

Blue Collar Democracy: Class War and Political Revolution in Western Pennsylvania, 1932-1937

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"Revolution, up and down the river!" cried *The Bulletin Index* on its November 11, 1937 cover. That cover of Pittsburgh's *TIME*-like weekly magazine also featured the smiling young face of Elmer J. Maloy, the "C.I.O. Mayor-Elect," as *The Bulletin Index* termed him, of the nearby steel town of Duquesne.

But Maloy, leader of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) in Duquesne, was not, in himself, the "revolution." He was merely the most visible symbol of the revolutionary political transformation of the Western Pennsylvania steel towns lining the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers around Pittsburgh. On November 2, 1937, seventeen of these company-run steel towns swept out long-dominant Republican incumbents and installed labor-oriented Democratic challengers. These administrations — composed entirely of SWOC members and their close allies — pledged to end the cozy, feudal partnership between local government and the giant steel corporations, "The most Republican of U.S. industries," as the *Index* described them. It was a political revolution, a major party realignment, a lasting transfer of political power.¹

This political revolution was due to an increasing political polarization along class lines during the Depression of the Thirties which seemed to indicate class and class-based economic issues would become the defining elements of American politics for some time to come. Initially, as Richard Oestreicher points out, the 1932 election of Roosevelt was a rejection of the Depression status quo, not a class act. But this tendency quickly changed: "After 1933 voters' responses to New Deal programs diverged sharply. The unemployed, relief recipients, low-income households, and blue-collar workers registered overwhelming approval in 1936 and 1940, while business people, professionals, white-collar workers, and upper- and middle-income households all expressed increasing disapproval. In 1936 the difference in the percentage voting Democratic between upper- and lower-income households was 34 percentage points; in 1940, 40 percentage points....Over the course of the 1930s [class] sentiment did indeed become translated into political consciousness as the class basis of partisanship became successively more marked from election to election...."²

Not only did the New Deal of President Franklin D. Roosevelt indicate the saliency of class politics at the national level, but class conscious rank and file workers also moved to take control of local governments in the name of the working class. In Western Pennsylvania this class-based political mobili-

zation was a victory for labor rather than for the Democratic Party, *per se*. Outside Pittsburgh the Democratic Party was a ghost organization boasting only ballot status. But in 1937, steel workers in western Pennsylvania steel towns, on their own initiative, flooded *en masse* into the moribund local Democratic parties and made them over in their own image into *de facto* "labor parties." As George Powers, who lived through these events, noted, "In Duquesne, labor practically took over the local Democratic Party."³ These local "labor parties" were then used as vehicles to ride to both political and economic power. This was recognized by the local media when, for instance, it referred to "CIO-Democrats" or to Elmer Maloy, not as the "Democratic Mayor-Elect," but as the "CIO Mayor-Elect."

Sustained by the votes of ordinary steel workers and led by local union organizers, these functional equivalents of local labor parties received minimal encouragement or support in their campaigns — either in resources, planning, or execution — from top SWOC-CIO leaders. Additionally, the early stages of local political mobilization — 1933-1935 — preceded the most important unionization drives. Taking advantage of previous political victories at the state level, activists used these as leverage to consolidate a political realignment at the local level. In doing so, these *de facto* "labor party" administrations brought the Bill of Rights to western Pennsylvania, made possible the consolidation of the union in the steel industry, and cemented the Roosevelt political realignment at the local level. These local labor campaigns and subsequent labor administrations therefore not only present a revealing picture of labor's street-level political activity and goals during the Great Depression, they also explain why and how the Democratic Party became the dominant party of the time.⁴

These developments revealed a newly awakened electoral cohort of increasingly class conscious, urban, working-class voters, overwhelmingly the children of southern and eastern European immigrants, who provided the urban electoral base of FDR's New Deal. Roosevelt never attracted a majority of the WASP vote. Much of his support — like Catholic Al Smith's before him — was in the "ethnic" cities where he attracted not only cross-ethnic, but *working class* loyalty. This is why Roosevelt attacked "economic royalists" in his 1936 campaign and why the pros and cons of unionization — not the long-time issues of religion, Prohibition or blue laws — dominated the nation's political agenda. The Democratic Party became the majority party in the 1930s by becoming the party of America's northeastern, urban, ethnic, blue collar proletariat — by occupying the space on the American political spectrum which would otherwise have been filled by a "Labor Party."

The Labor Party Tradition

Almost from its birth the American labor movement harbored a strong desire for what came to be called "independent political action." This phrase was generally understood to mean a political party separate from all others — a labor party. The first example of this tendency was the Working Men's Party of Philadelphia, founded by that city's Mechanics Union of Trade Associations to contest the municipal elections of 1828. Indeed, this was not only America's first labor party, but the world's first labor party, providing inspiration, for instance, to England's soon-to-emerge Chartist movement. A score of the party's candidates were elected that year and again the next. Workingmen in other Pennsylvania cities also began to organize politically and by 1830 it seemed a state-wide Working Men's Party would be formed. Internal dissension, however, tore the incipient movement apart by 1831. Nevertheless, between 1828 and 1834 similar municipal labor parties were organized in 61 cities and towns from Burlington, Vermont, to Washington, D.C., and as far west as Pittsburgh and Ohio.⁵ Throughout the nineteenth century other such municipal and state-wide efforts were made from time to time to establish labor parties around the country. By the 1880s a number of these local labor parties had come to power in many localities, as in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where Terence Powderly, leader of America's first truly national labor union, the Knights of Labor, served as mayor from 1878 to 1884.⁶

The efforts on the part of labor toward "independent political action" were not identical with the efforts of Socialists to form their own parties friendly to labor. The first of these was probably the Social Party of New York City, formed in 1868 by a merger of two German organizations, the Lassalleian German Workingmen's Union and the Marxist Communist Club. In 1874 the Labor Party of Illinois garnered nearly a thousand votes in the Chicago municipal elections, enough to encourage it to continue agitation. In 1876 this party merged with the International Workingmen's Association and the Social Democratic Workingmen's Party to form the Workingmen's Party of the United States. After undergoing various permutations, this party became Daniel DeLeon's Socialist Labor Party, which is still in existence. The failure of this party to win the allegiance of the American labor movement, however, gave rise to the Socialist Party of Debs. Still later came the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, and all the other sectarian grouplets on the Left which appealed for labor's love — and lost.

The rise to dominance of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) under Samuel Gompers meant that the Gompers policy of political neutrality — of "rewarding one's friends and punishing one's enemies," regardless of party — also came to characterize the political orientation of a large part of the labor movement. But the Gompers policy was never the sole political tendency within the movement and the desire for a party of labor's own remained strong

within certain sections.⁷ This was especially true following the "Red Scare" of 1919. In the wake of that hysteria, and with increasingly hard times for labor as the twenties began, labor party sentiment flared anew. Local Labor and Farmer-Labor Parties coalesced across the country, while the Non-Partisan League successfully contended for office as a third party in the upper Great Plains. Additionally, some liberals and unionists formed the Workers' Education Bureau, which the AFL Executive Council supported until 1928, despite the Bureau's advocacy of "independent political action." Other sources of labor party agitation were the "labor colleges" which labor activists and progressive intellectuals founded, the most notable being A.J. Muste's Brookwood Labor College in Katonah, New York, launched in 1921.⁸

In 1924, even the AFL halfheartedly surrendered to this tendency when it endorsed (and then abandoned) the presidential candidacy of Robert M. LaFollette under the banner of the Progressive Party. With LaFollette's defeat, however, the labor party upsurge faltered and most of the local parties faded, leaving only the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and LaFollette's Wisconsin Progressive Party as viable remnants.⁹ Even then, however, the flame was tended by on-going coalitions of unionists and progressives such as the League for Independent Political Action, the Conference for Progressive Political Action, and, later, the Farmer Labor Political Federation, which kept the idea alive in hopes of more propitious times ahead.¹⁰ Then, with the coming of the Great Depression in 1929, local labor parties again sprang up all across America like mushrooms in a meadow after a warm summer rain.¹¹

Even today, some unions, such as the United Electrical Workers (UE), call for the formation of a labor party at every annual convention. On June 26, 1985, Richard Trumka, then president of the United Mine Workers (UMW) and now vice president of the AFL-CIO, called for an independent labor party at the annual convention of The Newspaper Guild in Pittsburgh. America has "one party with two branches," said Trumka, "both apparently subservient to the interests of big money and the power of multinational corporations. All of us in the labor movement must consider the possibility that we are not going to establish a government of the people in this country as long as we remain so closely tied to the Democratic Party."¹²

But the ritualistic convention mandates of unions such as UE and the rhetoric of leaders like Trumka are mere lip service to the nostalgic dream of an independent labor party, not meant to be seriously acted upon. Even Trumka, while attacking the two-party system, disclaimed any interest in leading a genuine third party effort. Much more indicative of organized labor's attitude today is former AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland's belief that labor is a "natural constituency" of the Democratic Party and the Democratic Party is the natural home of the labor movement.¹³ Indeed, echoed United Steelworkers (USW) past president Lynn Williams, "If you took the labor move-

ment out of the Democratic Party, what's left? It's the heart and soul of the Democratic Party."¹⁴ So close is this alliance today that by the mid-1980s, the AFL-CIO had already been guaranteed 40 voting seats on the Democratic National Committee, the governing body of the Democratic Party. Labor's political neutrality died in the Great Depression of the Thirties. So, also, did the old dream of "independent political action" — the dream of a labor party. For the last half century, since the great realigning election of 1936, organized labor has been somewhat shakily married to the Democratic Party.

And yet we know very little of the street-level dynamics which drove this political revolution. Only by looking at how the New Deal political realignment was hammered home at the local, face-to-face, level will we fully understand the political mobilizations of the New Deal era and how the American labor movement became "the heart and soul" of the Democratic Party. And, once we place this realigning phenomenon under the microscope, we find an impressive and unprecedented grass roots, working class, political mobilization which was not simply an amorphous response to FDR and the Wagner Act, nor simply a result of the machinations of national labor leaders, though these certainly provided maneuvering room and encouragement. Fundamentally, the political mobilization of the working class in the thirties was a class war for political and economic equality. The call to this class war was issued, not from the top down, but from the bottom up by a myriad of self-starting local working class leaders responding to local imperatives. Collectively, the actions of these class conscious, street-level leaders brought about the political realignment of the thirties, the triumph of the Democratic Party, and the dominance of class politics.

Background to Realignment

From the late-nineteenth century until the New Deal, America had been dominated by Republican Party. Only two Democrats, Grover Cleveland and Woodrow Wilson, had been elected to the White House since the Civil War — and Wilson won in 1912 only because William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt split the Republican majority. The picture was just as bleak for Democrats at the Congressional level. In the 18 elections between 1894 and 1930, for instance, Republicans won a majority in the House of Representatives 15 times.

