

Working Class Internationalism:
The American Communist Party and Anti-Vietnam War Activism 1961-1971

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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The main objective of this research is to illuminate the Communist Party USA's movement in protest against the Vietnam War (1961-1971). Scholarship on anti-Vietnam War activism fails to focus on American Communists who participated alongside more routinely remembered college protesters. This thesis concentrates on three dimensions of Party activism: Its journalism, youth organizations, and the movement's circulation to more Americans. American Communist dissent, the thesis shows, worked within a complex American political climate. The Party's anti-war activism centered on an Old Left radical tradition separating Communists and non-Communist activists. Party activists also navigated the dichotomy between embracing Communist ideology and activism, and denying Party membership. By the 1970s, however, CPUSA activists found themselves outside of the anti-war culture. President Nixon's "Vietnamization" of the war diluted the fervor of the anti-war movement that revealed deep divisions between Communists and liberal groups whose alliance proved both volatile and temporary.

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Introduction

The American Communist Radical Tradition: CPUSA Activism and the Party's Place in the War in Vietnam

The Vietnam War and the protest generated by millions of anti-war Americans played a major role in the history of the postwar U.S. Anti-war Americans voiced a deep discontent against the U.S. government for multitudes of lost U.S. servicemen and Vietnamese. The American Communist Party and its anti-war activism, however, get largely lost in the scholarship. American Communists anti-war activists, although not the foremost major players in anti-war protests, also organized their own dissent.

CPUSA General Secretary Gus Hall spoke to 19,000 students on a tour of Pacific Coast Colleges in 1962. The General Secretary of the Party argued that the odds against the fight for equality were "tremendous" given the power of billions of dollars spent on propaganda to both isolate the CPUSA and "distort and confuse their [the American people's] understanding of the real problem."¹ The CPUSA, said Hall, had to break an "ideological wall... built between ourselves and the people."² The end of 1950s Communists persecution allowed the development of a working class upsurge in the 1960s as American Communist anti-war activists organized radical dissent.

A study of CPUSA is pivotal to our understanding of the larger anti-war movement which galvanized millions of Americans. American Communist Party activists operated within

¹ Gus Hall Speech, 1962, in Norman Markowitz, "Old Struggles in a New Age: The CPUSA in the 1960s," *Political Affairs*, 2010, 1.

² *Ibid*, 1.

an Old Left tradition which focused on the working class as the agents of revolutionary change. Such a CPUSA focus, nuances the history of anti-war activism in which the Party was a point of departure from the larger movement. This study will not simply tell the history of the anti-war movement in which American Communist activists participated on the periphery. But instead, and more importantly, the goal is to narrate how Old Left oriented Party activists broke through the “ideological wall” in Cold War American political life.

This thesis will look to show how the CPUSA, as the war progressed from 1961-1971, offered a radical critique against Cold War politics which both stood apart from and within the greater anti-war movement at large. The CPUSA, as Communism remained a political liability in American life, found allies in other non-Communists activists. But nevertheless, American Communist anti-war activists, contrary to other radicals of the 1960s, operated within the Party’s concentration on the working class as the agents of revolution and condemned the oppression of Communist nations in Southeast Asia. The Party was also forced to reconcile the dichotomy of conforming to the larger anti-war movement, while simultaneously focusing on a tradition of American Communist radicalism seen throughout the Party’s history. The CPUSA’s anti-war activism, as the Party navigated the anti-Communist dangers of American politics of the 1960s, manifested itself radically through *The Worker*, youth organizing, and the ways in which the Party circulated their criticisms to more people. The rest of this introduction will offer a literature review on the scholarship of CPUSA activism which argues that the Party had a long tradition of dissent, and also shows that the scholarship on anti-war activism lacks focus on

American Communism. The introduction will then highlight the arguments and sources for the rest of the thesis.

CPUSA Activism in the 1930s and 1940s

The CPUSA, in the Popular Front era (1935-1939) and the Second World War (1939-1945), engaged in an activism predicated on the advancement of working class and radical equality for African Americans. The Party operated in a culture that saw capitalism as problematic to American society. As Earl Brower, the leader of the Party from 1935 to 1945, declared, “Communism is twentieth-century Americanism.” The CPUSA in the 1930s and 1940s, as a result, achieved a highpoint of 100,000 members, and was, simultaneously, allowed to infiltrate a whole host of liberal institutions and use them as front groups.³

Conservative scholars of the CPUSA, and their subsequent followers, denounced Party activism. Theodore Draper, an unapologetic anticommunist, for example, claimed that the CPUSA was a puppet of the U.S.S.R throughout the Party’s history.⁴ The Communist movement in America that took overtures from the Soviet Union, therefore, was inherently detrimental to the nation’s way of life. The CPUSA, argues Draper, in its early stages “transformed from a new

³ “Communist Party U.S.A.,” <http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/printgroupProfile.asp?gpid=7511>.

⁴ Theodore Draper, *Roots of American Communism* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957); Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Union* (New York: The Viking Press, 1960).

expression of American radicalism to the American appendage of a Russian revolutionary power.”⁵ Draper also claims that the notion of “Americanization” by the CPUSA in the Popular Front was “in reality another type of American response to a Russian stimulus.”⁶ Draper’s disciples, most prominently John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr from the 1980s onward, cite newly opened Soviet archives that further link the CPUSA and the U.S.S.R.⁷ The orthodox approach to CPUSA history appears problematic, for the slant undercuts the Party’s grassroots ‘Americanized’ goals.

Many revisionist historians, to counteract the conservative anticommunist narrative, give the CPUSA a different look. Joseph R. Stobin, a revolutionary revisionist historian of the CPUSA, wrote in 1972 that American Communists in the Popular Front era engaged in “the bitter battle to save the Party” from criticism from conservatives and adopted an “independent course...re-examining the past.”⁸ Another important revisionist, Maurice Isserman, examined the

⁵ Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 3.

⁶ Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 395.

⁷ Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Book Publishers, 1984); John Earl Hayes and Harvey Klehr, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Harvey Klehr, *The Communist Experience in America: A Political and Social History* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010).

⁸ Joseph R. Stobin, *American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972). Maurice Isserman, *Which Side are you on?: The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1982).

Party in the Second War World. This historian, who belongs to a new generation influenced by 1960s Leftist radicalism, sees the Party as “flexible, imaginative, principled, and rooted in neighborhoods and workplaces.”⁹ Popular Front and Second World War American Communist politics, through Party activism, created their own U.S. society.

Up until the 1990s, with the work of revisionist Fraser M. Ottanelli, scholarship on the CPUSA either showed the Party’s direct Soviet influence, or American Communists’ movements. Ottanelli breaks that narrative and shows that his work “parts from previous studies in that it avoids a unilateral approach centered exclusively either on the Party’s connection to Moscow or on the grassroots activities of Communists.”¹⁰ Ottanelli, moreover, argues that from the Stock Market crash to the end of World War Two, “the Party’s experience centered around an indigenous quest for policies, organizational forms, language, and an overall cultural form that would adapt the Communist radicalism to domestic realities and political traditions.”¹¹ Ottanelli’s work pinpoints a nuanced history of the Party.

A tradition of American Communist radicalism didn’t just center on the U.S. domestic front, but instead the Party also concerned themselves with Communist politics worldwide. A

⁹ Maurice Isserman, *Which Side are you on?:The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1982).

¹⁰ Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 4.

¹¹ Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States*, 5.

domestic-international focus is a pivotal blueprint to follow in further research. This thesis will use Ottanelli's scholarship and delve into the ways in which American Communist anti-war activism dealt with domestic issues and placated to the Soviet Union {In particular chapter 1}.

The Cold War, McCarthyism, and De-Stalinization in America

Cold War American politics put limitations on American Communist activism. A great factor in this decline was the McCarthy era and the anti-Communist purges that "wiped out the means through which it was possible to offer an alternative vision of the world."¹² The McCarthy period compromised the well-being of the working class, racial minorities, and other disenfranchised American citizens who fought for world peace and equality. Cold War era Americans believed that the Party was dangerous to American political, economic and social life. The American government and their vibrant anti-Communism desired to keep the status quo with a capitalist driven society.

De-Stalinization also hindered CPUSA activism as well. The American mainstream adopted a growing awareness of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's inhumane actions and policies. Support for Stalin and the Soviets after World War II was rendered impossible. Americans saw Stalin's policies as inherently inhumane and detrimental to democracy as violence and oppression became connected with Communist affiliation in America. The CPUSA declined as membership became a political liability. American Communists during the De-Stalinization

¹² Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 6.

crisis in 1956 to 1958 were victims of anti-Communist subversion by the FBI, the House Un-American Activities Committee, and various ethnic groups who deemed Communism a grave threat to American way of life.¹³ Both McCarthyism and de-Stalinization thus created an anti-Communist culture in America. Cold War era politics made the eradication of Communism abroad an assumption Americans understood as a fact in order to sustain and grow a democracy.

The Making of 1960s Radicalism and the Rise of the New Left

A new generation of radicals emerged in the 1960s. In 1960 Sociologist C. Wright Mills popularized the term 'New Left.' Mills, in *Letter to the New Left*, argued that Leftist ideology needed to move away from Old Left radicalism to a new form predicated on opposing alienation, anomie, and authoritarianism.¹⁴ For scholars, the New Left movement captured the attention of millions of college students throughout the nation.¹⁵ A new generation of student radicals after the collapse of American Communism in the 1950s, as much of the scholarship shows, crafted itself in the wake of the Old Left and became the face of 1960s radicalism.¹⁶ For noted Communist scholars like Ellen Schrecker, Todd Gitlin, Al Richomod, and Joseph Strobin,

¹³ Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Charles Chatfield, "At the Hands of Historians: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam War Era," *Peace & Change* 29 no.3/4 (July 2004):438-526.

¹⁴ Daniel Geary, "Becoming International Again: C. Wright Mills and the Emergence of a Global New Left, 1956–1962," *Journal of American History* Vol. 95 Issue 3 (December 2008): 710–736.

¹⁵ Carl Ogleby, *Ravens in the Storm: A Personal History of the 1960s Anti-War Movement* (New York: Scribner); Charles Chatfield, "At the Hands of Historians: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam War Era," *Peace & Change* 29, no.3/4 (July 2004):438-526; Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

¹⁶ Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 359-416; Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties* (New York: Bantam, 1987).

Communism in America failed to adapt to the challenges the Party faced from anti-Communist politics.¹⁷

A better understanding of what American Communism meant after McCarthyism lets us see a more nuanced 1960s radicalism. Isserman traces the growth of the New Left and argues that 1950s anti-Communism “was a critical development in both the death of the Old Left and the birth of the New Left.”¹⁸ The late 1950s reconfiguration away from Communist beliefs built a bridge of American radicalism from the Old Left to the New Left which shows a less static history than other scholars of American radicalism give credit. The American Left, as youth movements sprung up throughout the nation, was far more fluid than many scholars believe.¹⁹ This thesis will highlight that a continuous American Left history is paramount to the history of American Communist anti-war activism. Scholars, who fail to see American Communist political activity after the McCarthy period, severely underestimate the Party’s place in the anti-war movement.

