaps also ready to cover the transportation costs to the United States.<sup>2086</sup>

Needleman’s assessment of the negotiations was apparently the correct because at some point in 1966 Toivo Halberg seems to have received his first Polish gift horse.<sup>2087</sup> Operation Solo documents do not contain information on the horse’s delivery or on other such details, but a document dated in January 1967 tells us that Halberg had received a purebred Arabian stallion from Poland. The successful horse deal seemed to inspire Gus Hall to plan for even larger horse transactions with the Eastern Europeans. Hall planned to send Needleman and his brother to the Soviet Union, Hungary and Poland to acquire additional horses. “Efforts should be made to secure possibly one purebred Arabian horse from each country”, Hall stated according to Morris Childs. This time Hall did not expect to receive horses as gifts but he was ready to pay for them. Hall prepared recommendation letters to Needleman and his brother for their visits to the Soviet Union, Hungary and Poland. In these letters Hall emphasized that Needleman’s and Halberg’s horse deals are not personal but “in the interest of our organization”. As a consequence Hall hoped that the Soviet, Polish and Hungarian parties would give them “special cooperation and consideration”.<sup>2088</sup>

After the January 1967 document mentioned above, there is no references to Hall’s horse dealings in the Operation Solo material now available. The dealings continued, however. According to Matthew Hallinan, Hall was given an Arabian stallion when he visited the Soviet Union in 1969.<sup>2089</sup> Morris Childs in turn remembers in John Barron’s *Operation Solo* book, that in February 1972 – while Richard Nixon was on his historical visit to the People’s Republic of China – he and his wife Eva were in Poland “dispatched there by Gus Hall on an important mission – laying groundwork for the acquisition of Arabian horses to be sold by the American communist Party (or Hall himself)”.<sup>2090</sup>

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willing to travel for more than 200 miles from home. According to Elizabeth Hall, this was the reason why the horse deals had proceeded so slowly. See report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on July 26, 1965; OSD, part 92, pages 29-30 and *Duluth Sunday News-Tribune*, March 12, 1967.

2086 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 28, 1966; OSD, part 99, pages 130-135.

2087 According to FBI documents in possession of Dennis Hallberg, the Halberg brothers’ first Polish Arabian stallion was expected to arrive to the United States on May 11, 1966. It was expected to arrive on a Scandinavian Airlines flight to New York’s John F. Kennedy Airport together with fourteen other Arabian horses from Poland. From the airport the horses were expected to be transferred to the United States Government Quarantine Station in Clifton, New Jersey. See report from FBI’s Newark office to the Director on May 9, 1966 and Dennis Hallberg’s FOIA papers.

2088 Report from FBI’s Chicago office to the Director on January 10, 1967; OSD, part 111, pages 58-62.

2089 Interview with Matthew Hallinan in Berkeley, California, August 2010. According to Hallinan, the Moscow visit changed his view of Gus Hall. Hallinan remembers: “When we were leaving, Gus Hall had a pile of loot. He was given a new Arabian Stallion that they were shipping over. He had pictures and jewelry for his wife and all this kind of stuff. Anyhow, that was the beginning of my disillusionment with him.”

2090 Barron 1995, 186-187. According to Toivo Halberg, the Halberg brothers imported at least eight horses – five stallions and three mares – after the first stallion which was imported in 1966. Unfortunately Halberg does not mention from which countries the horses were imported from, except that two of them were imported from Hungary. It is possible that the total figure of Halberg horse importations is higher because the figure above is from a statement which was most likely published in 1977. See Statement by Toivo Halberg concerning FBI’s counterintelligence operations

As the FBI assumed that the Polish stallions would be used to finance CPUSA's activities, the Bureau started planning for countermeasures which could limit the party's ability to receive income from the horses.<sup>2091</sup> FBI documents, which Gus Hall's nephew Dennis Hallberg received from the Bureau following the Freedom of Information Act, show that at least some FBI agents were ready to consider harsh measures to harm the party's economy. In April 1965, the FBI's New York office had a rough suggestion to the Bureau headquarters:

Because of the importance Hall attaches to the project and the fact that the Party's finances will depend in part upon the procreative ability of these horses, it is suggested that as a Counterintelligence effort, we make arrangements to have them sterilized when they enter the United States.