In Pennsylvania, the Democratic Party had also been excluded from power since the Civil War. Indeed, before 1936, the Democrats had not won Pennsylvania in a presidential election since 1856. In many of the numerous small steel towns surrounding Pittsburgh, such as Clairton, Monessen, and Aliquippa, no Democrat had ever been elected to any public office. Before the election of Democrat George Earle as governor in 1934, the last Democratic governor had been Robert Pattison, elected in 1883 and again in 1890 only because of

splits in the Republican Party. The last time Democrats controlled either house in the state legislature had been in 1870 when the only Democrat from Pennsylvania between the Civil War and the 1930s was sent to the United States Senate. After the political realignment of the 1890s, the Democratic Party became even more marginalized as Pennsylvania was converted into a solidly one-party state. For example, "of the 80 statewide contests held from 1894 through 1931, a candidate running with Democratic party endorsement won just one."¹⁵

Meanwhile, the state's dominant Republican Party drew much of its support and leadership from western Pennsylvania. The chairman of the state Republican Party, William Larimer Mellon, elected in 1926, hailed from Pittsburgh, where his family presided over the city's economic and political life. Meanwhile, Pittsburgh's Andrew W. Mellon was President Herbert Hoover's Secretary of the Treasury. Thus, what was true of the state at large was also true of the city of Pittsburgh. In the 77 years between 1856 and 1933, only one Democrat — elected for a single term at the head of a reform coalition — served as mayor of the city. During the same period, the Democrats did not elect a single city councillor, local judge, or any other municipal candidate. By 1929 Allegheny County, in which Pittsburgh is located, claimed 169,000 registered Republican voters but only 5,200 registered Democrats, virtually all in Pittsburgh itself. In the small steel towns clustered tightly around Pittsburgh, hardly a Democrat was to be found.

The Democratic Party, then, especially in the small steel towns on the outskirts of Pittsburgh, was a hollow shell with no office holders, no treasury, no campaign workers, and a miniscule constituency. A "political simplicity...had thus emerged in this industrial heartland of the Northeast by the 1920's [and]....It is no exaggeration to say that the political response to...industrialism in [Pennsylvania] was the elimination of organized partisan combat, an extremely severe decline in electoral participation, the emergence of a Republican 'coalition of the whole' and — by no means coincidentally — a highly efficient insulation of the controlling industrial-financial elite from effective or sustained countervailing pressures."¹⁶

But, with the presidential election of 1932, that changed, at least in Pittsburgh. While the rest of the state, for the time being, remained firmly Republican, Pittsburgh was transformed. Overnight, Pittsburgh became a Democratic bastion, as it has remained up to the present. No Republican presidential, gubernatorial, or mayoral candidate has carried the city since, nor has a single Republican been elected to any municipal office since 1932. Indeed, Republican Pennsylvania became a competitive two-party state because of the enduring Democratic dominance of Pittsburgh and surrounding Allegheny County which began at this time. Even as late as 1998, Democrats still outnumbered Republicans more than two-to-one in Allegheny County.

This political revolution in Pittsburgh and its surrounding Allegheny County mill towns was part of a larger political revolution in the thirties. As Samuel Lubell put it, the Depression era constituted a new "American Revolution" as the country went from being "normally" Republican to "normally" and enduringly Democratic for the next half century. A new majority electorate awakened to political activism. This newly-mobilized electorate, composed of "immigrant-stock voters, the young, those toward the bottom of the economic ladder, the unemployed, relievers, and citizens who had chosen to abstain in the 1920s,"¹⁷ increased Democratic totals nation-wide in off-year Congressional elections by 50% between 1930 and 1934 alone. At the local level, Bruce Stave, for example, has identified a "major shift in partisan control" of 92 cities nation-wide with populations of more than 100,000. "In 1929," he points out, "Republicans...controlled 48.9% of the city halls in urban America; by 1935 Democratic control equalled that proportion, with Republican strength sliding to 18.4%, a figure significantly below the Democrats [30.4%] in 1929."¹⁸ (The remainder of the nation's city halls were run by non-partisan, Socialist, or even Farmer-Labor administrations, as in Minneapolis and Berlin, New Hampshire.) More important than simple majority status, however, Lubell believed that "the significance of the Democratic rise to majority standing lies in the fact that with it has come a wholly new orbit of political conflict...one which is likely to govern the course of American politics as long as the animosities and loyalties of the New Deal remain in the memories of the bulk of voters."¹⁹

This "new orbit of political conflict" was class conflict. Just as FDR inveighed against "economic royalists" in the 1936 campaign, Harry Truman would win the White House in 1948 by making class politics the centerpiece of his famous "whistle-stop" campaign. Republican lawmakers were "gluttons of privilege" he thundered, who, along with "Wall Street reactionaries" wanted "an administration that will assure privilege for big business, regardless of what may happen to the rest of the nation."²⁰

To understand this class-based political revolution we must look at the grass roots in America's Northeastern and Midwestern regions. It was here that a new Democratic Party came into existence, ending the Republican hegemony which had dominated the region for so long. It was here that the Democratic Party "transformed itself from an institution largely rural in its orientation and leadership to one that embodied the aspirations of the American city dweller — and most notably, the urbanite of immigrant stock."²¹ The "new" Democrats of the thirties were overwhelmingly "concentrated in the industrial cities of the North" where support for the new Democratic Party was "far higher among Catholics, Jews, and blacks than among white Protestants." Above all, these "new" Democrats were "predominantly of the working class."²²

And, because these "new" Democrats were overwhelmingly of what we might call the urban proletariat, they brought their own unique concerns to the political arena and the new Democratic Party, both of which were transformed by their entry into active political life. The political realignment of the thirties brought about by the emergence of this new class of voters was not a value-free realignment. It was profoundly ideological, not just because of the economic catastrophe of the Great Depression, but also because of the fundamental concerns of the new majority electorate. These were "working class" concerns, manifested through an intense class conscious politics which sharply divided the electorate along class lines. When Lubell visited cities and towns across America, he found that where typical rents were below a set level, "pluralities were overwhelming" for Roosevelt. These pluralities quickly "faded away" once the rents rose above that level. As Lubell also discovered, this new class conscious politics made other concerns irrelevant. Speaking of the 1940 election, he wrote, "When I asked one auto unionist in Detroit why the third-term issue had made so little difference he replied, 'I'll say it even though it doesn't sound nice. We've grown class conscious.'"²³

Although scientific public opinion sampling does not exist for the early thirties, once it began it clearly identified such "class consciousness." Thus, summarizes one 1938 study of Chicago residents, "The evidence points clearly to the existence of important attitude differences among income classes."²⁴ A May 12, 1940, survey by the American Institute of Public Opinion asked, "If President Roosevelt runs for a third term on the Democratic ticket against Thomas E. Dewey on the Republican ticket, which one would you prefer?" Of those classified as "Upper Income," 69% preferred Dewey. Just as starkly, 66% of those classified as "Lower Income" and 74% of those classified as "Reliefers" preferred Roosevelt.²⁵

So prevalent was the class-consciousness of the new Democratic voter that even black voters often voiced their increasing support for the Democratic Party in terms of class rather than race. "We colored people of the Second Ward," said a 1936 black voter in Homestead, a small steel town near Pittsburgh, "led by Rev. Soloman...are better off now than we've ever been. Mr. Roosevelt is for the worker and for the poor classes while Landon is a tool for the bankers and those who have money."²⁶ The Rev. S.H. Soloman, himself, who was leading Homestead's formerly Republican black citizens into the Democratic Party, declared, "Didn't God of the Universe send President Roosevelt and give him a plan to take care of the needy? Are we going to let the enemy, which is the Republican Party, deceive us? I am asking the Negroes who belong to the Second Ward Democratic Club to be sure to come to the meeting Monday night....Because together we stand, but divided we fall."²⁷ The blacks of Pittsburgh's Steel Valley clearly saw their struggle as part of a

larger class struggle against rich Republicans who commonly oppressed the poor.

Thus, as political scientist Paul Kleppner has noted, the "electoral upheaval of the 1930s entailed much more than a simple transfer of political control from one majority party to the other. It involved a redefinition of what was salient to the electoral decisions of millions of voters and a consequent transformation of the social-group and attitudinal bases of partisanship....Among critically sized components of the mass public, perceptual evaluations of the major parties changed drastically. To large numbers of voters, especially the newly mobilized, 'Republican' came to denote hard times, indifference to the plight of the jobless, and opposition to measures aimed at ameliorating the bitter effects of the depression and improving the economic condition of the 'forgotten man.' That new and powerful set of negative evaluations had its positive counterpart, the central focus of which was Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was first Roosevelt, and only later and less completely his party, who came to be perceived as caring about the downtrodden and willing to do battle for their economic security against the amassed forces of 'economic royalists.' These perceptions shaped the cleavage line of the realignment and of the party oppositions that emerged from it."²⁸

The political revolution of the thirties, then, was based upon a new electorate composed of Northeastern and Midwestern, urban, immigrant, working class voters, primarily Southern and Eastern European Catholics, who brought their new concerns to the political arena at the same time they transformed the identity of the combatants in that arena. These were the working class Italians, for instance, of Boston's West End, among whom the sociologist Herbert Gans lived in the late fifties. "West Enders are Democrats," he observed at that time, and "they would not think of voting Republican." They knew where their political interests resided and "West Enders expect[ed] their politician to develop a public image of them, depicting them as proud citizens fighting for their rights against the hostile outside world. He is encouraged to make fiery speeches that condemn the powerful...and threaten them with violence or political reprisals by an aroused electorate."²⁹ Class conscious blue collar voters such as Boston's West Enders put an end to the long-dominant Brahmin Republicanism of Massachusetts and made Calvin Coolidge the last serious Republican presidential contender to come from the Bay State. These are the voters who also made sure that no Republican has been elected to any municipal office in Boston since the 1930s.

This mobilization of the immigrant, urban, working class — people who were previously outside the political universe — into the Democratic Party can be strikingly seen at the ward level in Pittsburgh (Table 1).

Table 1

Partisan Voting in Pittsburgh's Polish Hill, Ward Six, 1932-1940.

Year	% Dem.	% Rep.	% Other	% Nonvoting
1932	29.7	11.3	0.6	58.4
1936	50.3	9.4	3.1	37.1
1940	61.1	11.2	0.1	27.5

Source: Walter Dean Burnham, *The Current Crisis in American Politics*, Oxford University Press: N.Y., 1982, Table 11, p. 146.

Ward Six, Polish Hill, "was largely a Polish slum area adjacent to the Allegheny River and some of the area's many steel mills. In 1940, only 6.6 percent of its male labor force was in professional-managerial occupations, while fully 84.0 percent worked in semiskilled or unskilled manual labor occupations."³⁰ From 1932 to 1940, the percentage of the ward's electorate voting Democratic doubled, while the percentage voting Republican remained stagnant. At the same time, the percentage of registered voters who did not participate fell by almost half. Clearly, the Polish steelworkers of Polish Hill had been mobilized to go to the polls and vote Democratic as never before.