¹⁷ Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*; Al Richmond, *A Long View From the Left: Memories of an American Revolutionary* (New York Dell Publishing, 1972); Joseph R. Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

¹⁸ Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

¹⁹ Lewy Guenter, *The Cause That Failed: Communism in America Political Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Christopher Phillips, “The New Left Wasn’t So New,” *Dissent* (2013): 85-92; David Cochran, “I. F. STONE AND THE NEW LEFT : PROTESTING U. S. POLICY in VIETNAM,” *The Historian* (Spring 1991): 505.

The differences between the old and new American Left, at the same time, must get placed into consideration. Historian Doug Rossinow, who looks at the college campus movement of the New Left, argues that 1960's radicalism was "less an outgrowth of a continuous history of radical politics in the United States than the evanescent leftist branch of a search for authenticity in industrial American life."²⁰ American leftist radicalism changed with the advent of the New Left. Radical politics no longer centered on the working class, but instead focused on a student movement as the major voice for political dissent.²¹ American Communism, this thesis will show, was not only active after McCarthyism, but the Party also established Leftist activism in the 1960s that simultaneously operated as separately Old Left oriented.

Anti-Vietnam War Activism

In the 1960s America's Cold War objective to fight communism led to a deadly conflict in Vietnam. The U.S. government backed South Vietnam against a Communist North Vietnam take over. American political and economic interests lay in the balance as U.S. troops waged war in the region. The controversy around the Vietnam War allowed the American mainstream and radical liberal groups of the 1960s, like the New Left, to challenge the Cold War status quo. Historian Marilyn Young argues that "the consensus around major issues of foreign and

²⁰ Rossinow, Doug, *The Politics of Authenticity*, 200.

²¹ Ibid

domestic policy that had marked American politics while masking American realities since 1945 had been definitively broken by the Vietnam War.”²² Poverty and racism before the war were understood as separate problems, restricted to specific regions of the country and easily remediable. Anti-war activists on the other hand, saw racism and poverty as widespread problems, the social system as inherently unfair to minority groups, and the Cold War as at least as much an American as a Soviet creation.²³

Young also argues that anti-war activist developed “a complex national anti-war movement to resist the war.” The movement was never uniform in its ideology, its composition, or its tactics. But everyone involved shared the demand to bring the troops home now-it sounded like the voice of the people.²⁴ A rich tapestry of millions of young radical dissenters across America overthrew Cold War assumptions. Scholars of anti-Vietnam War activism, however, focus on non-communist radicals, such as the New Left.²⁵ The scholarship also tends to show

²² Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 243.

²³ Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 243.

²⁴ Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 197.

²⁵ Charles DeBenedetti, , *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990); Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America's Hearts and Minds* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002) ; Michael Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War* (Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Robin Ottoson, “The Battle Over the Flag: Protest, Communist Opposition, and Silence in Mennonite Colleges in Kansas During the Vietnam War,” *Journal of Church and State* Vol. 52 Issue 4 (December 2010): 686-711.

that anti-war activists turned away from CPUSA traditional activism due to the Cold War political danger of Communist identification.²⁶ This thesis looks to go beyond that narrative, and argue that CPUSA anti-war activists ideologically went against the newer surge of 1960s American anti-war politics.

Black civil rights became a major aspect in the Party's understanding of the war in Southeast Asia. American Communists, says scholars like Jacqueline Dowd Hall, contributed to the "long civil rights movement" that was rendered ineffective by the Cold War.²⁷ The movement to demand racial equality in America during the Cold War, although compromised, still manifested itself in an effort to stop the war in Vietnam. The Civil rights movement that Communists played a central role since the 1920s, says historian and CPUSA member Norman Markowitz, by the 1960s "served as a catalyst for...the tactics of mass protest outlawed by cold war policy legitimate in the eyes of millions of people."²⁸ The CPUSA, this thesis will show, operated within a long tradition of U.S. radicalism against the working-class and racial inequality within the dangers for American Communists in Cold War politics.

The CPUSA's Political Dissent Against the War

²⁶ Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer*; Fred Hasteed, *Out Now!: A Participants Account of the Movement Against the Vietnam War* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978).

²⁷ Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91 no.4 (March 2005): 1249.

²⁸ Markowitz, *Old Struggles in a New Age*, 1.

This thesis, in light of the historical trajectory of Party activism against problems of race and working class inequality, will ask how the CPUSA protested the Vietnam War. Secondly, how did the Party organize their own radical critique of the war within the larger anti-war movement? Finally, if American Communists anti-war activism indeed departed from activism, how did the CPUSA reconcile membership while a part of the anti-war movement? The Party from 1961-1971, this thesis will argue, criticized American actions in Southeast Asia based on anti-imperialism, moral objections to warfare, and the desire to improve conditions for the working class in America.

This thesis also places American Communist politics during the Vietnam War within the anti-war movement in which the Party participated, while marking the Party's activism as a point of departure from the anti-war movement at large. American Communists, unlike other anti-war Americans, saw American U.S. intervention against the freedom of Communist nations as detrimental to the world wide Communist movement. For the CPUSA, self-determination and world peace for such nations [as well as all nations] lay at the center of the Party's dissent. Communist activists, furthermore, regarded the working-class as the agents of revolutionary change in American society. Although anti-war movement supported American Communists activists, this thesis will show ideological differences signified a chasm between CPUSA anti-war activists and the larger movement.

American Communists criticized the War vigorously through anti-war activism in a multitude of ways: Through the American Communist press, *The Worker*; youth organizations

who protested in large groups, marched in the streets, and handed out pamphlets; and through a massive circulation of the Party's movements to more Americans in letters, speeches, and conferences. CPUSA anti-war activists, this thesis argues, organized these tactics to protest the far reach of American Cold War politics that impacted both foreign policy and the anti-war ideology of non-Communists activists.

For American Communist anti-war activists, limitations existed as Party members navigated the dangers of Cold War politics. The CPUSA's activism from Party leaders and rank and file members throughout the movement, this thesis will illuminate, centered on Old Left politics concerned with the working class, while they simultaneously avoided the political liability of Communist Party membership. The American Communist anti-war movement by 1971, however, ultimately fell apart after the Party was unable to avoid the pressure of Cold War politics applied by the Nixon administration.

The thesis also looks to close two gaps in the scholarship. First, it will highlight that the CPUSA exhibited more political activism after McCarthyism than scholars acknowledge. A large body of the historiography, as we saw earlier in the introduction, marks the demise of Party activism after anti-Communist purges. An American Communist study during the Vietnam War shows that Party activism didn't completely disappear, but instead put in political isolation, eventually able to emerge back into radical politics as anti-war activism entered the American landscape. The second, as a result of the first, looks to add the CPUSA's movement to the scholarship of anti-war activism. Scholars dismiss the Party's role in the anti-war movement as a

mere extension of larger anti-war activism and highlight the Old Left influence of the younger radicals. The CPUSA, while their dissent existed within both an anti-war movement and a fluid history of the American Left, offered at the same time an activism freed from New Left ideological influence that centered on their own brand of American Communist radicalism.

A study of the CPUSA's organizing illuminates the ways in which the Party actively participated throughout the era. The movement, each chapter of the thesis shows, manifested itself in different ways within the larger anti-war movement. Chapter 1 will cover the increased military aid sent to the region from 1961-1964 through *The Worker*, which newspaper coverage was accessed at the New York Public Library. *The Worker* perceived the war in Vietnam as deeply problematic to the self-determination of Communist nations in Southeast Asia. This movement both existed before the larger emergence of anti-war activism, and manifested itself as a pro-Communist and anti-imperialist critique. This radical dissent also was in line with the Soviet Union's position on Southeast Asia.

CPUSA anti-Vietnam war activism through *The Worker* gets little attention in the scholarship. Historian Melvin Small, anti-war participant Fred Hallstead, and an array of other scholars, ignore *The Workers* significance to the early anti-war movement. The emergence of a college movement in which the Old Left participated gets the majority of the concentration. When the CPUSA criticized the war, however, coverage in *The Worker* shows that the radically diverse American Communist based anti-war activity operated outside the Cold War ideological framework cultivated by the U.S. government.

Chapter 2 focuses on the Communist people's movement in 1964-1968 that manifested itself in youth protests and support of the Party in the 1968 Presidential Election. American Communists became increasingly concerned as the U.S. sent ground troops to the region under President Johnson in 1965. Dissent hit a fever pitch by 1967 and the Party argued that the President's War on Poverty and Great Society programs, as a result of war spending, failed to reach their full potential to cure America's problems. The notion, of what CPUSA leader Gus Hall called the Party's "working class internationalism," drove American Communist activism as the Party sought the end of the war in which the American working class was at the center of the protest against American foreign policy in Southeast Asia.

Sources for this chapter come from the Tamiment collection which houses CPUSA papers and other Party related documents. A CPUSA led youth group called the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America mobilized during the war. This organization, comprised of young workers both white and black, formed a critique of the Vietnam War. The young Communist radicals, whose papers, letters, and pamphlets were seen at the Tamiment, protested in large meetings, marchers, and handed out pamphlets. Youth organizations, the thesis will show, played a crucial role in the CPUSA's movement that took issue with the Vietnam War's impact on working-class and racial issues in America and stood apart from New Left radicals.

Another CPUSA collection at the Tamiment for chapter 2 documents the war's resistance within the military. The Fort Hood Three, known CPUSA supporters, refused to go to Vietnam to fight a war they thought to be morally wrong and were eventually court martialed in 1967. The

CPUSA in order to free the Fort Hood Three, through letters and pamphlets passed to Party members, helped form an Old Left centered critique of the American War that stood apart from the larger anti-war movement. The CPUSA's movement in this period, while the Party's stance of immorality of the war was similar to that of other anti-war Americans, centered on the Cold War's burden on the issues of working-class and race.

The New Left youth movement, as the scholarship shows, played a major role in the anti-war movement. But documents on the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs and the Fort Hood Three in chapter 2 add a way to look at anti-war activism differently. The American Communist youth group both used the momentum of anti-war activism to their advantage and advocated American Communist anti-war activism, while, simultaneously, forced to hide their Communist membership in an anti-communist American society.

Chapter 3 highlights the movement from 1969-1971. The CPUSA's effort to circulate the Party's dissent to the masses, chapter 3 of the thesis argues, lay at the center of the CPUSA's protest of the War as Nixon implemented his strategy to earn a stalemate in the war and revive American prestige on the world stage. American Communalists anti-war activism challenged a larger movement which denied acceptance of the Party. CPUSA circulation of the Party's dissent to more Americans, through speeches and letters found at the Tamiment collections, criticized the war as a departure from the larger mainstream de-radicalized anti-war movement and simultaneously found ways to avoid anti-Communist oppression.