With Bureau approval, New York will make inquiries at the Bureau of Customs and with some suitable veterinary authority to determine the most efficient way of accomplishing this.<sup>2092</sup>

About two weeks later the bureau headquarters gave its permission to the New York office to make preliminary inquiries concerning the possible sterilization of the horses. The FBI headquarters emphasized that the agents making the inquiries had to remain completely silent about the goal of the operation. "Under no circumstances should you indicate to any Customs officials your counterintelligence objective", the headquarters wrote. The same rule applied when the agents were talking with the veterinarians:

When you interview this veterinarian, you should not indicate to him the specific target of your counterintelligence action and be most circumspect, discussing the matter in general terms and using suitable pretexts to avoid revealing your counterintelligence purposes.<sup>2093</sup>

The headquarters instructed New York office to inform the headquarters about the results of their inquiries. "Do not initiate counter-intelligence action without specific authority", the headquarters emphasized.<sup>2094</sup>

In late May 1965, the New York office sent the FBI headquarters a memo containing the results of their inquiries. The document discusses the different ways of sterilizing a horse. The veterinarian who was interviewed by the FBI did not know whether there was a drug available which would cause the horse to be permanently sterile. The veterinarian suggested that the FBI should get in touch with an expert in the Food and Drug Administration or a research scientist working for a drug manufacturer. The veterinarian did not consider

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against the Halberg horse farm, no date.

2091 A fine Arabian stallion could indeed turn out to be quite a moneymaker for its owner. According a newspaper article on the Halberg horse farm, the potential earning power of a sire was "almost unlimited". A fine purebred stallion could earn up to \$1 000 per service and it could continue as a stud for more than 20 years. See *Duluth Sunday News-Tribune*, March 12, 1967.

2092 Report from FBI's New York office to the Director on April 8, 1965; Dennis Hallberg's FOIA papers.

2093 Letter from the Director to FBI's New York office on April 21, 1965; Dennis Hallberg's FOIA papers.

2094 Letter from the Director to FBI's New York office on April 21, 1965; Dennis Hallberg's FOIA papers.

sterilization by injecting female hormones a suitable method in this case because it did not cause permanent sterilization.<sup>2095</sup>

Sterilization by using x-rays was considered unpractical because such a method would require massive doses of radiation probably over a period of time and would cause “burns and debilitation”. Crushing the cords of the horse by using special type of pliers – which was a usual method when sterilizing sheep and swine – was also not considered a suitable method because there were “no veterinarians who have had experience in this method as far as horses are concerned”. Tying the horse’s cords with catgut was considered a much better alternative because “tied cords would be virtually impossible to detect and would be a relatively simple operation”. “The scars from the incision would be extremely small and unnoticeable and the chance of infection is nil”, the veterinarian told the FBI. The operation could be done at the Government Quarantine Station in Clifton, New Jersey, where the horses would be transferred to after their arrival to the United States. A veterinarian could not, however, carry out the operation unassisted, but it would call for the help of at least one person familiar with horses, the veterinarian said.<sup>2096</sup>

The FBI headquarters – including probably also director J. Edgar Hoover – studied the information gathered by the New York office. The headquarters also made an inquiry to the Bureau of Medicine concerning the existence of a drug which would cause a permanent sterilization of an animal. The answer of the Bureau of Medicine was negative. Because of this, the headquarters reasoned, the sterilization of the horses “could only be accomplished through surgery necessitating the cooperation of a veterinarian”. As a consequence, the headquarters decided to abandon the sterilization plan:

In view of the exceptionally delicate nature of the proposed technique, necessitating the cooperation of a veterinarian, after careful consideration it has been decided the technique as proposed by New York cannot be approved. The Bureau has also considered the possibility of artificially causing the stallions to develop a disease which will cause their indefinite quarantine or require their return to Poland upon their arrival in this country. It has been decided that this technique also would not be feasible because of the necessity to secure the cooperation of Government veterinarian at the Quarantine Station in Clifton, New Jersey.<sup>2097</sup>

Sterilizing Toivo Halberg’s horses was not the only counterintelligence operation the FBI was planning in relation to the Halberg horse farm. The Bureau also wanted the Minnesota newspapers to write about Halberg brothers and their Arabian stallions because such stories could later be used in the FBI’s counterintelligence operations. The FBI’s efforts led to a publication of one Halberg brothers -related article in *Duluth Sunday News-Tribune* in March 1967. The article did not mention the Halberg brothers’ connections to Gus Hall or to the CPUSA.<sup>2098</sup>

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2095 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on May 28, 1965; Dennis Hallberg’s FOIA papers.