Class-based mobilization such as this also had long been evident in the steel towns surrounding Pittsburgh, even if it dared not speak its name to the voter registrar. A regional tradition of radical third-party voting had emerged. In the 1912 presidential election, for instance, Socialist candidate Eugene V. Debs averaged 25% of the vote in 16 Western Pennsylvania steel towns, while Socialist Party candidates swept the local elections that year in Allegheny County's North Versailles. The small steel town of Homestead was typical. In 1892, James B. Weaver, the Populist presidential candidate, got 15% of the vote. In the 1912 election, 25% of the West Homestead vote went to Debs. That same year Socialist Party vice-presidential candidate Emil Seidel spoke at a massive Labor Day parade in Homestead, along with Charlotte Perkins Gilman, one of the nation's leading feminists. As late as 1920, Debs still got 22% of the Homestead vote. In 1924 LaFollette (on the ballot as a "Socialist-Labor" candidate) got more than 25% of the vote, while the Socialists carried West Homestead.

In the thirties, this class-conscious support for socialist third parties transferred to the Democratic Party, as the latter came to be seen as a more viable vehicle for working class aspirations. To illustrate, Robert M. LaFollette won 36% of the Pittsburgh vote in 1924 on a "Socialist-Labor" ticket. The wards that supported LaFollette, which we might call the most highly class conscious, were the same immigrant, working class wards which voted for Socialist Eugene V. Debs in 1912 — and voted for Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 and thereafter. The Debs-LaFollette vote became the Roosevelt vote.

At the same time, John W. Davis, the 1924 Democratic presidential candidate, garnered only 8% of the Pittsburgh vote, and that vote came from wards "poles apart" from the wards that supported Debs, LaFollette, and later Roosevelt. The "new" Democratic vote, therefore, was very different from the "old" Democratic vote of just a decade before. The "new" Democratic vote was based in the very "third party" wards which had spurned the Democrats of 1924 and had, instead, been the strongholds of Debs and LaFollette. This allegiance shift of the class conscious working class vote from Socialist or "Socialist-Laborite" to Democratic was the foundation of Democratic dominance in the thirties.³¹

Furthermore, this working class and class conscious "new" Democratic vote grew much larger over time. In 1924, Socialist-Laborite LaFollette received 25% of the Homestead vote. But in 1928, the Homestead vote cast for Catholic Democratic presidential candidate Al Smith was 68% higher than the *total* voter turnout of 1924. In nearby Pittsburgh, where by 1934 *all* of the Democratic Party ward chairmen and Committeemen were of non-WASP origin, the WASPs continued to vote Republican in the same numbers they always had. For example, 95.3% of the voters in 1930 were Republican, while only 4.7% were Democrats. By 1936 Republican registration had dropped to 43.9% of the total, while Democratic registration climbed to 56.1%. Numerically, *the Republican vote was as high as ever*. But the political universe had been transformed by a tremendous expansion of the electorate — mostly working class and mostly in favor of the Democrats.³²

The Urban-Ethnic Demographic Revolution

Part of the answer to the phenomenon of class conscious political realignment in the Thirties was an intersecting phenomenon, the urban and ethnic demographic revolution. This revolution created what Lubell called a "critically sized component," a critical mass of *potential* Democrats — *if they could be mobilized*, if they could be aroused to vote their class interests through the vehicle of the Democratic Party. This was the necessary precondition to the dominance of class politics in the Thirties.

As the 1920 U.S. Census graphically revealed, America finally had become an urban nation, as the majority of its population for the first time was to be found in the cities. This demographic revolution helps us understand why "labor's millions" were "on the march" in the 1930s. The 1936 Presidential election, of course, witnessed the shift of political power at the national level away from the long-dominant Republicans to the Democrats — a trend begun in 1932 (or perhaps 1928 when Democrat Al Smith carried all of the nation's 12 largest cities by appealing to the "immigrant" vote), but cemented in 1936. What made this shift possible was what Samuel Lubell called, "The Revolt of the City."³³

America's industrial cities not only contained the bulk of the population after 1920, but this urban working-class population was comprised of immigrants and their children. Although many cities had contained immigrant majorities for some time, as the twentieth century progressed, this took on larger proportions. In 1910, for instance, the great bulk of school-age children in 37 of the nation's largest cities were the children of immigrants. "In cities like Chelsea, Fall River, New Bedford [Massachusetts]...more than two out of every three school children were the sons and daughters of immigrants."³⁴ This ethnic diversity may have been a major contributing reason for the perceived lack of "class consciousness" in America during this period.³⁵ The American working class was not "made" at any one time, but was constantly being re-made over and over as new waves of immigrants entered the work force, bringing with them their "alien" customs, beliefs, and values. This constant demographic churning made ethno-cultural differences and issues, such as Prohibition, blue laws, and religion, the cleavages of American politics. Further, alien workers were thrown into conflict not only with the "natives," but also with other alien workers in an alien land. It was difficult for them to even speak to each other. As for them uniting in common cause, it was just as likely they would finish the Tower of Babel as find common grounds for united political action.

The major source of this churning demographic cauldron was removed, however, when World War I and then the Johnson Act of 1924 clamped the lid on further European immigration. Without continued injections of foreign elements, both the cities and the work force — the working *class* — grew more "Americanized," as the children of the immigrants grew up and joined the world of urban work. By the 1930s, the children of the immigrants had at last come of age.³⁶ Born and raised in the cities, speaking English and thinking of themselves as Americans rather than as strangers in a strange land, mobilized into the electoral arena as their parents had not been, they not only shifted the demographic gravitational pull decisively away from the countryside, they completed the political power shift which had likewise been underway from country to city.

But this political power shift was more than demographic, as it also changed the long-time *content* of American politics because of *when* it occurred. "The human potential for a revolutionary political change," Lubell noted, "had...been brought together in our larger cities when the economic skies caved in."³⁷ Thus, with the decline of salient ethno-cultural conflict and with the economic crisis of the Depression, class politics, always present but usually submerged by ethno-cultural tensions, became the primary fault line of American political life for the first time.

The political revolution of the thirties, then, was based upon a new majority electorate. But this electorate was not always aroused. Indeed, the

initial response to the 1929 Depression of the people who would later join the Democrats had been political apathy. "Turnout did not increase much in the 1930 and 1932 elections," we are told. "[P]residential turnout in 1932 was 0.9 percentage points below the 1928 level.... The experience of extreme deprivation and its accompanying perceptions of dissatisfaction are not by themselves sufficient causes of collective political action. To mobilize discontented citizens as an effective political force, these subjectively stressful conditions must be politicized. Individuals have to perceive them both as conditions shared by others and for which government action is somehow relevant."³⁸

Someone or something, then, politicized the desperate conditions of the new electorate. Something happened to transform this economically devastated yet politically apathetic population into an electoral force which changed the face of American politics. Somehow, these dispossessed millions were mobilized into the Democratic Party in the years after 1932 to express their class interests at the ballot box, as well as on the picket line.

But this development was not automatic nor inevitable. Lubell argued, for example, that this new class conscious constituency of urban, working-class immigrants and their children, coming of age and coming into its own in the 1930s (seven million 21-year-old first-time voters in 1936 alone), with its political loyalty still to be won and cemented, was not yet active and was not yet firmly Democratic. And, indeed, if the inchoate political loyalty of the newly arrived, class conscious, urban working class was up for grabs, it was problematic whether the Democrats or perhaps some labor or third party movement would secure and hold it. How, then, was America's ethnic working class politically mobilized and then won and held for the Democrats?

Pittsburgh and the small mill towns which surrounded it are an appropriate place to look at how this was accomplished. In 1930, Pittsburgh was the tenth largest city in America. Like all the other top ten, except Los Angeles, it was located in the Northeastern-Midwestern industrial heartland of the country. It and its surrounding mill towns were, in fact, the heart of that heartland. Allegheny County had a large, immigrant, working class population which responded readily to the appeals of the "new Democratic party." The ethnic groups which dominated the Pittsburgh region — the Catholic Irish, along with the Catholic and Orthodox Southern and Eastern Europeans, as well as blacks — have long been recognized as key participants in building the new Democratic majority. In conjunction with other major industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest, the Pittsburgh region emerged as a crucial component of the "New Deal coalition," and the forces which transformed the American political universe in the 1930s were particularly acute in "The Steel Valley." In fact, it is possible that the forces which created the New Deal's new Democratic majority may have been more powerfully at work in Pittsburgh and its Steel Valley than in any other region. As labor historian John R. Com-

mons observed in 1909, "Pittsburgh loom[s] up as the mighty storm mountain of Capital and Labor. Here our modern world achieves its grandest triumph and faces its gravest problem." Perhaps more than any other city, he claimed, Pittsburgh was the focus of "titanic...contests for the division of wealth..." A quarter of a century later, in the mid-thirties, other observers of the Pittsburgh scene agreed with this assessment, saying, "[F]or the life of the people of Pittsburgh and its environs the production of wealth on a gigantic scale and the contest for its division are still the basic facts, and that city may yet qualify as the 'storm mountain of Capital and Labor.'"³⁹

A closer look, then, at what happened in the Pittsburgh region, and especially in the small surrounding mill towns, may well give us our clearest idea of the class character of American politics in the 1930s. Here we can see how the ethnic American working class was politically mobilized into the Democratic Party through a call issued by grass-roots leaders for political class warfare.

The Little New Deal

The political revolution in the Pittsburgh area, also known as "Steeltown," did not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it permanently hammered home at the local level a political reconstitution which the labor movement had already helped bring about at the state level. By 1933 Pennsylvania Democrats had begun emulating the pro-labor programs of FDR's New Deal with their own proposed "Little New Deal," even while the Republicans still held the governorship and controlled the state legislature. The 1934 Democratic state platform was almost entirely devoted to the cause of labor, with the first eight points prominently addressing labor issues.⁴⁰ In that 1934 campaign, mainly with labor votes, George H. Earle was elected the first Democratic governor of Pennsylvania since 1890.

In 1935, when Earle took office, he brought with him 116 Democratic State Representatives, enough to gain control of the 206-member State House. "With this degree of power the Democrats hoped to use the New Deal as a model and reproduce its image in Pennsylvania. Used at first as an epithet by unfriendly newsmen, the term 'Little New Deal' caught on as a description of the Earle administration and was soon accepted by friend and foe alike...For the next few years, news stories publicized the Little Wagner Act, the Little A.A.A., the Little Brain Trust, and Little Fireside Chats..."⁴¹

Pennsylvania's "Little New Deal" also promised financial aid to strikers, as well as state police protection. Indeed, Lieutenant Governor Tom Kennedy, International Secretary-Treasurer of the United Mine Workers and a close ally of UMW chief John L. Lewis, was made commander of the state police. Nor would the National Guard be used to break strikes, as had often been the case in the past. Speaking at Pittsburgh's Forbes Field to a mammoth Labor Day celebration of 150,000 Pittsburgh-area workers and their families, Governor

Earle declared that, "I give you my solemn pledge that the Pennsylvania National Guard will not be used to break strikes. Our National Guard is not a company police system and will not be used as such. The relief authorities will not at any time be used as strikebreakers. The only basis for relief will be actual need. The weapon of starvation to coerce workers has been taken away."⁴²

But many of the "Little New Deal's" programs were stymied by the fact that the Republicans still controlled the State Senate. The 1936 election removed that obstacle. Franklin D. Roosevelt's election in 1932 had made possible the initial CIO drives in steel and other mass production industries, a job which was yet incomplete. John L. Lewis and other high CIO leaders, therefore, deemed the re-election of Roosevelt in 1936 essential to the continued success of their efforts. Their main vehicle for accomplishing this, in Pennsylvania as elsewhere, was Labor's Non-Partisan League.