Chapter 1

A Dangerous Hotbed of War: U.S. Involvement in Southeast Asia and *the Worker* 1961-1964

Cold War politics were at a fever pitch when John Kennedy entered the Presidency in 1961. America's foreign policy centered on stopping the spread of global Communism. For the American government of the early 1960s, the spread of what they called free market economies in democratic governments abroad was the best way to put the world under the sphere of American influence. Southeast Asia was a key area of Cold War foreign policy. The administration sent money and military aid to help their allies defeat the Communists in the region. In addition, President Lyndon Johnson supported the anticommunist war effort, and, in 1964, committed the U.S. to an all-out war after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Southeast Asia thus became the target for the American government to rid the region of Communism and spread American interests.

Scholars of the war in Vietnam find that “attention must be paid to the enormous strength of the Cold War consensus in the early 1960s, shared by journalists and policymakers alike, and to the great power of the administration to control the agenda and the framing of foreign affairs reporting”²⁹ The notion of a Cold War consensus on “America’s ‘global commitment’ was so powerful in the early 1960s that as long as the Vietnam War remained

²⁹Daniel C. Hallin, *The “Uncensored War:” The Media and Vietnam* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. 27.

small, the administration had little trouble with the press.”³⁰ For the American press in the early 1960s, military strategy lay at the heart of debate instead of a critical evaluation of anti-Communist Cold War ideology. Scholarship on the early protests to U.S. involvement therefore tends to be minimal. War activities in the early 1960s, says anti-war historian Melvin Small, “were far off the media’s radar screen, and consequently, the radar screen of most Americans.”³¹ What seems left out is the radical dissent from American Communists who viewed the war outside the Cold War consensus.³² Scholars, due to a lack of focus on *The Worker*, pinpoint the start of anti-war activism in 1965.³³ The questions thus arise, how did Communist dissent manifest within such a tightly constructed American involvement? And how did this movement differ from American thought at the time?

American Communists, as the U.S. government aided pro American governments in Southeast Asia, critiqued the ideological framework of war on Communism through *The Worker* years before other anti-war Americans. This American Communist media dissent manifested itself as a different strand of American politics against Cold War foreign policy so engrained in the landscape of the U.S. The CPUSA, with a much different view than that of the U.S. government on what role America played in the Cold War, was in accord with the Soviet Union.

³⁰ Hallin, *The “Uncensored War,”* 28.

³¹ Small, *Antiwarriors*, 17.

³² Hallin, *The “Uncensored War”*; Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (California: University of California Press, 1980); Melvin Small, *Covering Dissent: The Media and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994); M. S. S., “Vietnam War and US: Hunting Legacy,” *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol.36, no.21 (May 26 - Jun. 1, 2001): 1793-1795;

³³ Small, *Covering Dissent*; Small, *Antiwarriors*; Thomas Powers, *The War at Home: Vietnam and the American People, 1964-1968* (New York: Grossman, 1973), 293; Terry Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protests in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); E. M. Schreiber, “Anti-War and American Public Opinion,” *The British Journal of Sociology* Vol. 27 No. 2: 225-236.

For American Communists, however, the international focus on the Soviet Union made the possibilities of radical dissent limited. Criticism of the war in *The Worker* was the only way to avoid Communists persecution. Organized anti-war activism in the streets of America from 1961 to 1965 was too dangerous politically.

The Worker argued that sovereign States in Southeast Asia created a world disentangled from imperialism and free from warfare, as well as a region with real democracy. American Communists in *The Worker*, this chapter will show, mobilized a radical dissent in *The Worker* away from the American government and mainstream media's world view; and the paper criticized America's imperialist anticommunist crusade throughout the intervention in Laos in early 1961, escalation of the war in November 1961, the Vietnam Buddhist Crisis in 1963, and in the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964.

Intervention in Laos

For Kennedy, a communist revolution in Laos in early 1961 became a grave danger to the defense of Southeast Asia. The administration and the mainstream media, as one scholar stated, saw containment of Communism in Laos as imperative to the Cold War, but it was clear that "anti-communist forces backed by the United States could not hold their own against a coalition of communists."³⁴ The American government strongly believed that if one Southeast Asian nation fell to Communism, surrounding nations would also be lost. Laos, as believed by the Kennedy administration, was necessary against the grave threat of global Communism.

³⁴ Hallin, *The "Uncensored War,"* 27.

For the American government, the debate on Laos centered on the military strategy in the region and not on a critique of anti-Communist ideology. Full U.S. military intervention in Laos was too risky for Kennedy after the defeat at the Bay of Pigs, a fear that the President made known to Arthur Schlesinger Jr.³⁵ The Kennedy administration instead had the CIA train and equip a secret army of Communist insurgents.³⁶ *The Worker's* protest against the U.S. intervention in Laos, however, greatly deviated from the administration and mainstream media's views on Laos. For *The Worker*, the U.S. went down a dangerous path away from peace and freedom in the region.

The voice of American Communism saw military intervention in Laos as deeply troublesome, and argued on December 21, 1960 that imperialism pushed “the world to the brink of war for the sake of the selfish interest of a handful of monopolists and colonialists.”³⁷ *The Worker* portrayed a similar sentiment on January 8, 1961 when it stated that “The president’s action coincided with his attempt to involve the American people in a war to impose a Wall Street puppet regime on Laos, half way around the world.”³⁸ America, in its imperialist efforts,

³⁵ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, *A Thousand Days* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 339.

³⁶ Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam War Years*, 60-88; Chester Cooper, *The Last Crusade: America in Vietnam*, (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1970), 191; John Prados, *President's Secret Wars: CIA and Pentagon Covert Operations from World War II Through Iranscam* (New York: William Morrow, 1986); Timothy N. Castel, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam: U.S. Military Aid to the Royal Lao Government, 1955-1975* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

³⁷ “Communist Parties Urge Against A New World Order,” *The Worker*, December 21, 1960.

³⁸ “Ike’s Lame Duck Regime Edges Nation To Brink Of War In Cuba And Laos,” *The Worker*, January 8, 1961.

wanted a government in Laos under the sphere of American influence with free and competitive economies, and a democratic government.

The Worker also argued that the CPUSA wanted to prevent the Kennedy administration's "New World Order," and held that an established "universal security" fostered world peace.³⁹ For the CPUSA, the notion of world peace was paramount, and it offered a diplomatic alternative to war: The ideological battle between "capitalism and socialism should not be fought during war, but by peaceful competition."⁴⁰ The CPUSA believed the ideological battle between capitalism and socialism should not be fought on the battlefield where millions of men, women, and children perished. More desirable was a peaceful world order where democratic and communist nations competed for economic, political and social stability in the Cold War. An antiwar political stance on the heels of the destruction seen in the Second World War was also paramount to the Party. Just over a decade passed since millions lost their lives and the CPUSA saw America's imperialist efforts as a threat to a peaceful world order.

The Worker's response to this new world order fell in with to the Soviet Union. American Communist politics throughout the party's radical history, argues many scholars, offered stances on issues with direct lines to Moscow. Correspondence from *The Worker* shows that the newspaper and the Party indeed shared the same views as the Soviet Union in the early 1960s.

³⁹ "Communist Parties Urge Against A New World Order," *The Worker*, December 21, 1960.

⁴⁰ Ibid

The Party's stance on the eradication of Cold War foreign policy thus operated within a Soviet context, and the U.S's Cold War enemies shaped *The Worker's* dissent.⁴¹

The Worker's denunciation of the war effort in Laos only got more intense when the coverage continued in early 1961. "Cold Warriors Train Guns on Laos," read the first page of *The Worker* on March 26, 1961. "The demand of the peoples of the world is for the U.S. to eliminate its aggressions and intrigues against the independence and self-determination (for Laos), and to liquidate the dangerous hotbed of war."⁴² *The Worker* highlighted a rejection of Cold War foreign policy. America formed on the same core principle that no nation should experience tyranny by an oppressive government. So why should nations that sought independence in the post war era be any different? For the CPUSA, the answer to that question lay in America's desire to expand its empire, and establish free market economies around the world. The CPUSA aspired to foster, said *The Worker*, an independent Southeast Asia.

Political pressure became even hotter when *The Worker* put U.S.-Soviet relations into question. The headline on April 9, 1961 read "Peace in Laos Waits on Washington's Moves."⁴³ The article argued that "in Washington, the dominant tendency in government circles appears to downgrade the Soviet proposals. Instead of seeing the problem as that of assuring peace in Laos,

⁴¹ John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, *In Denial*; Theodore Draper, *American Communism and the Soviet Russia*.

⁴² "Cold Warriors Train Guns on Laos," *The Worker*, March 26, 1961.

⁴³ "Peace in Laos Waits on Washington's Moves," *The Worker*, April 9, 1961.

Washington is attempting to make the issue that of a testing of strengths between President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Khrushchev.”⁴⁴ The narrative of a head to head faceoff between Soviet and U.S. leaders was imperative. The CPUSA, who pinpointed America as the aggressors and not the Soviet Union, saw Cold War tensions as a major problem to an established and a sustained peace when President Kennedy sought to gain control of Laos. *The Worker*, yet again, backed and was influenced by the Soviet Union. For American Communists in *The Worker* at this time, America was the aggressor during the Cold War. American Communism championed The Soviet Union’s peaceful and anti-imperialist views.

Political dissent also existed when *The Worker* questioned President Kennedy’s foreign policy as a continuation of his predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower, on May 14, 1961. The Eisenhower administration’s legacy of foreign policy in the region was “the 14 nation Geneva agreement aimed at guaranteeing neutrality of Laos, Cambodia, the republic of Vietnam and South Vietnam.”⁴⁵ The CPUSA charged the young president with “still trying to keep Laos in the pocket of Wall Street imperialism” after the Eisenhower presidency.⁴⁶ The CPUSA saw the Kennedy administration as a near reflection of his predecessor, and both clearly adhered to Cold War ideology which the Party fought in *The Worker*.

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ “Kennedy Aides Stalling Geneva Parley on Laos,” *The Worker*, May 14, 1961.

Kennedy's actions in Laos again came into question on May 21, 1961. *The Worker* says that "the opening of the 14 nation conference on Laos last week in Geneva was an outright repudiation of efforts of President Kennedy's administration to tie Britain and France to the Wall Street colonialists' objective of stalling over Laos while seeking to apply a stranglehold to the rest of Southeast Asia."⁴⁷ The CPUSA called out the deceptive nature of the Kennedy administration. American Communists found the involvement of Britain and France extremely problematic, and equated colonialism as the root of war throughout the world.