2096 Report from FBI’s New York office to the Director on May 28, 1965; Dennis Hallberg’s FOIA papers.

2097 Letter from the Director to FBI’s New York and Newark offices on July 15, 1965; Dennis Hallberg’s FOIA papers.

2098 *Duluth Sunday News-Tribune*, March 12, 1967. Ten years later Minnesota newspapers wrote lengthy stories on the FBI’s efforts to influence the newspapers. The FBI documents related to

Toivo Halberg was shocked to find out about the FBI's plans to sterilize the horses after he studied the Bureau documents which the Halbergs had been able to obtain under the Freedom of Information Act. He published a statement in which he briefly told the story of the Halberg horse farm and attacked the "gangster-like acts" that the FBI had been planning. "It has had a totally devastating effect on my mind to realize that such underhanded tactics would be employed by our government at the U. S. Quarantine Station", Halberg wrote.<sup>2099</sup>

As Toivo Halberg wanted to represent himself solely as an innocent victim of government repression, he had to stretch the boundaries of truth in certain respects. According to him, Gus Hall had nothing to do with the importation of the horses. His account of the financing of the first imported horse – which was called Madrygal – was also not wholly truthful:

The news media and others have questioned how people of modest means were able to import these horses. With good business management and an excellent credit rating we were able to secure a bank loan for the purchase of Madrygal, and as I have said so often, "Madrygal started the ball rolling, so we could continue". I have all the records on the horses imported and they clearly indicate that my brother [Veikko Halberg] and I purchased and paid for them.<sup>2100</sup>

In Toivo Halberg's opinion, he was being persecuted only because Gus Hall happened to be his brother:

Although the extensive FBI investigation conducted by the Department of Justice and the I.R.S. [Internal Revenue Service] audits failed to find any proof of wrong doing in our importation of horses, the Department of Justice was making plans to mutilate or otherwise to make worthless my horses by the use debilitating drugs (some justice!), simply because of my family relationship with Gus Hall.

In closing, I leave you with this thought: Ask not what you can do for your government, but beware of what your government can do to you.<sup>2101</sup>

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the Halberg horse farm revealed that some journalists working for the papers – including the managing editor of the *Duluth Sunday News-Tribune* – had cooperated closely with the Bureau. Thomas Daly, editor of the *Duluth Herald and News-Tribune*, strongly criticized the cooperation with journalists and the FBI. "I have no knowledge at this time as to whether anyone now at these newspapers have compromised themselves in this manner. If I had evidence to this effect, the person would, of course, be discharged", Daly said in a statement. See *Duluth News-Tribune*, November 24, 1977 and *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 27, 1977.

2099 Statement by Toivo Halberg concerning FBI's counterintelligence operations against the Halberg horse farm, no date. The author received a copy of the statement when interviewing Dennis Hallberg in Superior, Wisconsin in August 2008. There is no date in the statement, but most likely it was written in November or December 1977 when Minnesota newspapers were writing about FBI's above-mentioned media operations related to Halberg horse farm.

2100 Statement by Toivo Halberg concerning FBI's counterintelligence operations against the Halberg horse farm, no date. According to the FBI documents, Madrygal – which won numerous prizes in horse shows – was apparently in 1968 sold to a buyer in Kentucky. The sale price was not known, but it was reportedly around \$15 000 to \$20 000. See report from FBI's Minneapolis office to the Director on August 22, 1968; Dennis Hallberg's FOIA papers and report from FBI's Minneapolis office to the Director on September 17, 1969; Dennis Hallberg's FOIA papers.

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This study examines the life and political line of Gus Hall (1910-2000), the long-time general secretary of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), up until the late 1960s. The first main part of the study examines Hall's Finnish American background and his life until 1959, when he became the general secretary of the CPUSA. The second main part studies Hall's political line during the first decade of his general secretaryship. The latter part is, to a large extent, based on the documents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In the mid-1950s the FBI managed to infiltrate two of its informers into the very top of the CPUSA. In the 1960s, the two informers, Morris and Jack Childs, provided the FBI detailed information on Gus Hall and his relations with the Soviet Union, China and other communist countries. Thanks to the Childs brothers, the FBI became fully informed about, for example, the Soviet Union's financial support to the CPUSA.

In addition to more than 20 000 pages of FBI's intelligence documents, this study is based on a wide variety of other historical sources, including interviews with numerous former and current CPUSA members.

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ISBN 978-951-653-451-3 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-951-653-452-0 (pdf)