But from the beginning, the League was designed to re-elect the president, with little attention given to the Democratic ticket at lower levels. With this goal, the League worked hard to carry Pennsylvania for Roosevelt. During the campaign, for instance, "Seventeen thousand five-hundred one sheet posters were supplied to county chairmen along with large quantities of window cards and Roosevelt buttons."⁴³ In addition, the Pennsylvania Non-Partisan League organized large rallies, distributed a half-million copies of its four-page newspaper, *The Labor Voter*, and "enrolled 150,000 members from various trade unions in the state and collected over \$81,000 in union contributions."⁴⁴ In the meantime, SWOC, a CIO affiliate, was active on Roosevelt's behalf independently of the League. "The union announced that a vote for the New Deal was a vote for collective bargaining....[and] The time and energy of many organizers and staff members were diverted toward the political campaign."⁴⁵

While Pennsylvania may have gone for Roosevelt anyway in 1936, the League and SWOC both claimed a major share of the credit for swinging Pennsylvania into Roosevelt's camp. In Allegheny County, the heart of the steel industry, Roosevelt won by almost 300,000 votes. In lesser populated Beaver County, where the towns of Aliquippa, Ambridge, and Midland are located, Roosevelt had a nearly 17,000 vote margin of victory.

Almost as an after-thought, the League had targeted 14 anti-Little New Deal Republican State Senators for defeat in a single edition of *The Labor Voter*. Perhaps this had an effect, for ten of these fourteen Republicans were defeated. Beyond this sole mention, the League seems to have made no other effort to affect the course of Pennsylvania state politics in 1936. Still, the election of ten more Democratic State Senators gave the Earle Administration a two-thirds majority in the State Senate to go along with its Democratic majority in the House. What Governor Earle called "Liberal forces" controlled both executive and legislative branches of the state government for the first

time. "It is now our duty to translate that liberalism into positive effective action," Earle told his new legislature. It responded with "the most sweeping reform program in Pennsylvania's history."⁴⁶

Nevertheless, just as the labor movement needed to further its workplace organizing campaigns by helping to "reproduce the image" of FDR's New Deal in a "Little New Deal" at the state level, so also it needed to bring that political transformation on home and cement the New Deal in the small communities of Steeltown. State police, for instance, could not always be relied upon to guarantee the safety and civil liberties of union organizers. That had to be done at the local level.

But, while state politics seems to have been an after-thought to Lewis and the top CIO leaders, they seem not to have thought about local politics at all. The consolidation of both pro-labor politics and political realignment at the local level, then, was something rank and file steelworkers and their local leaders had to do themselves. This is how those working class voters entered electoral politics, joined the Democratic Party, and, in the process, created a "Blue Collar Democracy" in the corporate-Republican heartland.

Revolution in Steeltown

Stretching for miles up and down the Monongahela, Allegheny, and Ohio Rivers, the grimy steel towns of western Pennsylvania represented perhaps the largest concentration of industrial might in the world. These small communities were emblematic both of the country's industrial heartland and of the business-oriented Republican grip upon that heart: "As a composite," *The Bulletin-Index* said, "Steeltown has had a grim, long-publicized history of adamant, walled opposition against labor unionism, rough treatment of 'alien' agitators, undisguised steel company domination. No more solid symbol of rock-ribbed Republicanism was there in the U.S. prior to 1932 than Steeltown. Thus, what happened in Steeltown last Tuesday [Election Day, 1937]...was of transcendent significance."⁴⁷

Of all the component communities comprising Steeltown, the largest was McKeesport, just east of Pittsburgh and home of the huge McKeesport Tinplate Corporation and the National Tube Company. There, 70 year-old Mayor George H. Lysle, who had been in office for 27 years, survived the unprecedented challenge of "Democratic Laborite" Carl Bechtol, a worker at the National Tube Co. who would be elected to the city council in the next election. But Lysle's was a solitary victory. "The day after election...Lysle could look out over the string of steel towns that flank McKeesport and see not one familiar face in the mayoral chairs of Steeltown. Before him stretched a lonely term as the last of Steeltown's Old Guard."⁴⁸ He was, said *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, virtually the sole exception to the "mighty wave of Democratic victory which rolled over Allegheny County yesterday."⁴⁹

Duquesne was directly across the Monongahela River from McKeesport and the third largest community in Steeltown after McKeesport and Aliquippa. There, the hand-picked successor to ex-Mayor James C. Crawford, president of the town's only bank and brother of the former president of the McKeesport Tinplate Corp., was beaten by "C.I.O.-Democrat" Elmer J. Maloy, a 26-year veteran in the local Carnegie-Illinois mill (part of United States Steel) and chief of the local Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) lodge. Crawford had been the only mayor in Duquesne's 20-year history as an incorporated third-class city and was notorious for crushing the 1919 steel strike in his town. He had then declared that "Jesus Christ himself could not hold a union meeting in Duquesne." The defeat of his designated heir was viewed as a crushing repudiation of Crawford himself.⁵⁰

John J. Mullen was the new mayor-elect in Clairton which, according to the *Post-Gazette*, did not go Democratic: it "went CIO,"⁵¹ reflecting the popular impression that this was a triumph for the CIO local unions more than a Democratic Party victory. Clairton, said the *Index*, had "long rated with Aliquippa as the two most typical company-dominated steel towns in the U.S."⁵² Mullen, the local Sub-District Director for the SWOC, defeated a Clairton policeman to become the first Democrat elected to office in the town's history. Unlike the situation in every other Steeltown campaign (and perhaps because Mullen was on the SWOC headquarters staff), SWOC chief Philip Murray had a reluctant SWOC Treasurer David McDonald contribute some small funds out of the SWOC treasury to Mullen's campaign.⁵³

Despite this nominal support, Mullen's campaign (like those of other Steeltown candidates who coincidentally happened to be SWOC members) was very much a venture independent of SWOC — and the Clairton Democratic organization as well. As in Duquesne, the regular Democrats endorsed one of their own in the primary. Mullen, however, was the Democrat calling for class war and his candidacy tapped into a tidal wave of popular sentiment. He rolled over the old-line Democrat in the primary.

Then, despite a "four-to-one Republican registration lead in this town, strictly because of mill dominance,"⁵⁴ Mullen led the Democratic slate to complete victory in the November elections, not even allowing the Republicans a single office, as they had won in Duquesne. "I took it as a showing that our people were tired of suppression," Mullen said. "If they were really allowed to voice their hopes and their thoughts, they would vote Democratic and vote for a union, too. I ran on the basis that a vote for me was a vote for unionism....that's how I became the mayor."⁵⁵

In Aliquippa, west of Pittsburgh on the Ohio River and long controlled by the Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation, all but one of the CIO-Democratic candidates swept into offices ranging from mayor and council down to tax collector and inspector of elections. This ended the 23-year reign of J.A.C.

Ruffner. Ruffner had been tax collector since 1914, chairman of the local Republican Party since 1916, was director and first vice-president of the town's only bank, director of the sole building and loan company, director of the community's major trust company, and owner of *The Aliquippa Gazette*, the town's only newspaper. Replacing him was a CIO-Democratic administration whose leading member was Paul Normile, President of the Aliquippa SWOC lodge.

Directly across the Ohio from Aliquippa in Ambridge, a town named after a U.S. Steel subsidiary, the American Bridge Corporation, Democratic Burgess (Mayor) Philip J. Caul, an AFL plasterer, was elected, along with his entire slate, due to massive support from the local SWOC lodge. Caul had earlier served as the Ambridge Chief of Police. *The Union Press*, weekly newspaper of the Aliquippa SWOC lodge, praised him before the election for his pro-labor orientation in that office. "During the earlier days when he first occupied the office of Chief of Police," it said, "he waged a relentless fight against the encroachments of coal and iron police within the territorial limits of the Borough and succeeded in eliminating the nefarious practice of industrial police patrolling the streets of the Borough and spying upon the private affairs of the citizens."⁵⁶

Every other part of Steeltown repeated the story. In legendary Homestead, famous for its 1892 strike against Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick, a labor-based slate of candidates, "sweeping every Republican before it,"⁵⁷ ended the 16-year incumbency of local Republican Party boss and Burgess John Cavanaugh. Along with a new burgess, eight Democratic councilors, four Democratic school board members, a Democratic tax collector, and a Democratic justice of the peace were installed. A thousand steel workers celebrated Cavanaugh's defeat with a honking 100-car caravan down Eighth Avenue, Homestead's main street. Bearing a coffin emblazoned with Cavanaugh's name and led, appropriately, by a "Democratic" donkey ridden by a Homestead steel worker, "mourners" forced themselves to weep by squeezing freshly cut onions under their eyes. Of the many Republican defeats in the various communities of Steeltown on that election day, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* thought the "Most outstanding of these was the overwhelming defeat of Burgess John J. Cavanaugh....Many years during his regime he ruled the borough with an iron hand, controlling the naming of many borough and county office holders."⁵⁸ So heavy was Cavanaugh's "iron hand" that in 1933 he had even forbidden U.S. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins the right to speak to steel workers in his town.

In Donora, home of a large American Steel & Wire facility, Democrat Michael J. Sweeney, a high school math teacher and son of an Irish coal miner, was elected burgess with labor backing. New Kensington, run by the Pittsburgh-based Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA), "saw its Republi-

Photo courtesy of William J. Gaughan Collection,
Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.