The Worker's coverage of the intervention in Laos indeed illuminated political dissent for the CPUSA. World peace and anti-imperialism were the core platform against the Kennedy administration and its goal of combatting communism worldwide. *The Worker* felt that a peaceful world order was impossible if American imperialist efforts continued in Southeast Asia, a notion that indeed was not up for debate the U.S. government or the American mainstream. Escalation of the war into Vietnam became more and more troublesome even after the crisis in Laos dissipated from *The Worker*. The same deviance from the mainstream press and U.S. government, as well as notions of world peace and anti-imperialism against Cold World ideology, gained palpable traction as Kennedy escalated the war in Southeast Asia.

Escalation in Vietnam

⁴⁷ "Laos Parley Moving Over Rusk's Delays," *The Worker*, May 21, 1961.

Escalation of the war became heavier later in 1961. Kennedy sent his personal military advisor, General Maxell Taylor, to Vietnam in October 1961. The general's report recommended the immediate dispatch of American troops to stop a communist takeover of the allied North. Kennedy at a National Security meeting on November 15, 1961, however, resisted all-out war, and instead, upgraded military assistance and advisory groups, sent over two fully armed helicopter companies, and increased the authorized number of advisors.⁴⁸ The administration at no point in this debate challenged Cold War foreign policy, and the decision to aid anti-Communist forces was a necessity in U.S. foreign policy. Kennedy's decision was only influenced to the extent of American involvement in the war, instead of an examination of how America perceived America in the Cold War.

The mainstream media perpetuated these assumptions. The announcement of military expansion in Vietnam on November 1 was a non-issue in the mainstream press. The decision to send increased military assistance into Vietnam, as the Pentagon Papers stated, "stirred very little fuss and, not even much interest... There is simply nothing much to say about them: except that they were apparently taken for granted at the time."⁴⁹ Assumptions on foreign policy thus penetrated the media. For the press, intervention against communism became a normal function of U.S. foreign policy, and it made little sense to challenge a policy Americans believed imperative. For *The Worker*, however, expansion of the war effort in Vietnam went against the

⁴⁸ Young, *The Vietnam Wars*; Notes on National Security Meeting, November 15, 1961, 608-609.

⁴⁹ Quote from the author of the Pentagon Papers in Hallin, *The "Uncensored War,"* 28.

CPUSA's core ideological values and they protested increased American intervention in the region.

The CPUSA showed support for the Soviet Union as the war effort gained steam in Vietnam. *The Worker* stated on November 12th, 1961 that "Soviets Hit Intrigue in Vietnam..."⁵⁰ *The Worker* spoke out against Kennedy's escalation in clear support of not only communism in America but also in accord with the U.S.S.R. The voice of American Communism went as far as to quote Moscow: "The position in this area is deteriorating as a result of U.S. aggressive actions and real threat to peace is thereby created."⁵¹ American Communists thought the government's increased aid in Vietnam put peace in the balance in Southeast Asia. The U.S.S.R's denunciation of America's increased military effort, just as with the crisis in Laos, provided *The Worker* a voice of protest against the status quo.

On January 2, 1962 *The Worker* stated that "the foreign policy of the socialist countries, which is based on the principle of peace, the equality and self-determination of nations, and respect for the independence and sovereignty of all countries, as well as the fair, humane methods of socialist diplomacy are exerting a growing influence on the world situation."⁵² *The Worker* saw Soviet core principles of world peace and independence in Southeast Asia as a

⁵⁰ "Soviets Hit Intrigue in Vietnam, Baltic," *The Worker*, November 12, 1961.

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² "How Soviet Communist Think About Peace," *The Worker*, January 2, 1962.

major vehicle to protest the war. The Soviet Union clearly had other economic and political reasons to denounce American military presence in the region, but the CPUSA used the anti-American discourse to condemn U.S. actions on the world stage. Capitalist denouncement thus became a major issue of anti-war discourse, and a major tool *The Worker* used in accordance with the Soviet Union.

Critiques of military advisers were another way in which the CPUSA protested the war efforts. *The Worker* reported on May 20th, 1962 that “the Pentagon brass want to turn the crisis into a showdown war of extermination against the new nations and the socialist world, a top general told a newspaperman last week with brutal frankness.”⁵³ Gen. Mark Clark also told Dan Brighary of the *N.Y. Journal-American* that “the only thing the Communists respect is brutal strength...positive action ruthlessly followed through to the hilt...We’ve got to hit the Reds where it hurts.”⁵⁴ *The Worker* highlighted America’s view on communism in Southeast Asia, the perspective that capitalism must be maintained in the region and that ‘Reds’ were a primitive people that can only be driven out by violent force. The CPUSA believed that a denial of independence, for a foreign nation through imperial might went against their core platform. North Vietnam or any other revolutionary movement in Southeast Asia deserved sovereignty and the freedom from foreign oppressors.

⁵³ “Pentagon Laos Policy Perils S.E. Asia Peace,” *The Worker*, May 20, 1962.

⁵⁴ Ibid

The CPUSA's dissent operated outside a narrow ideological debate on U.S. intervention in Vietnam. Communist protest in *The Worker* offered a different view on main stream American discourse. American Communism, in accord with the Soviets, saw Cold War foreign policy as detrimental to world peace, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. The nature of the brutal dictatorship of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, under the guise of supposed American democracy, also gained attention from *The Worker*. Diem's brutality, indeed, came under fire unlike in the mainstream media.

Vietnam Buddhist Crisis

Buddhist monks in South Vietnam in May 1963 led a campaign of civil unrest against the repressive government supported by the Kennedy administration. The shooting of nine unarmed civilians, by the Catholic regime in the city of Hue, who protested a ban of the Buddhist flag precipitated the crisis.⁵⁵ The crisis ended with a coup, ordered by Kennedy, in November 1963, and the arrest and assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem on the 2nd.

Battles between members within the Kennedy administration and members of the press over the support of Diem were intense. But, as one scholar remarked, "they all took place within the narrow confines of a tight consensus on the nature of world politics and the American role in it; none brought into question the premise that the preservation of an anti-Communist Vietnam

⁵⁵ Adam Roberts, "Buddhism and Politics in South Vietnam," *The World Today*, Royal Institute of International Affairs Vol.21 no.6 (June 1965): 240–50; Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 89-104.

was indeed a legitimate goal of American policy.”⁵⁶ *The Worker*, on the other end of the political spectrum, opposed U.S. support of dictatorship in South Vietnam and their ideology was in stark contest to the mainstream media, a slander of democracy shared by the Soviet Union.

Critiques of the mainstream media and government came to the forefront of American Communist discourse when the Buddhist Crisis hit Vietnam. Arnold Johnson, a CPUSA member critical of President Kennedy’s Cold War policies during the Vietnam Buddhist crisis, argued in a speech that: “The President’s message indicates that monopoly capital in this county is selling a way to wage, to expand, and to intensify economic against the socialist countries and to establish economic imperialist domination over newly formed countries.”⁵⁷ Thus support of a brutal and inhumane dictatorship in Southeast Asia was part of a war program and not world peace.

The Worker on July 7th, 1963 denounced the *New York Times* and argued that “United States servicemen coming to South Vietnam are now being told by their officers to paint a more positive picture of events here to American reporters.”⁵⁸ The U.S, in the context of crisis in South Vietnam, tried to downgrade the severity of the situation. *The Worker*, in response to an apparent cover up of a flawed war effort in Southeast Asia, criticized one of America’s most widely read newspapers in support of their Communist ideology.

⁵⁶ Hallin, The “*Uncensored War*,” 48.

⁵⁷ The Kennedy Program by Arnold Johnson, 1963, Peoples Coalition for Peace and Justice Records, Arnold Johnson papers, box 3, The Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

⁵⁸ “The ‘Furtive War’ in Laos and in South Vietnam,” *The Worker*, July 7, 1963.

The political pressure from the South Vietnamese to remove Diem was immense, and Kennedy led a coup to assassinate the South Vietnam dictator in November 1963. But as *The Worker* reported, the Kennedy administration's "CIA Puppets in Vietnam Continue the Dirty War."⁵⁹ Much to the dismay of the CPUSA, Kennedy established a new military dictatorship that still oppressed and killed the South Vietnamese people, which led *The Worker* to call for a swift end of the war efforts and labeled American involvement in Southeast Asia a "shameful war"⁶⁰ In the eyes of the CPUSA, although not a surprise, the fact that Kennedy replaced one violent dictatorship with another was profoundly troublesome. Peace in Southeast Asia, argued *The Worker*, was impossible to establish if Kennedy's main concern was the survival of a pro American South Vietnam.

The Soviet Union, and their critique of American democracy, shared and influenced condemning Diem and Kennedy's military dictatorship. Soviets, in the context of the Cold War, found America's so called democracy a faulty system. What America put in place in South Vietnam thus was not true democracy where people live in freedom and peace. The government of South Vietnam instead was merely a U.S. puppet state that was easily placed under the sphere of American influence. American Communists in *The Worker* shared this denouncement, and just as throughout the early 1960s, influenced by Soviet ideology.

⁵⁹ "CIA Puppets in Vietnam Continue the Dirty War," *The Worker*, November 10, 1963.

⁶⁰ Ibid

The CPUSA in *The Worker* could not ignore that America looked to establish oppressive regimes and spread capitalism in Southeast Asia. In the mind of the CPUSA, pro-American and capitalist dictatorships were a massive hindrance to communism in Southeast Asia. The death of Kennedy in November 1960, brought Lyndon Johnson to the White House, and as the new president expanded the war effort, *The Worker* continued its dissent.

President Johnson and Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

President Johnson not only continued the Cold War policy, he also committed U.S. troops and air forces to an all-out war effort in August of 1964. Johnson needed a resolution from both houses of Congress in order to bring America into the war and bomb North Vietnam. The impetus for this resolution came on August 2nd when a U.S. destroyer, the *Maddox*, was destroyed by North Vietnam off their coast in the Gulf of Tonkin. The Johnson administration, however, lied when Secretary of State Robert McNamara told the House Foreign Affairs Committee that the attacks were “deliberate and provoked” against a ship on “routine patrol of international waters.”⁶¹ On the 5th, the resolution passed 88-2 in the Senate and 416-0 in the House, and the Johnson administration seemed unhindered by false information which supplied justification for war. For the government, warfare was a certainty, an assumption of Cold War era politics. The Gulf of Tonkin incident provided Johnson with his opportunity to continue and expand American Cold War foreign policy.

⁶¹ James Clay Thompson, *Rolling Thunder: Understanding Program and Policy Failure* (Durham: University of North Carolina, 1980), 71; Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 120.