The Stirring of Revolt: Elected representatives of the U.S. Steel Homestead Works Employee Representation Plan (ERP), taken on the steps of Homestead's Carnegie Library, November 5, 1935. These men were elected in May of that year, as was Elmer Maloy to the ERP in Duquesne. These men then helped elect Maloy as head of the association of ERPs in all the Carnegie-Illinois (U.S. Steel) plants of the Pittsburgh District and joined with him in a 1935 revolt of such "company unions" against corporation dominance. Though there were black workers in the Homestead mill, there were no black union representatives.

can ribs broken by a 34-year-old Reliance Life Insuranceman named Dick Miller Reeser.⁵⁹ Reeser, a drummer and a member of the AFL's American Federation of Musicians, was backed by the local SWOC lodge to become the first Democrat ever elected in the town. In Monessen ("Essen on the Mon"), Democratic Mayor and SWOC member James C. Gold, a 29-year veteran of the open hearth furnace, was elected. The CIO-Democrats cleaned out the entire Republican council in Rankin, across the Monongahela from Homestead, along with the 12-year incumbent Burgess. The new burgess was John Martcshek, a laborer at Union Switch & Signal and a member of the CIO's United Electrical Workers, Local 610. Returns in next door Braddock, home of U.S. Steel's behemoth Edgar Thompson Works, revealed "a clean sweep" for the CIO-Democrats. In North Braddock, up in the "American" hills overlooking "Hunky" dominated Braddock, only the Republican burgess survived "an avalanche of votes" that elected five CIO-Democratic councillors.⁶⁰

In McKees Rocks, the Republican municipal government had bloodily resisted a dramatic IWW-led strike at the Pressed Steel Car Company in 1909 during which four strikers and three state policemen were killed. In 1937, however, that government was ousted as the CIO-Democrats took all borough offices, with the CIO-Democratic burgess candidate leading his Republican opponent by five-to-one. There was "complete victory" for the CIO-Democrats in the race for five city council seats in East Pittsburgh.⁶¹

"The impossible happened in Glassport," said the *Post-Gazette*, "where a Democratic slate that was not given a chance in a thousand swept into power, ousting a Republican rule that had existed beyond the memory of the oldest residents." Joseph Faix, Jr., a local glassworker, was the new burgess, with CIO-Democrats filling every other office in the city. Even though the Glassport vote was still laboriously hand-counted, "The vote was so top heavy, the Republican slate conceded defeat an hour after the count began."⁶²

Some soon afterwards hailed this political earthquake as a triumph for Labor's Non-Partisan League, which had been formed the previous year by CIO-leader John L. Lewis to aid in the re-election of President Roosevelt.⁶³ Others described it as a centralized SWOC headquarters initiative. Yale professor Robert R.R. Brooks, in an almost contemporary history of the unionization of steel, viewed the 1937 political transformation of Steeltown as vital in the success of unionizing the steel industry. "Such formerly 'closed' towns or boroughs as Clairton, Duquesne, Brackenridge, Aliquippa, Ambridge, and Midland," he said, "are now either completely controlled or powerfully influenced by union members. This fact is of considerable significance...in connection with the permanent establishment of unionism in steel communities..." However, he also incorrectly attributed the change to a top-down strategy. "S.W.O.C. encouraged lodge leaders in the 'company' towns of Pennsylvania and Ohio to enter contests for such offices as those of mayor, burgess, constable, and town or borough council," he said.⁶⁴

On the other hand, George Powers, a labor champion who lived through these events, highlighted the fact that these were victories, not of Labor's Non-Partisan League or even SWOC headquarters, but of local union lodges acting on their own. He also stated that the significance of the victories was not just in establishing unionism in steel, but in introducing political democracy as well: "For the first time in the history of Monongahela Valley, people were free to exercise their vote as they saw fit, no longer cowed by the pressure of the mill superintendent...there was a new freedom over the land."⁶⁵

Status Quo Ante

This "new freedom" had been a long time in coming. Since the crushing of the old Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers at the Battle of Homestead in 1892, a common experience of repression and exploi-

tation had forged a strong sense of class consciousness and class struggle among the workers of Steeltown. English labor historian E. P. Thompson has described the decade of the 1820s in England as the period in which the English working class became class conscious. By this phrase he meant that, "working men formed a picture of the organization of society, out of their own experience...which was above all a political picture. They learned to see their own lives as part of a general history of conflict between the loosely defined 'industrious classes' on the one hand, and the unreformed House of Commons on the other."⁶⁶ We see evidence of a similar evolution of class consciousness in the Pennsylvania steel towns, as a common experience of oppression led workers to a clear awareness of their own interests in distinction to those of others, in this case the steel companies, the Republicans, and what workers called the "Republican police."

The workers of Steeltown had been forced into an almost feudal servitude, yet many remained steadfast in their opposition to corporation dominance and strong in their confidence of their own eventual victory in the eternal class struggle. "Repeatedly," John Fitch reported in his 1907 investigation of Steeltown, "I was told that workmen have been discharged at Duquesne for refusing to vote the way the company wished."⁶⁷ Despite the threats of discharge, the surveillance, and the complete political and economic dominance of "the steel trust," Fitch still found that, "In spite of the period that has elapsed since there was any form of union activity in the steel mills, there is still a firm belief on the part of a great many that some day the mills will be all unionized. A majority of the workmen feel that it is only through their efforts and that of the community at large, together launched against the opposing powers, that their industrial freedom is to be won."⁶⁸

Even at that time, however, many felt that they had to move *beyond* workplace organizing if they wanted to gain their freedom. Already, in 1907, Fitch had discovered that, "Not all of the socially hopeful workmen look to trade unionism to secure to them what they consider their rights. As the years have gone by since unionism was overthrown, and each year has seen the control of the employers grow more certain, and nearly absolute, many have turned to politics as the way out....There is a deep unrest among the voters in the mill towns with regard to things political....Most of the Pittsburgh steel workers vote the republican ticket, because they see no immediate hope of success through a workingmen's party; but they are ready to accept any political theory that promises something worthwhile to labor. If the workmen in the mills were once convinced that in an approaching election there existed a possibility of election of the socialist candidates, there would follow what could not adequately be termed a landslide; it would be an avalanche."⁶⁹

Until the thirties, however, the possibility of such political success was frustrated by an omnipresent Republican-corporate control. David Brody has

detailed the "sources of stability" in the mill towns which contributed to an enduring status quo of steel corporation rule following the defeat and near destruction of the old Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers in the great Homestead Lockout and Strike of 1892.⁷⁰ The smaller communities were one-industry towns which depended totally upon the local steel mill for their continuing existence, sometimes even for their birth. Even in a large city like Pittsburgh, half of its industry was steel production in the early years of the century. Local business elites, therefore, as well as newspapers and even the churches, were quick to ally with the company in any labor dispute. There were also the ethnic divisions among the steel workers themselves, both on the job in segregated occupations and in the surrounding communities. In a town as tightly controlled as Aliquippa, for instance, these divisions were carried to such an extent that the company (the major renter) assigned each ethnic group, including sub-divisions of Eastern and Southern Europeans, to different parts of town.

But perhaps most important, there was company control of municipal government, which guaranteed an unyielding hostility on the part of local officials to workers' grievances in general and to strikes in particular. When all else failed, the local police force could always be counted upon to break any strike or stifle any organizing campaign before it gained momentum. By the time of the 1919 steel strike, local government in Steeltown belonged completely to the corporations. The Sheriff of Allegheny County was the brother of a United States Steel plant manager. The President of the Homestead Borough Council was an official in U. S. Steel's Homestead plant. Indeed, virtually every Homestead burgess between 1894 and 1921 was either a member of the mill's top management or a close company ally from the town's business elite. The Burgess of Munhall, where most of the Homestead facility was actually located, was the plant superintendent. Likewise, the Burgess of Clairton was an official in the U.S. Steel mill in that town. George Wilson, new "labor-Democrat" candidate for Burgess of Midland in 1937, pointed out that, "For years...this little Steel Town has been ruthlessly mismanaged by the hirelings of a great steel corporation. Coercion, discrimination, and terrorism in general has been the lot of the great majority of the people here....The Steel corporation had their flunkies and still have them in the school board and in the town council. The majority of these men are mill superintendents elected to do the company's bidding."⁷¹

Where the local political establishment was not actually employed by the corporations, it nevertheless protected the interests of the corporations. In Aliquippa, remembered union organizer Louis DeSenna, "The Burgess and the Council were all appointed by the company. No one dared run against them, so you may as well say they were appointed. They ran the town for the company."⁷²

The Duquesne experience is illustrative of this semi-feudal condition. Duquesne had a population of about 20,000 throughout the thirties.⁷³ The largest employer, dominating the town, was the Carnegie-Illinois mill, a subsidiary of United States Steel, where virtually everyone worked.⁷⁴ Closely allied to the steel corporation was the town government, headed by Mayor James C. Crawford. The Crawford family had dominated the community, economically and politically, since its genesis as an incorporated town. Crawford's father, John, had been elected the original burgess of the town in 1896 and son James had taken over the reins of government in 1917, just in time to crush the 1919 steel strike. Crawford was president of Duquesne's only bank. His brother was president of the huge McKeesport Tinplate Corporation.

The Crawford administration — and virtually the entire electorate — was Republican. "It was all Republican," remembered Elmer Maloy. "They controlled the politics of the town and the school and everything else....by 1933, when Roosevelt came in, here was a town that had been practically 100% Republican. I don't think there were over 50 Democrats as voters in that town....There were a few families that didn't work in the mill, businessmen and other ones, that stayed Democratic, but outside of that, everybody was a Republican."⁷⁵

This Republican administration routinely marshalled the town's police to suppress demonstrations of worker dissatisfaction, but Mayor Crawford's police force was not directed *only* against the workers. Maloy remembered that when the relatively pro-labor Gifford Pinchot was the Republican governor of Pennsylvania in the early thirties, neither he nor his activist wife, Cornelia Bryce Pinchot, were allowed to speak in Duquesne. Like Frances Perkins in Homestead, Mrs. Pinchot had to resort to federal territory if she wanted to speak: "She had to go down to the federal building, the post office, and speak from the post office steps. That's the only way she could speak in the town without getting arrested. And he was the governor of the state!"⁷⁶

In Aliquippa it was perhaps even worse.⁷⁷ Mike Zahorsky, who began working in the Aliquippa Jones & Laughlin (J & L) mill in 1921 at age 13, was Catholic and worked for Democrat Al Smith in the presidential election of 1928 because Smith was Catholic. But, he recalled, almost no one actually dared register as a Democrat. There were then only 35 registered Democrats in Aliquippa, and about 10,000 Republicans.⁷⁸ "You couldn't get a job if you were a Democrat," he recalled. "It was like living in Russia, Siberia....The company had their stooges out and you didn't know who you were talking to....You couldn't trust a fellow you knew for 25 or 30 years. They'd come up to a guy in the mill and they'd say, 'Hey, Mike, what the hell were you talking about up at the Slovak picnic the other day? Word got to us you made a derogatory comment about the company. How many years do you have in the mill? Do you like your job?' You start to quake."⁷⁹

Aliquippa was the place where, in 1933, J. & L. organized a private army of American Legionnaires and detectives from the Bergoff Detective Agency which charged with submachine guns and tear gas bombs over the bridge spanning the Ohio River into neighboring Ambridge to break a strike which Ambridge Burgess Philip J. Caul refused to crush. The invading army did it for him, killing one striker and wounding scores. In 1934, George Isasky, an Aliquippa rank and file leader, was railroaded into an insane asylum for 35 days before the workers were able to induce a gubernatorial investigation which found him sane and released him.

Ruling Aliquippa as his personal fiefdom, though in thrall to J. & L., was J.A.C. Ruffner, publisher of *The Aliquippa Gazette*, the town's only newspaper, school district and borough tax collector since 1914, chairman of the local Republican Party since 1916, Director of The Woodlawn Building and Loan as well as the Woodlawn Trust Company, and Director and Vice-President of the First National Bank of Aliquippa. When asked about the 1933 charge over the Ohio into Ambridge by the army of tommy gun-wielding strike breakers, Ruffner said, "That was one of the most wonderful things that ever happened in this valley.... We won't see the law thrown aside because certain authorities [such as Ambridge Burgess Caul] fear the mob."

"Where was the mob, the throwing aside of law?" he was asked.

"Why, they were picketing!" he answered. "Whenever three or four men gather and make remarks that could be resented by another person, they are inciting to riot."⁸⁰

Croatian barber Pete Muselin, son of a mill worker and a World War I veteran, said that, "The J. & L. police carried their guns openly wherever they went. Their purpose was to intimidate people throughout the town.... The coal and iron police were domiciled right next to the J. & L. main office.... They had all their machine guns...and tear gas...in there, and they had a shooting range right next door. Every day we could see them off of mom's dining room window, practicing with pistols, rifles, and so on.

"[J. & L. Police Chief] Harry G. Mauk was the fellow behind the political scene for J. & L. The borough council was composed of strictly Jones & Laughlin people and the town's professionals. Mauk would direct Dr. Stevens, the physician, and Bud Scott, the dentist, and others.... Bud Scott was my dentist. A long time afterward he told me, 'Pete.... I hated that Mauk. He ordered me to be a councilman and told me, 'You will do at these council meetings what I tell you to do, and you will vote the way I tell you.'"⁸¹ What that council did was to make sure the Bill of Rights did not apply to Aliquippa. "The council would pass these ordinances," Muselin remembered, "and I would defy them on the grounds that they were unconstitutional. They would tell me, and be very emphatic about it, 'We make the rules. This is not the United States. This is [Aliquippa].'"

Pete Muselin was one of the few Aliquippa workers who dared to register as a Democrat in the twenties and continued to call union meetings, despite being "arrested so often I could have put my name tag on that cell down in the borough lock-up....Once I went [to the city council] and I started reading the Declaration of Independence.....a cop said 'That's communistic stuff you're reading.' When I got to the part where, 'all men are created equal,' he arrested me."⁸²

While Mauk was chief of the J. & L. police, Mike Kane, Aliquippa Police Chief and Squire (magistrate), was his right hand man. Kane was the State Chairman of the Constitutional Defense League, an anti-union strike force created by the Americanism Committee of the American Legion in 1935. He was perhaps even more vicious than Mauk. He patrolled Aliquippa's "Hunkytown" on a motorcycle, which was also an instrument of terror. He'd roar into backyards on his motorcycle, gunning it up onto porches and smashing into people's kitchens. "With a *motorcycle* he'd go into the kitchen," said Muselin, "dispersing the men who were there, and shout, 'Break it up, you Hunkies!' And do you know what the men had been doing? They were either playing Ferbel, a card game, or they had a glass of wine in front of them, or maybe they were singing a little bit....When two people met peacefully [on the street] and might have been talking about who knows what, according to the...police they were inciting to riot: 'Break it up, Hunkies.'"

Muselin was himself the target of much police harassment. "Every once in a while," he said, "the cops came to my home and just raided the place — no warrant, no nothing. They would take every book, every periodical, every bulletin; they'd just dump them in a pile and throw them in the police cruiser and they would never return them. A policeman used to attend our Croatian fraternal lodge meetings. He stood in the back there, big guns strapped to his side, his arms crossed, with a club dangling down....He just wanted to make sure he didn't hear the word 'union.' ...[Aliquippa] was a typical cossack town."

Mike Kane and Harry Mauk were just the most prominent of these "Republican Police," as the local steel workers called them. In 1926 they raided Pete Muselin's Croatian lodge meeting and arrested him and 30 others. Muselin and another four were charged with sedition under Pennsylvania's state anti-sedition law. Prosecuted by J. & L.'s long-time attorney, they were found guilty in 1927 and sentenced to five years in the Allegheny County workhouse. Their convictions were upheld on all appeals until they reached the United States Supreme Court — which refused to review them. One of the five died in prison and the other four were released in February, 1932. Muselin then resumed his activities. He became one of the leaders of the 1933 Ambridge strike crushed by the army of American Legionnaires and Bergoff detectives from Aliquippa.

Worker Resistance, 1932-1937

After the election of Roosevelt in 1932, however, things began to change. FDR provided a psychological umbrella which empowered the steelworkers of Pennsylvania to begin to move *en masse*. Elmer Maloy remembered the tidal wave nature of political change in Duquesne: "In 1932...when Roosevelt was elected, there was a wave, when the Democratic votes started to hit....pretty soon everybody started to change their registration to Democrat. (The company couldn't stop them), it was too late, they couldn't do anything with them, they just changed, the whole lot of them."⁸³

Louis DeSenna, who started working at Aliquippa's J. & L. mill in 1934, recalls that, "In 1932 we had some Democrats, but not too many. You'd lose your job real quick. They'd put you on a train. But then Roosevelt gave us the freedom to vote....Then, in 1937, we had a revolution and every one turned Democrat. Before that, it was a dangerous thing to say anything for either "Pappy" Roosevelt or the union."⁸⁴ Aliquippa's Mike Zahorsky agreed. "It was Roosevelt," he said. "He was the father. Before that people were too fearful. But when Roosevelt was elected in 1932, nobody was fearful any more. We had no fears."⁸⁵

The psychological and political impact of Roosevelt moved them in the direction of aggressive action even in the days of the old Amalgamated. The 1933 Frances Perkins incident in Homestead illustrates how unruly the workers quickly became.⁸⁶ Several hundred angry workers descended on the Homestead City Hall to speak with her following a tour of U.S. Steel's Homestead Works. When she asked Burgess Cavanaugh if she could use the City Hall to meet with the workers, he refused, saying, "These men are no good. They are undesirable Reds."

Nevertheless, Perkins met them on the steps of the City Hall. Cavanaugh appeared at the head of a police contingent and told her, "You can't talk here! You are not permitted to make a speech here!" Perkins then saw the American flag flying over the post office just down the street. "We will go to the post office," she told the tense crowd. "There is an American flag."

She led the workers to the federal building, over which Burgess Cavanaugh had no jurisdiction, and held the meeting there. "Twenty or thirty men" from the crowd accepted her invitation to speak up and "they said they wished the government would free them from the domination of the steel trust....We ended the meeting with handshaking and expressions of rejoicing that the New Deal wasn't afraid of the steel trust."

Several hundred angry steel workers had stormed the City Hall, demanding to see her *despite* Burgess Cavanaugh (Perkins described him as the "nervous Burgess") and his police. Further, at the subsequent meeting at the post office, over 20 workers were not afraid to step forth and speak publicly against "the steel trust." It had commonly been said before this that, "If you want to

talk in Homestead, you have to talk to yourself," as anyone, even your best friend, could be a company spy. This fear quickly dissipated. Only the "nervous Burgess" displayed any fear in this incident. John A. Fitch discovered the workers' new confidence after a 1935 visit to Homestead.⁸⁷ The Perkins incident makes it clear, however, that workers were "talking union" even earlier.

Indeed, contrary to Edward Levinson's claim that the first union meeting to occur in Homestead took place on July 5, 1936, under the auspices of the newly-formed SWOC,⁸⁸ the steel workers of Homestead had already organized a local of the Amalgamated Association — significantly named the "Spirit of 1892" lodge — three years to the day before SWOC was founded on June 16, 1936. The election of Roosevelt had encouraged workers in Homestead, as elsewhere, to take action on their own. On June 16, 1933, the very day the National Industrial Recovery Act was passed, a truck with loudspeakers boldly prowled the streets of Homestead announcing a public union meeting to be held that night at Turner Hall, in lower Homestead near the mill. Over a thousand Homestead steel workers jammed into the hall to found the "Spirit of 1892" lodge.⁸⁹

This working-class restiveness also found an expression in the "new" labor-oriented Democratic Party as the Homestead municipal election of 1935 neared. That election, a prelude to the climactic showdown to come in 1937, was for three seats on the five member school board and seven seats on the 15-member borough council. It was the workers' first serious challenge to Republican rule at the local level, a challenge met by police terror and fraudulent voter rolls. Responding to pleas from Homestead workers, Lieutenant Governor Tom Kennedy sent in two detachments of the State Police on election eve to ensure a fair election. Even so, Election Day witnessed brutal street battles between workers and Cavanaugh's "Republican police" as the latter beat and attempted to intimidate Democratic candidates and voters. Nevertheless, the worker-Democrats won all three seats on the school board and four of the seven seats on the council. The tide was beginning to turn.

Workers were also becoming more restive in nearby Duquesne. On May 31, 1935, for example, the Ft. Dukane Lodge of the Amalgamated, led by William "Bill" Spang, attempted to strike in support of strikers in Canton, Ohio. Mayor Crawford ordered the police to suppress this effort by arresting and jailing Spang and the other lodge officers for parading without a permit. This, however, failed to intimidate Spang and the Ft. Dukane Lodge membership. Following the release of the local union officers from jail, a mass meeting of Duquesne steel workers called for a strike at all U.S. Steel facilities within two weeks, on June 16, 1935, to coincide with a projected United Mine Workers strike (which Union President John L. Lewis later cancelled).⁹⁰

But instances of police repression such as this reminded the Ft. Dukane membership of the necessity for political, as well as workplace, action. Thus,

the lodge passed a resolution calling for the formation of an independent, "anti-capitalist Labor Party."⁹¹ Already, in 1930, the coal miners of western Pennsylvania's Cambria County had actually launched such a Labor Party. (Some of their ephemera, including leaflets and convention delegate credentials, are in the possession of the author.) These actions indicate how strong the third party-labor party sentiment remained among Western Pennsylvania mine and steel workers only a short time before they began heavily voting Democratic. More commonly, however, Duquesne's rebellious steel workers were coming to see the Democratic Party as a more promising political vehicle. One of those who did so was Elmer J. Maloy, a World War I veteran and 45-year-old electrician in Duquesne's Carnegie-Illinois plant.