The mainstream American press also did not challenge America's imperative against Communism in Southeast Asia. "No major American Newspaper," says Marilyn Young, "questioned either the official version of the events (at the Gulf of Tonkin) or the American response."⁶² For the American mainstream, there was no recourse but to fall in line with the government narrative, and Cold War assumptions indeed made the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution an imperative. American Communists in *The Worker*, however, dissented against Johnson's new war effort. For *The Worker*, not only was the justification for escalation founded in lies, but the war also was inhumane to the Vietnamese and imperialistic in its goals. American communism during this crisis thus operated in a culture that did not challenge Johnson's actions, and voiced their radicalized dissent through their own media.

American Communists in 1964 under President Johnson continued their criticisms of U.S. involvement in *The Worker*. The CPUSA believed that the U.S. supported a war which they could not possibly win. The American government held that the Vietnam people were primitive, and therefore easily overpowered by military might backed by the U.S. American Communists, in response, argued that the Vietnamese were a prideful people and had the will to keep the fight sustained indefinitely. "These hill men," argued *The Worker*, were "valuable scouts" and knew "every path in the terrain."⁶³ *The Worker's* movement against the war in Southeast Asia, as President Johnson perpetually denied the Party's wishes for self-determination for the nations of Southeast Asia, understood the administration's goal to overpower their

⁶² Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 132.

⁶³ "Mountaineers of Vietnam Resist Saigon's Torturers," *The Daily Worker*, March 22, 1964.

enemies as problematic to the goal of world peace and finally an end of Cold War foreign policy. *The Daily Worker* argued “The deadly assaults” after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution were the “naked acts of military aggression which violate our nations honor in the eyes of justice-loving peoples in the world over.”⁶⁴ The CPUSA’s biggest fears came to fruition after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution: The U.S. from then on participated in total warfare, and devastated North Vietnam with massive air bombardment. *The Worker’s* worldview operated outside what the American government thought was best for the region. For the Johnson administration, the Gulf of Tonkin represented a chance to secure the region for American interests. For American Communists, on the other hand, the acts of war were stood against world peace and anti-imperialism.

American actions in Vietnam, from the Kennedy administration to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, provided early fuel for dissent against an imperialist war. Converge from *The Worker* critiqued what the rest of America thought was imperative to Cold War politics. The CPUSA’s movement against the war , furthermore, took on larger and even greater significance as America further engaged the conflict and American Communists gained more political freedom. Anti-war activism from 1961-1964 grew in its size and active participants as resistance grew to American foreign policy after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. President Johnson’s escalation of the war proved problematic to his development on the domestic war on poverty.

⁶⁴ “Attack on North Vietnam Shakes Peace of the World,” *The Daily Worker*, August 9, 1964.

Anti-war activists' focus on Johnson's Great Society interconnected to the early movement's criticisms of imperialism.

Chapter 2

A People's Protest: The W.E. B. Dubois Clubs of America, the Fort Hood Three, and the CPUSA's Dissent Against U.S. Military Expansion 1964-1968.

The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 gave a new face to the conflict as American Communists organized a broader critique of the war. President Johnson ordered ground troops to combat the Communist presence in South Vietnam and authorized air raids to devastate the North. Johnson's air raids, historian Marilyn B. Young argues, "produced not immediate surrender but the wider war" the President "promised the American people he would not seek."⁶⁵ Johnson's promise of peace made in the presidential election of 1964 proved token, and dissent from the American people against the new war effort ensued in epic numbers. The Cold War consensus that was air tight earlier in the decade, thus collapsed as the war in Vietnam opened the door of dissent against the government's actions.

A large and diverse anti-war movement came to the forefront by 1967 as combat troops increased from 385,000 to 500,000.⁶⁶ The anti-war movement was so mixed that both Old Left radicals and a movement led by college campus students worked hand in hand. This student youth movement galvanized millions into the anti-war movement with what historian Guenter Lewy called "the nonexclusionary policy." American Communists under this policy worked

⁶⁵ Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 123.

⁶⁶ Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors*, 74; Wells, *The War Within*; Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*; John Morton Blum, *Years of Discord: American Politics and Society, 1961-74* (New York: Norton, 1991).

within the larger anti-war movement simultaneously with the young New Left radicals.⁶⁷ For American Communists, the presence of non-Communist anti-war activists provided the Party with support and protection from anti-Communist politics.⁶⁸ The CPUSA thus had the stability in the anti-war movement as other radicals worked within the movement who were not labeled as CPUSA members. A focus on CPUSA activism complicates the scholarship that puts an emphasis on the New Left and other radicals of the 1960s.⁶⁹ The questions must be asked, how did American Communist dissent differ from other radicals of the 1960s? And how did CPUSA activists participate within the movement, while, at the same time, renouncing Communist Party membership?

Historian Norman Markowitz argues that CPUSA leaders and activists against the war, with a long tradition of dissent, organized a “movement which developed in opposition to the political reaction and social stagnation brought about by domestic and international Cold War policies.”⁷⁰ The American Communist radical tradition, where both Old Left ideology and organizational tactics flourished, thus came back to the forefront of U.S. politics after years of McCarthy era political and social isolation. The rise of the New Left in the 1950s also played a paramount role in the radical dissent of the 1960s. American Communists, argues Isserman, provided the framework for the younger American Leftist radicals. The mobilization of against

⁶⁷ Lewy, *The Cause That Failed*, 250-287.

⁶⁸ Halstead, *Out Now!*, 24-44.

⁶⁹ Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity*; Irwin Unger, *The Movement: A History of the American Left, 1959-1972* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1974); Staughton Lynd, “The New Left,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol.382 (March 1969): 64-72.

⁷⁰ Markowitz, “*Old Struggles in a New Age*,” 1.

anti- Vietnam War activism, therefore, did not occur in a vacuum, but instead was the product of a long tradition of radicalism in the U.S sparked by a critique of Cold War foreign and domestic policies.

Left radicalism at this time also took on a different shape. The New Left, argues scholar David Cochran, “focused not on strictly economic issues but rather on the alienating nature of a highly technological, highly bureaucratized society and looked for support not from the traditional foundation of radical movements-labor unions-but rather from the young, especially college students.”⁷¹ The fundamental differences between the Old and New Left illustrates the Old Left nature of the Party’s anti-war activism. American Communism, unlike the New Left, saw American imperialism as problematic to the advancement of other Communist nations around the world, and drew on traditional Old Left protest centered on the labor movement. The Party’s anti-war activism, in relation to the New Left college protests, shows that the two movements had different agendas in protest against the Vietnam War.⁷² The CPUSA, this chapter looks to show, while Party dissent existed within both a complex anti-war movement and a fluid history of the American Left, offered at the same time an anti-war movement centered on an Old Left radical tradition away from New Left ideological influence.

The American Communist anti-war movement from 1964-1968 transformed from a dissent manifested in the media to much more of a peoples movement. Anti-war activism at this

⁷¹ Cochran, “I. F. STONE AND THE NEW LEFT,” 505.

⁷² McMillian, “All the Protest Fit to Print’: The Rise of the Liberation News Service,” from *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press , 2011), 82-114.

juncture, this chapter argues, came from Communist fronts like the W.E.B. Dubois Clubs of America, the Ford Hood Three, and from CPUSA advocates in the 1968 election. A focus on youth Communist front groups contributes to the scholarship which deals significantly with other young radical groups, like SDS.⁷³ These anti-war groups and activists, with pamphlets, letters to Party leaders, marches in the streets, and meetings, came to protest the war within the larger movement focused on Communists Old Left anti-war activism. For the CPUSA, not only was the U.S. engaged in an immoral and imperialist war against Communist third-world nations, but military expenditures compromised the social and economic progress of America's working class. American Communists "working class internationalism", during Johnson's military expansions and the election of 1968, indeed found anti-imperialism intrinsically connected to the improvement of American working-class social, political, and economic conditions.

For CPUSA anti-war activists, explicit Communist identification was also a slippery slope in Cold War America. The Communists, therefore, organized within the anti-war movement based on Old Left ideological principles, while Party activists simultaneously denounced any connection to the Party whatsoever. CPUSA anti-war activists, this chapter will illuminate, were forced to work within a dangerous anti-Communist society which forced Party members to hide their membership.

Bombing of North Vietnam and the W.E.B. Dubois Clubs of America

⁷³ "Our Founder, the Mimeograph Machine: Participatory Democracy in Students for a Democratic Society's Print Culture," *Journal for Study of Radicalism* 2 no.2 (September 2008): 85-110; Richard G. Braugart, "SDS and YAF: A Comparison of Two Student Radical Groups in the Mid-1960s," *Youth & Society* 2 no.4 (June 1971): 441-457.

Johnson wished for an all-out victory in the war. The post Tonkin debate revolved around the ways in which U.S. air forces could bomb North Vietnam into submission, rather than conventional warfare.⁷⁴ The American government's actions were clear: U.S. military might was the only way to victory and the eradication of Communism in the region. The Johnson administration also feared that South Vietnam would negotiate surrender on their own terms. The CIA in September 1964 warned President Johnson that "the odds are against the emergence of a stable government capable of effectively prosecuting the war in Vietnam."⁷⁵ Thus these were the problems the American government dealt with; bombing the North was the only way the war would end on U.S. terms.

The anti-war movement, because of this newly Americanized and more aggressive war effort, denounced Johnson's orders to bomb North Vietnam in February 1965. The New Left oriented Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), in an example of the nonexclusionary policy, led the war's first major war demonstration on April 19th 1965, where Old Left radicals, American Communists included, participated. Anti-war protesters at this early stage marched on foot to the Washington Monument to listen to music and leaders' speeches, as well as went to Capitol Hill with a petition calling for a new Geneva Conference to end the war, negotiations

⁷⁴ Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 124.

⁷⁵ CIA, SNIE 53-64, September 8, 1964, cited in Kahin, *Intervention*, 234.

with the Communist National Liberation Front, and free elections in South Vietnam.⁷⁶ The problem for the larger anti-war movement at this time, however, was not the size of the demonstrations, but instead the Communist label such anti-war activism earned.⁷⁷ The youth of CPUSA front organization the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs thus had no other recourse but to hide their CPUSA membership. The anti-war movement at large, otherwise, would have died in its infancy at the hands of a largely ant-Communist American society. When the W.E.B. DuBois Club's anti-war activism came into the mix, their own brand of politics offered a critique of the war grounded in Old Left radicalism, but at the same time it masked CPUSA membership.

The CPUSA brought youthful enthusiasm into the Party's anti-war movement in a major way. Communist youth activists founded the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America in San Francisco in 1964. These clubs brought together student and young workers, both white and black. For the young Communist radicals, working class and racial issues, in the middle of a war that cost America millions of dollars, were the major issue as President Johnson's liberal social programs failed to garner real change. The Clubs, who operated within the anti-war movement, offered a critique in which the working class signified the agents of revolutionary change in American life.

⁷⁶ Small, *Antiwarriors*, 29.

⁷⁷ Halstead, *Out Now!*, 24-44.