Maloy's father, an Irish-Catholic coal miner and member of the Knights of Labor, brought the family to Duquesne in 1911, at which time Maloy began working as a water boy in the mill. Over the next seven years, he worked his way up through cover boy in the soaking pits to craneman to electrical millwright before leaving to fight in Europe. Demobilized and back in Duquesne in time to be idled by the 1919 steel strike, he returned to the mill after the strike ended, working as a craneman on a stripper for the next 14 years.⁹²

In May, 1935, the same time the Ft. Dukane Lodge of the Amalgamated was agitating under the leadership of Bill Spang, elections were held for a rival "company union" called the Employee Representation Plan (ERP). The ERPs were responses to increasing worker militancy through which management hoped to domesticate discontent. Maloy had become popular with his workmates and was elected to head the Duquesne ERP almost without trying. As he described it, the workers themselves engineered his election and thrust him into prominence as their spokesman: "I wasn't even in the mill [on election day, but] I had told all these fellows, dinkmen, cranemen and the men who worked around the open hearth that I thought I'd run for employee representative, just to see if I could do something...They all got together, and when I came out I never saw such a thing....All the walks were painted with my check number and name, the water tower, clear up for 50 feet in the air, and down in the open hearth and all the buildings and everything....Well, I got twice as many votes as the two old representatives."⁹³

Shortly thereafter, Maloy was elected to head the association of ERPs in all the Carnegie-Illinois plants of the Pittsburgh District. He immediately began making trouble, demanding a wage increase, for instance, the very day after his election in Duquesne. Charging company domination of the ERPs, he led a revolt of the company unions, which resulted in his ouster by the plant management on the grounds that he was covertly helping to organize the nascent Steelworkers Organizing Committee — though he was not a member of SWOC at the time. Nevertheless, Maloy soon joined SWOC after it

was founded on June 16, 1936, and was made National Grievance Chairman and President of Duquesne's SWOC Lodge #1256 once it organized.⁹⁴

Police repression of organizing activity, such as that of the Ft. Dukane Lodge of the Amalgamated, was also the reason Louis DeSenna gave why Aliquippa's steel workers finally decided to organize politically. "If you're going to fight the company on a union basis," he said, "the cops in town are going to harass you to stop you from organizing. They'll raid your house and plant moonshine in your house, something of that nature. So, we had to go into politics."⁹⁵

Mike Zahorsky echoed DeSenna's feeling that if the workers of Aliquippa could not gain some measure of political power, they would never be able to carry out the activities necessary to organize the mill: "We found out that whenever the sheriff came down with his deputies and he brought 150 people with guns and all we had were clubs — why, we felt we had to get into those offices where we could control that."⁹⁶

Therefore, as in Homestead and Clairton the same year, steel workers in Aliquippa entered the 1935 municipal elections. In that first political campaign, three of their candidates won minor offices, which were then abolished in retaliation. Seeking to gain some power over the police, Angelo Volpe, Vice President of the local Amalgamated Lodge #200, ran for constable and received 3,293 votes to the winning Republican's 4,690 — the most ever received by a Democrat in Aliquippa.

A surge of Democratic registration accompanied this increase in Democratic votes. While Aliquippa's Democratic registration hovered between 50 and 100 throughout the 1920s, by early 1935 there were already 20,960 registered Democrats to 45,675 Republicans in Aliquippa's Beaver County, only a little more than a two-to-one edge for the Republicans.⁹⁷ Reminiscent of Maloy's rationale for the explosion of Democratic registrations in Duquesne, Zahorsky explained this mushrooming growth on the grounds that, "There were so many that they couldn't fire everyone."⁹⁸

This political groundswell began to undermine the ruling powers. Indeed, even as early as 1934, political leverage had begun to crack open Aliquippa. In his chapter on the unionization campaign in Aliquippa, Robert R.R. Brooks recreates a conversation between Joseph Timko and SWOC Regional Director Clint Golden on June 18, 1936, two days after SWOC had been created by John L. Lewis' fiat.⁹⁹ Timko, a veteran UMW organizer in Harlan County, Kentucky, had just been brought to Pittsburgh to become Sub-Regional Director for the Beaver Valley, which included Aliquippa, Ambridge, and Midland. Golden gave Timko a capsule history of Aliquippa before sending him in.

Aliquippa and Midland had not joined in the 1919 strike because of the tight control the corporations and their Republican allies had over the towns.

"Aliquippa," in particular, said Golden, "is a dark town. Even Bill Foster's organizers couldn't get near it back in 1919. Company and city police barred the roads and watched the railroad station. When strangers couldn't give a good account of themselves, they were hustled to jail overnight and then out of town." On October 4, 1934, Republican Governor Gifford Pinchot, a relative progressive, had sent in the state police after J. & L. railroaded union organizer George Isasky into an insane asylum. Golden remembered that the state police, "Opened up the town and on Oct. 14, Cornelia Bryce Pinchot spoke at the first labor meeting the town had ever seen. There were more than four thousand there. Men began to sign union cards [to join the Amalgamated] right and left and in a month or so there were over three thousand members."

Later SWOC President Philip Murray was himself more explicit and more dramatic in describing the self-organization of Aliquippa steelworkers in 1934. Speaking to the October, 1935 AFL annual convention in Atlantic City in favor of the resolution calling for industrial unionism, Murray recalled that, "I was invited to a meeting in the town of Aliquippa eighteen months ago, at the great plant of the Jones & Laughlin Steel Company, where some 8,000 men are employed.¹⁰⁰ The workers employed in that plant, *of their own volition* [emphasis added], of their own motion, without an organizer attending the meeting in its initial stages, called meetings....And those workers operating under their own motion, without any assistance from any international union, without any assistance from the American Federation of Labor, at that time organized 6,500 of the 8,000 workers at the Aliquippa plant into an independent union."¹⁰¹

But, it seems that the pace of unionization, even the ability to sustain union gains, ebbed and flowed with available political support. The state police could not remain as a permanent occupation force and, when they left, the *status quo ante* reasserted itself: "The company kept right at it with discharges, discrimination, evictions, and so on," Golden asserted. "The union began to melt away and continued to drop off even after charges were brought under the National Labor Relations Act."

Then Golden sent Timko on his way. He advised Timko to set the SWOC office up in neighboring Ambridge, across the Ohio River, because Philip J. Caul, the Democratic burgess there, would protect him. Timko did so. When he held his first SWOC organizational meeting in Aliquippa itself, it was in the local Democratic Party headquarters — which the steel workers of Aliquippa had already taken over with Angelo Volpe serving as President. During the late summer of 1936 Timko launched the SWOC organizational campaign in Aliquippa with mass outdoor meetings held in vacant lots. That these initial SWOC meetings were possible at all was because they had some political clout on their side. As he had done in Homestead in 1935, Lieutenant Governor

and UMW Secretary-Treasurer Tom Kennedy sent state troopers to stand guard over them.¹⁰²

In this, Kennedy was being true to his word. At a mass meeting of 2,000-4,000 workers in Homestead on July 5, 1936 — the anniversary of the battle between the Homestead strikers of 1892 and a 300-man Pinkerton army — Kennedy had pledged state police protection and financial aid in case of a strike. "If the steel magnates throw people out in the streets as a result of organization activities...they will be entitled to relief," he said. Further, he assured the workers that the National Guard or the state police would not be called in to break their strikes, as had happened in 1892 and 1919. "Governor Earle," he told them, "as commander-in-chief of the military and police organizations of the state, will see that workers get their constitutional rights....the captains of steel can't get away with the stuff they got away with before. The government of the United States is now in Washington, not New York, and the government of Pennsylvania is now in Harrisburg, not Pittsburgh."¹⁰³

But it was still up to the workers of Steeltown to take control of their government. As early as 1907, John Fitch had felt that, "The Pittsburgh steel workers are very nearly ready for a political movement. They are inwardly seething with discontent....The workingmen of Pittsburgh or any other American community could not be roused over night to the point of serious, premeditated, revolutionary violence....Revolutions, however, do not necessarily involve violence. And through either the trade union or the political movement...there is bound to be a revolution ere long that shall have as its goal the restoration of democracy to the steel workers."¹⁰⁴

Revolutionary Climax

In early 1937, Elmer Maloy made an apparently independent decision to run for Mayor of Duquesne. The reason he gave was the same as that given by the union activists elsewhere. "I was mad at Jim Crawford and the Chief of Police," he remembered. "I wanted to get him out of office and I wanted to control the city; the police force especially."¹⁰⁵

The catalyst seems to have been the denial by Crawford and the Police Chief of Maloy's request for a permit to hold a union meeting. Maloy decided to hold the meeting anyway and rented the Croatian Hall for \$30. But, he said, "Then the bank [of which Crawford was president] put the screws on the Croatian Hall, because they had a mortgage on the place. They told them they were going to foreclose the mortgage unless they withdrew their rental of the hall to me....And then I had gone to every hall that there was in the place and some of them told me, 'We're being subsidized by the company, paying so much rent a month to not rent the hall to you, or any labor organizations.' Well, I got sort of peeved about this, so I said, 'Damn it. I know what I'll do.

I'll run for Mayor....Then I know that we can hold a meeting, and the first meeting we're going to hold, we'll hold right up in the City Council chambers!"¹⁰⁶

This decision on Maloy's part was not part of any strategy devised by the top SWOC leadership. Nor did the national leadership even seem to care about it. When asked if John L. Lewis or Phil Murray endorsed him or helped in any way, Maloy emphatically denied their involvement. "They didn't endorse us," he said, "either me or Mullen [in Clairton]. They didn't put a dime into the campaign. They had absolutely nothing to do with it....I understood that Mullen received a very small sum of money...like \$300 or \$400, you know, something that couldn't be used very well in a political campaign. But I received absolutely nothing."¹⁰⁷

Nor did what passed for the local Democratic Party welcome Maloy's candidacy. The "old" Democrats endorsed another candidate for the primary election. To overcome his lack of money and official endorsement, Maloy relied upon the same steel workers who had elected him president of the local ERP: "I figured that with the vote I had in the open hearths alone I had a nucleus. There were about 700 guys, not counting their wives, enough to swing the primary....At the time I ran, there were a good thousand union members, mostly foreigners [i.e., ethnics]."¹⁰⁸

While Maloy's decision to run was his alone — just as his decision to run for ERP representative was his alone — once made it seemed to unleash a torrent of steel worker energy. Workers swarmed to Maloy's impoverished campaign and made his campaign their own. "All of these people that worked for us," he recalled, "were a whole indiscriminate group of Croatians, Serbians, Hungarians, and colored....They were real workers. Nobody could bribe them. They didn't get any pay. They didn't *want* any pay. They even contributed money, you know, to run the campaign...They lost work, they laid off, they went to every meeting, they campaigned door-to-door, they did the most efficient job. In fact, I was told later by John Kane, the County Commissioner, that it was the most efficient political organization he had ever seen."¹⁰⁹ Borne on the backs of these workers, Maloy smashed the candidate of the "old" Democrats in the primary. Now Maloy and his "indiscriminate group" of ethnic and colored steel workers *were* the Democratic Party in Duquesne.

Meanwhile, Mayor Crawford had decided to step down after 16 years in office and anointed as his successor in the Republican primary R.W. Schriber, owner of the Duquesne Bus Company and the town's largest shipping garage. At the same time, the "old" Democrats who had been shoved aside in the primary by the steel worker campaign refused to accept Maloy as their candidate. "The local Democrats [the WASP Democrats who supported Davis in the 1924 presidential race]," said one report, "virtually deserted their candidate and worked for the election of the Republican candidate."¹¹⁰

Card from the
author's
collection.

ELECT ROOSEVELT DEMOCRATS



ELMER J. MALOY

Democratic Candidate For

MAYOR

Your Support Will Be Appreciated



"Pull Top Lever"

A Class Conscious Democrat: Poll card for steelworker Elmer J. Maloy from his successful 1937 campaign for mayor of Duquesne. Steelworkers called themselves "Roosevelt Democrats" to distinguish themselves from old-line Democrats, from whom they wrested control of the party in that year's primary. Phrases such as this, along with "Roosevelt Democracy," also used on their campaign literature that year, were code words denoting a more class conscious, egalitarian political orientation on the part of the Democrats so-identified.