The young Communists participated in the march on Washington to end the War in Vietnam on April 17th 1966.⁷⁸ Young people, who participated with no bias of race or gender, signed anti-war petitions and reviewed pamphlets which denounced the Johnson administration.⁷⁹ For the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America, the working class suffered as a result of the Vietnam War, and only when the war came to a close would justice be served at home. New Left radicals in Washington that April, argues historian Melvin Small, were “unlike the old Communist and Socialist left that considered the working class the main spearhead for revolutionary change,” the “potential liberating force of modern technology, and which operated in an authoritarian and highly centralized manner.”⁸⁰ SDS, on the other hand, organized a movement that recruited college students, opposed authority and technology, and espoused decentralization. The W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America, while they operated in the same time and place as the New Left, organized in Communist grounded activism.

The W.E.B. DuBois Clubs participated in a diverse anti-war activism. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover pointed out that Party leaders took “advantage of the upsurge in radicalism in America’s youth” and stepped up “their efforts to reach students through college speeches.”

⁷⁸ Letter from the W.E.B. DuBois Club of Upper West Side to Friends, April 1, 1965, Communist Party of the USA Printed Ephemera Collection, box 15, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Small, *Antiwarriors*, 8.

Members in June 1965 at Camp Midvale, NJ, in addition, “attempted to bolster its young membership through a training session.”⁸¹ Another meeting also took place at a secret location on an Indiana farm that September. Not only did the New Left galvanize America’s youth, but rather, the DuBois Clubs also gained a stronghold on the youth activism within the anti-war movement.

American Communists also avoided the obstacle of government anti-Communist counter-subversive operations. In April 1966, the youth organization filed a law suit which they actually won, “to stop the government’s investigation of the clubs.”⁸² For W.E.B. DuBois Clubs, their constitutional rights were infringed upon and they proclaimed that their organization was an “autonomous student group.”⁸³ The fight against Cold War political culture in America became a way for Communists to work within the anti-war movement and garner support from fellow college activists. As the U.S. government looked to stifle any dissent on the far Left, fighting back was the only other recourse for passionate and loyal Communist Party youth members.

Out- right denouncement of Party membership was another way young members took cover from counter-subversion. DuBois Clubs International Secretary, Michael Myerson,

⁸¹ “Hover Ties Reds to Antiwar Drives,” *The New York Times*, January 6, 1966.

⁸² “DuBois Clubs Will Sue U.S. Halt Big Investigation,” *Chicago Defender*, April 25, 1966.

⁸³ *Ibid*

identified himself as “non-Communist, pro-American and pro-human.”⁸⁴ Deberaux Kennedy, who tried to organize a chapter of the club at Washington University, “denied his group was interested in foresting any particular political affiliation.”⁸⁵ For rank and file American Communists in the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs, taking the focus off Communist membership and Old Left ideological principles, meant survival in the anti-war movement. Young American Communists in W.E.B. DuBois Clubs organized an anti-war dissent while they simultaneously took steps to blend into America society.

Troop Invasion of South Vietnam and the Fort Hood Three

In 1966 President Johnson intensified the war in South Vietnam with deployment of ground troops. For the Johnson administration, the question was not should the U.S. send ground troops to South Vietnam, but how many?⁸⁶ An invasion of South Vietnam, just as with the bombing of the North, was the only recourse. The U.S. government believed that if Southeast Asia was to be freed from the Communist threat, the all-out military troops use would force Communist insurgents out so that the region could enter the sphere of American influence. The anti-war movement by 1966, however, remained small. Activism at the time, said New Left

⁸⁴ “DuBois Club Officer Opposes Viet Fighting,” *Chicago Defender*, June 15, 1966.

⁸⁵ “DuBois Club Group Barred by Washington University,” *Chicago Defender*, April 16, 1966.

⁸⁶ Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 159.

activist A.J. Muste, “hardly amounts to a hill of beans.”⁸⁷ For anti-war leaders, frustration permeated the movement as Johnson maintained his approval rating despite the increase of U.S. troops from 185, 000 to 385,000.⁸⁸ The anti-war movement, as the radicals struggled to find mass dissent, needed a base to cling on to. That momentum came in early February 1966 when 100 war vets traveled to Washington to turn in their medals and decorations.⁸⁹ Young radicals, while their dissent was not nearly at its peak yet, found an impetus in this military movement, and took to the streets. Dissent within the military thus created an effective anti-war activism early the movement.

Young Communists also played an important role in the development of military rank and file opposition to the war. In July 1966, three working class draftees, James Johnson, an African-American, Dennis Mora, and David Samas refused to serve in Vietnam and were court-martialed. Mora was a member of the DuBois Clubs, and Johnson subsequently served as an editor of the *Daily World*. Their case became a national cause of draft resistance and opposition to the war within the military, although all were court-martialed and given long sentences to be served at hard labor.⁹⁰

The Fort Hood Three, as they criticized the War effort, denounced the American military itself to make an impact on the anti-war movement. For these young radicals, America’s actions

⁸⁷ Anderson, *The Movement*, 151.

⁸⁸ Small, *Antiwarriors*, 39.

⁸⁹ Small, *Antiwarriors*, 42; Wells, *The War Within*, 86.

⁹⁰ Norman Markowitz, “Old Struggles in a “New Age,” 1; Halstead, *Out Now!*, 167-186.

were “immoral, illegal and unjust.”⁹¹ The Fort Hood Three had a legal team at their disposal, and their supporters passed out pamphlets in the streets across the nation on their behalf calling for the young Communists to be freed.⁹² Support also came from anti-war groups who reproduced and distributed facts sheets about the case which became popular front page news across the nation.⁹³ Support from the American people to the anti-war cause allowed the Fort Hood Three to become household names and players on the anti-war scene.

The Fort Hood Three spoke to a palpable notion of anti-war Americans that the U.S. engaged in an ‘unjust and immoral’ war. For America citizens at large, peace in Southeast Asia to protect the lives of American servicemen and Vietnamese was a universal objective in the anti-war movement. The American Communist movement, however, was also a departure from the popular movement in two ways. The Fort Hood Three, were, first, American Communists, and indeed, a part of a political faction that stood apart from the radical anti-war movement at large. This movement also placed the working class at the front line of the debate. The men, all poor minorities, put an emphasis on working class awareness to end the war in Vietnam.

The Fort Hood Three galvanized anti-war activism in other ways as well. Detention of the three men on July 8th, 1966 triggered a protest of about 500 people in Times Square. The

⁹¹ “*The Fort Hood Three: The Case of Three G.I.’s Who Said “No” to the War in Vietnam,*” By the Fort Hood Three Defense Committee, New York, 1966.

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Halstead, *Out Now!*, 178.

Fifth Avenue Peace Parade Committee, made up of New Left activists, also sponsored a protest demonstration for the Fort Hood Three outside Fort Dix on July 10th, 1966.⁹⁴ Student activism came to the forefront of Fort Hood Three as well. After the young Communists' conviction and sentencing in September, the Fort Hood Three Defense Committee held an anti-war demonstration in Leavenworth, Kansas (where the men were imprisoned) on January 7th, 1967. 91 student marchers, who chanted, "We Shall Overcome," came from as far away as Minneapolis, Denver, Iowa City, and Columbia.⁹⁵ The Fort Hood Three galvanized America's youth through activism rooted in American Communist radicalism.

The Fort Hood Three was also forced to navigate the troubles of Communist membership. If these young men were to participate in such a massive anti-war crusade, alongside with other American radicals, denying Communist Party membership was imperative. Dennis Mora stated that "he was not a member of the Communist Party, and Private Johnson and Private Samas said that they were not members of any organizations other than the Army."⁹⁶ For these young American Communists, avoiding Party membership was the only way that they would be able to participate fully in the anti-war movement.

The anti-war movement came a long way as Johnson's approval diminished. Throughout 1967, "as the movement continued to promote a wide variety of imaginative national local activities, increasing numbers of politicians, journalists, and other public figures began to

⁹⁴ "Anti-Vietnam GI's May Miss Sailing," *The New York Times*, July 9th, 1967.

⁹⁵ "Student's Protest at Army Prison Ends in Fisticuffs," *The New York Times*, January 8th, 1967.

⁹⁶ "3 Soldiers Hold News Conference to Announce They Won't to Vietnam," July 1, 1966.

express their opposition” to the American war effort.⁹⁷ The anti-war movement thus grew to such an extent, that it captured the imagination of the American people. The dissent only grew from there and as more Americans were drafted into the war effort and service members killed.

Presidential Election of 1968

The election of 1968 brought the anti-war movement to the sphere of presidential politics. President Johnson became so unpopular that he did not seek re-election. This pivotal election saw anti-war activists go as far as to set up demonstrations at the National Conventions to prevent the nomination of pro-war candidates. Anti-war Americans, therefore, saw the 1968 Presidential Election as a great impetus for radical dissent.

The CPUSA’s movement to end the war also grew as the American people voted for a new Commander-in-Chief, and the uniquely American Communist critiques made their dissent a different strand of radicalism at the time. American Communist activism, although the Party had no realistic design or expectation for victory in the election, offered an alternative to mainstream American politics. CPUSA leaders, along with rank and file American Communists proved invaluable members of the anti-war movement in the 1968 American Presidential politics.

The W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America again took up the mantle of the American Communism at this time. The youth organization passed out handouts of a Jarvis Tyner speech, a CPUSA leader, at the clubs 3rd national convention on January 19th. Tyner argued that the war

⁹⁷ Small, *Antiwarriors*, 55-76.

in Vietnam was at the center of the crisis and served U.S. imperialist aggression. The American government, says Tyner, wanted “monopoly capital so that super profits can be made.”⁹⁸ Tyner also argued that the people of Southeast Asia’s struggles gave rise to “democracy and freedom throughout the world” and “Lyndon Johnson and his gang” misled the American people.⁹⁹ The American Communist movement gained steam as influential Party leaders saw the issues at hand. CPUSA leaders saw the connection between an imperialist war and growing working class inequalities. The American Communist anti-war movement thus had a larger more prominent voice.

The club’s conference also proclaimed that “the peace movement must develop new and creative forms of struggle that will attract the imagination and support of this majority.”¹⁰⁰ Oppression, exploitation, racism, and war, said Tyner “are all products of the system” with capitalism, not democracy, at the root of the issues. Tyner also recommended that the convention must get more pledge cards stating the intentions of resisting the draft, that communities be built to defend those who dodged the draft, and a draft resistance center must be built. Jarvis Tyner in the fight for a better society for the American working-class, called for the nation’s youth to help mobilize the anti-war movement on the ground. The CPUSA’s movement against the war took

⁹⁸ W.E.B DuBois Clubs of America published a handout January 1968 , recoding a speech by Jarvis Tyner at the Clubs 3rd national convention, Communist Party of the USA Records, box 51, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

an Old Left approach as anticipation for the presidential election built up, and worked tirelessly on the ground to promote economic and societal fairness in the U.S.

American Communists saw draft resistance as a major issue. The Party, on January 8th, published and handed out to its members a draft statement to the election. “The key objective of this election,” said the CPUSA “is to turn the tide, to change the course from escalated aggressive war with its increased danger of nuclear holocaust to steps to peace.” The statement also denounced the Johnson administration that spent 100 billion dollars on the war. The Party, through their presidential campaign, found a new more expansive critique on the American war effort. High end CPUSA leaders saw the problems with imperialism on the communist region, and the impact it had at home in America.

The General Secretary of the CPUSA, Gus Hall, argued in a speech on January 13th that “we are called upon into being this indispensable weapon that will inject a new political ideological content into every contingent of the struggle for social progress.”¹⁰¹ This new political ideology aimed to help, proclaimed Hall, “the struggles against racism, reformism” and the “ruling class, whether coated by Right or Left fig leaves.”¹⁰² Gus Hall during the 1968 election, with the CPUSA’s Old Left centered critique of the war, offered a different alternative for voters. Neither Democrats nor Republicans, in the CPUSA’s estimation, had the correct answers to end the war.

¹⁰¹ Draft Statement of the 1968 Elections, January 8, Communist Party of the USA Records, box 51, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

¹⁰² Ibid

American Communists, however, saw the struggles of fellow Communist nations, while at the same time fought for equality of the American working class.

Michael Zagarell, who ran for Vice President, and Charelence Mitchell for President, ran a campaign against the same issues outlined by Hall and the Party. In Mitchell's acceptance speech for the nomination, the candidate claimed that she would address "the issue of the war and the need to get out of Vietnam now."¹⁰³ Mitchell's goals, moreover, were the eradication of problems with poverty, racism, and the working class in America. The presidential ticket for the CPUSA actively engaged in the Party's Old Left driven anti-war activism.

This movement in the 1968 election would not be very successful, but it still galvanized other Communists in America to show support for the cause. Carl Bloice, who was the campaign manager, gave material to many CPUSA supporters. In a letter to one such person, James Havel, Bloice sent "Mrs. Mitchell's acceptance speech, biographical sketches of Mrs. Mitchell and Mr. Zagarell, a poster, 3 copies of platforms, and 10 buttons"¹⁰⁴ Another CPUSA follower was also impacted by the movement. Bob Seymoun of Burlington, Vermont wrote to the CPUSA to help the movement. "My parents and I" said the enthused Communist, "are strong supporters of the Communist Party" and asked the campaign for "3 buttons and, if possible, 4 bumper stickers,

¹⁰³ Acceptance Speech of Charelence Mitchell, CPUSA candidate For President of the United States of America, Communist Party of the USA Collections, box 51.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Carl Bloice to Campaign Manager James Havel, October 11, 1968, Communist Party of the USA Collections, box 51.

(because we converted 2 neighbors).”¹⁰⁵ Stories like these point to the impact CPUSA leaders had on the common run of the mill Party supporters. These stories also point to the political necessity of hiding Communist membership. For American Communist rank and file supporters of the Party in the 1968 election, covert backing of the Party was the only way their radical dissent was able to mobilize.

The CPUSA’s dissent, although not as pivotal in the major anti-war movement overall, grew in its size and operated separately ideologically from the New Left. American Communist anti-war activists had to, at the same time, work with other radicals and denounce Party membership. The CPUSA’s movement not only departed from the larger anti-war movement in its ideology and organizational practices, but also in the challenges Cold War era politics made for American Communists. The American Communist anti-war activism continued when Nixon entered the White House as the new President failed to keep his promise to end the conflict.

¹⁰⁵ Letter Bob Seymoun of Burlington, Vermont to the Communist Party of America, October 30, 1968, Communist Party of the U.S.A. Collection, box 51.

Chapter 3

Promoting the Cause: Circulation of CPUSA Dissent 1969-1971

Richard Nixon became President in 1969 and won the election on the promise to end the war. The Nixon administration, much to the disappointment of millions of anti-war Americans, increased bombing in the region and moved the American war effort into Cambodia and Laos in 1969 to 1970.¹⁰⁶ Nixon's escalation of the war, argues historian Marilyn B. Young, "came as an immense shock to the American public" as the desire to end the war fueled the general eagerness that America had elected a "peace president."¹⁰⁷

On October 15th, 1969, members of the Student Mobilization Committee participated "in a moratorium from work or school...to register their opposition to the continuation of the war at rallies, marches, vigils, prayer sessions, or by leafleting and participating in whatever activities local moratorium committees organized."¹⁰⁸ This national protest against the war, due to anti-war leaders Sam Brown and David Hawk's effort to spread the movement away from a few big cities infested with much maligned American radicals, to a more diverse range of smaller venues, signified a growing and diverse anti-war movement.¹⁰⁹ If anti-war activists at the time achieved a broad and successful movement away from radical politics, then how did the CPUSA participate? And how did the CPUSA reconcile their Communist politics at a time when Nixon challenged meaningful radical dissent?

¹⁰⁶David Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

¹⁰⁷ Marilyn, *The Vietnam Wars*, 245.

¹⁰⁸ Small, *Antiwarriors*, 107.

¹⁰⁹ Wells, *The War Within*; Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?: American Protest Against the War in Vietnam 1963-1975* (Traverse City: Horizon Book Publications; 1st Edition, 1989).

American Communist anti-war activism movement from 1969-1971 seems left out of scholarship that focuses on the larger anti-war movement.¹¹⁰ The CPUSA, this chapter will highlight, complicated the American political climate. American Communists, through letters, speeches, and conferences advocating the circulation of dissent against the war, operated outside the larger anti-war movement. These activists represented a departure from New Left radicals, as well as from both non-Leftist anti-war Americans and Nixon supporters. Moreover, the Communist anti-war movement experienced conservative counter-subversion from the CIA and Nixon that proved the fatal blow to the Party's activism.

The CPUSA call for a new communist daily newspaper, the *Daily World*, as well as the creation of Young Workers Liberation League, indicated the Party attempted a circulation of American Communist anti-war activism. The CPUSA's effort to circulate the Party's dissent to the masses, this chapter of the thesis will argue, lay at the center of the CPUSA's anti-war activism as Nixon implemented his strategy in Southeast Asia. American Communist dissent at this time, although not nearly as prominent or successful as the heavily supported larger anti-war movements, mobilized an effort to circulate their American Communist anti-war activism. CPUSA anti-war activism thus circulated their movement within a vastly dangerous and ever growing anti-Communist American society and an anti-war movement moving further away from the Communist label.

¹¹⁰Sandra Scanlon, "The Conservative Lobby and Nixon's "Peace With Honor" in Vietnam," *Journal of American Studies* Vol.43 no.2 (Aug 2009): 255-276; Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

The Movement back to a Daily Newspaper

Nixon's initial steps on Vietnam, argues historian David F. Schmitz, "were a complex set of decisions designed to allow him to pursue an expansion of the war and achieve victory while creating the appearance of de-escalation."¹¹¹ The President, through a willingness to negotiate and implement modifications to the draft, created the perception that peace was near and spoke to what he called 'the silent majority' for support of the war. But in reality, Nixon believed that his administration was a point of departure from Johnson's which did not achieve victory or negotiate peace in the region. Nixon instead wanted to restore American credibility around the world and achieve concessions from North Vietnam based on U.S. terms and interests.¹¹² The new President thus created both a new strategy and public perception on the war.

Anti-war activism shifted as well. The movement dealt with a more comprehensive effort against anti-war activism under Nixon. Nixon expanded the FBI, CIA, NSA, military intelligence, and the White house itself, with a goal to target radicalism against the war.¹¹³ For the New Left movement, it was difficult to protest the war under Nixon administration's watchful eye. The de-radicalized movement was indeed the perfect catalyst for unprecedented anti-war activism throughout the nation as anti-war Americans viewed Nixon's foreign policy as a continuation of an immoral and unjust war.

¹¹¹ Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War*, 42.

¹¹² Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War*, 43, cited "Minutes of the First Meeting of the National Security Council," January 21, 1969.

¹¹³ Small, *Antiwarriors*, 95-118.

Nixon 'silent majority' supporters played a major role in American politics. Nixon's victory in the 1968 election occurred, to a large degree, due to the candidate's conservative and anti-Communist stance. Nixon appealed to an emerging conservative electorate that the new president referred to as the 'silent majority.'¹¹⁴ The new President, in a political climate where anti-war activism grew unprecedented numbers, used his new base to support a win in Vietnam against Communism. Nixon supporters at the October Moratorium galvanized a pro-Nixon war effort. Anti-war demonstrators, said *The New York Times*, generated counter protests" and Americans "who had been quiet for months spoke out in anger."¹¹⁵ Thus Nixon's anti-Communism created a political base in support of his policy in Southeast Asia which helped combat American Leftist radical anti-war activity.

American Communist anti-war activism, therefore, evolved. The impact of Leftist radicalism was diminished on the American political scene. The CPUSA, sparked by their own debate on the war, led a movement to create the *Daily World News* newspaper. Party leaders, through speeches and papers, believed that the best way to promote their radicalism was a more comprehensive circulation of a daily newspaper with the platform to protest the war which Nixon waged on.

The movement for the *Daily World* started in January 1969 and led by CPUSA General Secretary Gus Hall. The American Communist leader argued that the Party was "called upon into

¹¹⁴ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

¹¹⁵ "Vietnam Moratorium Observed Nationwide by Foes of the War; Opponents React," *The New York Times*, October 19, 1969.

being this indispensable weapon that will inject a new political ideological content into every contingent of the struggle for social progress.”¹¹⁶ The war in Vietnam, said Hall, stood for “the struggles against chauvinism, racism, reformism...against all influences of the ruling class, whether coated by Right or Left fig leaves.”¹¹⁷ Secretary Hall, as Nixon’s foreign policy paradox polarized the anti-war movement, provided the fuel for the circulation needed to critique the war. The American Communist leader also set in motion what was an ideological challenge to both the anti-war movement and the ever expanding conservative framework against Communism.

1960s anti-war activism changed American radicalism. Both New and Old Left groups were forced to fight for attention of the American people. The prospect of a new daily newspaper further advanced the American radical debate as the portals for protest shrunk under Nixon. Linda Morse of the Student Mobilization Committee, a Leftist group, on January 28, 1970, discussed the ideological dilemma within the American Left:

“Since the war in Vietnam was escalated, we (Left groups) have come together on some very basic issues dealing with the war, and our influence has been felt far outside of our numbers because we do express the feelings of a vast number of Americans on these basic issues. However, the feeling of unity within the left groups breaks down when we go past the ‘withdrawal of troops, end the draft, black liberation and a change in the system’ slogans. We by no means have a unified view of what is wrong with the U.S., and we sure as hell don’t

¹¹⁶ “How to Shape History”, Speech delivered by Gus Hall, General Secretary, CPUSA to the National Party Conference on a Daily Marxist Paper, January 13, 1968, Communist Party of the U.S.A Records, box 122.

¹¹⁷ Ibid

agree on how to change it. A daily newspaper would supply a debate within the anti-war movement and America's other issues."¹¹⁸

For the CPUSA, the creation of the *Daily World* was important in two different ways. Promotion of *The Daily World*, first off, provided the Party with a much needed media platform where criticisms of the war arose. A daily newspaper, moreover, allowed a debate within the broader anti-war movement on how America could be fixed. The CPUSA saw Vietnam as a war against Communists, and indeed Communism's repression in the region. The self-determination of Communists in Southeast Asia, therefore, was in the balance. For the national anti-war movement at large, such a pro-Communist notion was incomprehensible to their own desires and views on American society. The New Left, for example, based anti-war activism "on ideas that would not be viewed by Americans at large as alien and primarily concerned with domestic issues, not international politics."¹¹⁹ New Left politics or the larger anti-war movement at this time seemed an unlikely outlet of support for Communist revolutions abroad. *The Daily World*, and the CPUSA's desire to circulate their own agenda, was the apparatus in which the Party's movement both expanded and departed from the anti-war movement.

The Founding of the Young Workers Liberation League

The Party by 1970 desired a movement to create a new youth organization after the W.E.B. Dubois Clubs vanished from the world of American Communist's politics. For American

¹¹⁸ Position Paper for January 28 Conference on the proposed new Marxist daily newspaper, by Linda Morse, Executive Student Mobilization Committee., Communist Party of the U.S.A. Collection, box 122.

¹¹⁹ Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity*, 211.

Communists, promotion of the Young Workers Liberation League made the anti-war movement more palpable. The American anti-war crusade at large, says Melvin Small, “became less cohesive and more fragmented than it had ever been before”¹²⁰ The conflict between violent revolutionaries and the rest of the movement limited the sustaining power of anti-war dissent in America. Anti-Communist organizations also hindered the league’s possibilities. The House Internal Security Committee held the new youth league under strict surveillance. HISC knew all League members, from CPUSA leaders like Jarvis Tyner and Michael Zagarell, to everyday rank and file members.¹²¹ The CPUSA, as the broader movement around them floundered, promoted a new youth movement that espoused American Communist objectives against the war.

Gus Hall again became a vehicle for circulation of the Party’s causes. The Young Workers Liberation League, says Hall, had the goal to recruit “the best of the working class youth-black and white-the best students, the best farm youth.”¹²² Revolt against the Vietnam War, argued Hall, was “the acid test of our working class internationalism.”¹²³ What Hall referred to as ‘working class internationalism,’ seemed pivotal to the CPUSA’s expansion and circulation of American Communist anti-war activism. The creation and promotion of a new youth organization allowed youths, both white and black, as well as both urban workers and rural farm

¹²⁰ Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors*, 119.

¹²¹ Subversive Involvement in the Origin, Leadership, and Activities of the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam and Its Predecessor Organizations, HISC Staff Study, 1970, 5.

¹²² Speech by Gus Hall Delivered At The Founding Convention of the Young Workers Liberation League on February 8, 1970, Communist Party of the U.S.A. Collection, box 122.

¹²³ *Ibid*

owners, to organize a dissent against the war. Equality for such people, moreover, comprised what the CPUSA believed was the best American society. For the American Communists, international politics was the impetus for the fight for racial and working class equality in the U.S.

The CPUSA also attempted to fund this new youth movement. “U.S. capitalism,” said one petition asking for aid to the new revolutionary working-class organization, lay “at the center of world imperialism, has become a world policeman. It is funneling 70 per cent of the budget into war spending.”¹²⁴ This petition to aid the Youth Workers Liberation League signified the ability and hunger of the CPUSA to grow the Party’s dissent through circulation of their youth organization.

The League on February 7th, 1970 issued a resolution on the war. “Neo-Colonialism,” argued the resolution, was “the attempt of imperialist powers to dominate through economic and political means”¹²⁵ The CPUSA’s mission to promote the Young Workers Liberation League and circulate their ideas worked to generate more excitement to the cause. But since this movement was much smaller than the broader anti-war activism it operated within, American

¹²⁴ A Call To Found A Revolutionary Working Class Youth Organization, Communist Party of the U.S.A Collection, box 22.

¹²⁵ Introduction to General Resolution February 7, 1970, Communist Party of the U.S.A collection, box 122.

Communists had a long hill to climb. As popular as the anti-war movement grew in the mid-1960s, a group that espoused Communist notions at this time didn't have a large audience. But the circulation protest offered a way for the CPUSA to mobilize a radical dissent which stood apart from anti-war activism at large.

The CPUSA was not dead, as many suggested, but instead the movement against the Vietnam War allowed the CPUSA to not only oppose faulty and contradictory American foreign policy, but also to bring back Old Left ideology into a de-radicalized movement. American Communists at this time, therefore, challenged two concrete and powerful American ideals. New Left radicalism in the 1960s held the most sway as anti-war activism permeated American and social life, and the Nixon administration looked for ways to counteract the dissent. American Communists, in response, formed their own critique against this dichotomy. The Party's activism indeed represented a retreat from both other anti-war activists and Nixon's attempt to eradicate the movement.

Freeing Angela Davis

Angela Davis, an African American scholar at UCLA, was a CPUSA member fired from the University for her support of anti-war activism. The Board of Regents of the University of California fired Davis from her teaching position at UCLA for being a Communist in 1969. In 1970, she was also charged as an accomplice in a conspiracy that led to a shootout in a California court and forced her into hiding. A jury found her not guilty in 1972, in part because an

international movement came to her defense and helped her win a fair hearing in court. American Communists circulated a movement to free a fellow member who spoke out against the war as the Cold War permeated California politics.¹²⁶

Gus Hall in August 1971 published a pamphlet in support of Davis. Davis's removal from UCLA and incarceration, argued Hall, led to the "destruction of democratic rights." Mass anti-war activism grew "in a pattern of waves that rise and recede, but they take place in an overall framework of rising growth of militancy, political consciousness, radicalization and the readiness to struggle."¹²⁷ For American Communists who challenged the wrongs against Davis, the promotion of anti-war activism took on major importance. The CPUSA, in a fervent anti-communist American society, worked within a nation-wide movement to free Davis. The very nature of a dynamic movement allowed the American Communists to also participate.

But the movement still operated in fear of anti-communism. Hall also argued that Trotskyites, who were fellow Old Left members and moved away from Communist politics,

¹²⁶ Markowitz, *Old Struggles in a New Age*, 2010, 2.

¹²⁷ "Out of Indo-China! Freedom For Angela Davis! Our Goals for 1971 And How to Win Them: The Sharpening Crisis Of U.S. Imperialism and the Task of the Communist Party," By Gus Hall, New Outlook Publishers, August 1971.

were problematic to the anti-war cause when they became “the focal point of mobilization for all the worst redbaiters, anti-Soviets and disrupters.”¹²⁸ Old Left anti-war activists created

fundamental obstacles for American Communists. The CPUSA throughout the Nixon years had to navigate a complicated political climate. Not only did the Party deal with anti-communist push back from the American government and Nixon supporters, but also from anti-war Americans who had no other recourse than to denounce Communism.

Decline of the Movement

The anti-war movement still met its demise after 1971. President Nixon, from 1971 until America left the war in 1973, turned back the people’s movements and restored the cold war consensus.¹²⁹ Radical activism no longer remained prevalent when the President started to return home the troops. This was not only a death at the hands of exterior governmental politics, but the movement also decreased from within. The failure of the CPUSA coincided with the decline of the anti-war movement. Activism against the Vietnam War failed because of an implosion of the New Left, due to the young radicals’ inability to learn from the experiences of the Old Left. The lack of “long term movements” and “a willingness to work with others with differing views around limited goals,” helped allow New Left American radicalism to fall by the way side.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Markowitz, “*Old Struggles in a New Age*,” 2010, 2.

¹³⁰ Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer*, 219.

Liberalism in American politics, said *The New York Times*, entered “the foreign policy crisis in Southeast Asia with little preparation for it.”¹³¹ Liberals had perversely focused on domestic affairs, but the government after the Second World War saw the world stage as paramount to the liberal agenda. The Vietnam War thus transformed American liberal ideals, and Left radicalism, including the CPUSA, was rendered incapacitated as domestic reform was unable to disengage from foreign policy.

The CPUSA, unable to work under these external and internal political climates, failed at any anti-war achievements after 1971. The domestic portals that allowed radicalism in the 1960s were abolished by the Nixon administration. The circulation of Communist ideas and the larger movement was no longer a possible voice of dissent. Nixon dwindled the radical possibilities and American Communists had no way to muster momentum in a dry American climate.

¹³¹ “Liberals, the Blacks and the War,” *The New York Times*, November 30, 1969.

Conclusion

Party Legacy, Limitations, and Failures

A study of American Communists anti-war activism, in summation of this thesis, shows a diverse anti- Vietnam War movement. The American Communist movement, as we have seen throughout, shaped itself around the context of larger anti-war activity. CPUSA leaders and rank and file members had no other recourse but to adapt with the times, but, at the same time, participated in activism rooted in Old Left radical tradition. Party activism, at each stage of the movement, challenged American foreign policy as well as the ideology of the New Left radicalism. The ways the CPUSA anti-war activism operated within American political and social life in the 1960s showed how complex the nation-wide movement really was.

This study also illuminates gaps in our understanding of the CPUSA. American Communist activism, in the wake of McCarthy's anti-communist purges, still had political activity in America. Scholars, as we saw in the introduction, to a large degree, ignored Party activism after the 1950s. But, also important was the renewal of radical American Communist politics and its impact on the 1960s radicalism. A historical retrieval of the CPUSA makes the 1960s radicalism a much deeper and complex movement. Militancy at this time may have been dominated by the New Left, but American Communists also offered a radical view of the American political and social landscape.

The American Communist movement, finally, had major limitations and failed. American Communism never had real political backing. For the majority of Americans, the act of being a

card carrying member of the Communist Party went against American values. Perhaps paranoid Americans and subsequent historians harbored a legitimate concern? The CPUSA, as we have seen, had designs on the reconfiguration of American domestic and foreign policy. Given this political climate, it was understandable that the government put restraints on American Communism. American Communist activists failed to maneuver past those restraints and eventually fell victim to an inability to negotiate a fervent anti-Communist American culture. In the end, the CPUSA represented and espoused a political agenda too radical for the sensibilities of both the American government they opposed and the anti-war movement they wished to work within.

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