Maloy ignored that "official" Republican candidate and campaigned against Crawford himself, who remained the power behind the throne. Maloy attacked Crawford for arranging to have his mid-town mansion, surrounded by a quarter-mile stone wall, assessed as a farm. He lashed Crawford for keeping Duquesne "in chronic bankruptcy since 1917 through such maneuvers as placing \$300,000 of the city's funds in his own bank at no interest, then lending the city \$1,500,000 at 6%."¹¹¹ He chastised Crawford for ignoring the material infrastructure of the city and for refusing to accept any of the New Deal's relief programs for Duquesne's needy. But most of all he challenged Crawford's anti-union stance which prevented union organizers from exercising their basic civil liberties of free speech, free association, and freedom from coercion.

An indication of the hope and enthusiasm ignited by his campaign may be gleaned from an account of Democratic Governor George Earle's visit to Duquesne to stump for Maloy and urge the defeat of local Republicans "hostile to Roosevelt's program."¹¹² Over 1,500 "wildly cheering Duquesne voters jammed the city high school auditorium and grounds" to hear Maloy, Earle, Pat Fagin, President of District 5 (Pittsburgh region) of the United Mine Workers (who was later himself elected to the Pittsburgh City Council), Democratic Congressman Henry Ellenbogen, and others blast the Crawford administration. The auditorium had been jammed beyond capacity with not even packed standing room left fully an hour and a half before the arrival of the speakers. For the benefit of the "hundreds who were not able to get even standing room," a public address system was hastily erected so that the speeches could be broadcast to those milling around outside the building.

A caravan of "blaring bands" and honking cars escorted Elmer Maloy and the other dignitaries up to the auditorium entrance where they received a hero's welcome as they made their triumphal way through the frantically cheering throng. Once inside, Maloy was introduced by Congressman Ellenbogen as, "a man risen from the ranks of labor and one who knows its problems." Maloy then "assailed the present city administration, charging it with being reactionary and always hostile to labor." He called for a "liberalization of Duquesne" because, "We've been called the most reactionary city in the United States, simply because of the domination of the Republicans."

Maloy's candidacy lit a match in a gas-filled room and the resulting explosion swept out Crawford and his cronies. Maloy carried the working class neighborhoods in a convincing demonstration of the power of the "new" Democratic vote. "Oh, hell," remembered Maloy, "they went solid....My brother [who was Chairman of the Democratic City Committee] had been down in the first ward (on election day) where all these Croatsians, Hungarians, Serbs, and all the colored lived (and knew how they'd voted). When the vote came in, I won without any problem at all."¹¹³ The entire "new" Democratic slate, with the single exception of the office of City Controller, also won with no problem at all.

In explaining Aliquippa labor's 1937 re-entry into politics (labor had already contested the 1935 municipal elections, winning some victories), Manuel Wood, who had replaced Timko by then as the top SWOC organizer in town, explained that it was a necessary first step toward unionization. In an August 8, 1937 speech to J. & L. workers at Aliquippa's Polish Hall he said, "The present Republican administration has sided with employers against labor again and again, using its police powers to harass and oppress union men and terrorize the town in an effort to prevent the union from getting a foothold here...It has always been an enemy of the people, and we must throw it out of office."¹¹⁴

The steel workers of Aliquippa first proceeded to do this by challenging the "old" Democrats in the September Democratic primary. They had already taken over the party organization, known as the Democratic Social Club, with their 1935 constable candidate, Angelo Volpe, as president. This steel worker-dominated Democratic Social Club named a full primary slate of candidates for all offices, headed by George Keifer, a pro-union druggist, as their burgess candidate. Keifer's main platform promise was, "We will have but one Chief of Police and one Police Force. Their duties will be to police the town of Aliquippa, keep law and order and meddle with nothing else...The Police Department will be under the direct supervision of the Burgess with the approval of Council. The entire Police Force will take orders from nobody else [such as J. & L.]"¹¹⁵

Six of the ten "new" labor-Democratic candidates running with Keifer were union members. They included Council candidate Peter P. Haubner, a grievance committeeman for the tin mill and a member of the Socialist Party; council candidate Michael O'Connor, member of the Railroad Brotherhood; auditor candidate Michael J. Wallace, a grievance committeeman for the welded tube mill; school director candidate Harrison Kirkwood, hot mill shop steward; and School Director candidate Paul Luger, an officer in the local meat cutters' union. Even the precinct level candidates included members of labor unions for the offices of judge and inspector of elections in the various wards.

Leading the "new" Democratic slate of City Council candidates was Paul Normile, who had replaced Volpe as President of Aliquippa's SWOC lodge. Normile pledged to bring in New Deal programs such as the WPA and PWA, which the current "Republican rule" refused to do. But above all else was the pledge to do something about the police. First and foremost, the "importation" of outsiders to staff the Aliquippa police force had to end. Of 35 police officers, only three lived in Aliquippa, seeming to guarantee a hostility on the part of the "occupation force" towards Aliquippa workers. "We pledge ourselves," swore Normile, "that in the selection of police officers, we will first select local residents."¹¹⁶

The message of independence was also repeated by the "new" Democratic candidates for justices of the peace. Speaking to a rally of Aliquippa steel workers at the Serbian Hall on September 12, just before the primary, R.J. McLanahan "promised that in his capacity as Justice of the Peace he would accept orders from no one," while Ivor L. Jones "promised to uphold the American rights of Democracy." The workers of Aliquippa wanted these rights. In the September 14 primary, their slate of "True Roosevelt Democrats" trounced the "old" Democrats to become the official standard bearers of the party, with Keifer defeating his "old" Democratic opponent five to one. The steel workers and their leaders were now the Democratic Party in Aliquippa.

Next they attacked the Republican-Corporation hegemony. There was a spirit of euphoria in the air. It seemed the entire population of Aliquippa was united in opposition to an alien occupation army. All things — even Democracy — seemed possible. "A Colored Voter" reflected the spirit of the movement in a letter written to *The Union Press* shortly before the election. In words reminiscent of the Declaration of Independence, this "Colored Voter" said:

Our citizens have long realized that *there has come into this community a feeling that every man and woman has certain inalienable rights* and he who surrenders them is less than a man....Our citizens are determined to test whether the principles of democracy shall be applied in Aliquippa or whether the selfish interest of a favored few political bosses shall continue to triumph against the will of our citizens....

In this election every right and privilege that our citizens yearned for will be at stake. This is simply the will of an oppressed and aroused citizenry bent upon the execution of those national symbols which are embodied in the articles of our Constitutional guarantee....During their many years of official tyranny imposed upon our citizens their long train of abuses pursued invariably an objective designed to reduce us to absolute serfdom. Now it is our right and our duty to throw off the yoke of Republicanism.¹¹⁷

These sentiments seemed to be widespread, for the "new" labor-Democrats dominated the November elections, electing Keifer burgess and winning all but one council seat. It was the first political defeat for the Republican-corporation alliance in Aliquippa's history.

Blue Collar Democracy

Elmer Maloy, the new Mayor of Duquesne, immediately promised a "New Deal for Duquesne." "The banks have made enough off of Duquesne," he declared. "That will end." There had never been a single WPA project in Duquesne. "Well, that is something we will have," he vowed.¹¹⁸ A month later, both Maloy and John Mullen, the new Clairton Mayor, were in Washington, D.C. to testify before Congress about labor conditions. A Washington newspaper noted that, "The fact that these two CIO organizers became mayors last month was pointed to as evidence in itself of some kind of a New Deal in their communities."¹¹⁹

The "New Deal" which Maloy instituted in Duquesne was, first and foremost, a labor-oriented New Deal, a "Blue Collar Democracy." True to his promise, SWOC President Elmer Maloy held the first post-election meeting of the local SWOC lodge in the Duquesne City Council chambers at the invitation of Mayor Elmer Maloy. Virtually his first official act was to appoint his brother Bill, already the Chairman of Duquesne's Democratic City Committee and a 20-year veteran of the police force, as the new Chief of Police. His next act was to disarm the company's private police force, the notorious Coal and Iron Police. Maloy recalled the importance of this act: "In Allegheny County, they used to deputize all the mill police...when there was labor trouble, so you didn't have a chance, see? When I became mayor, I took away all their guns, made them leave them in the plant. They weren't allowed to go out of the plant without a gun permit. The only one who could give it to them was me...and I just refused to permit them to have a gun."¹²⁰

As far as the SWOC organizing efforts were concerned, disarming the company police made all the difference in the world. One magazine featured a photo, for instance, of a SWOC member handing out leaflets at the plant gates in Duquesne and noted in the caption, "Today, leaflets can be distributed without restriction at factory gates. Before Mayor Maloy's time, this was unheard of."¹²¹ Within two weeks of taking office, Mayor Maloy had facili-

tated the enrollment of all city employees into the CIO's State, County, and Municipal Workers of America and reduced the Fire Department from a 72- to a 40-hour work week.¹²² He then set up a relief office in the SWOC hall and began interviewing applicants personally. Mayor Crawford had not allowed federal relief programs to be implemented in Duquesne, so there was a large reservoir of need. Over 1,000 were quickly entered into the newly established relief rolls. Maloy also welcomed the WPA to Duquesne for the first time. Using WPA funds, Maloy built and repaired roads, constructed a "modern red-brick school house," and instituted WPA work projects, which garnered wide support. As Ben Kirschbaum, a "credit jeweler," said, "I'm for the mayor on principle. He is for progressive things like housing and sewing projects."¹²³

These initiatives were accomplished without raising taxes or going into debt. "Economy in administration is a Maloy slogan," reported one source, and it seemed to be true. Working with Dominic Genito, "Special Fireman" in charge of public improvements, Maloy installed a traffic light system, police and fire boxes, and laid new cables for the city's power lines at nominal cost. "Dominic and Mayor Maloy made most improvements out of scrap materials from mills," and the scrap pipe for the traffic light stands cost \$20 for the entire city.¹²⁴ Maloy's frugality was coupled with new sources of revenue. For instance, the city's account was transferred out of Crawford's bank and to a bank which began paying interest on the deposits. Also, within two weeks of taking office, Maloy had reduced the annual municipal budget by \$6,000 when he "sliced the salaries of higher ups."¹²⁵

Duquesne's "Blue Collar Democracy" also meant a New Deal for the "colored," who were part of Maloy's "new" Democratic coalition. Maloy made a point of improving municipal services for "below the tracks" black neighborhoods. But the political revolution in Steeltown also brought great changes for blacks *as* blacks. It was in 1938, for example, after the "new" Democratic administrations came into office, that Jim Crow policies started to topple in Homestead, Clairton, and throughout Steeltown.

The change for blacks had already begun after the Democrats gained control of the State House and elected George Earle governor in 1934. One of the few Democratic accomplishments of the years before the true beginning of the Little New Deal in 1936 was the revision of the Pennsylvania Civil Rights Act of 1887, which greatly aided the black citizens of Pennsylvania. On September 1, 1935, the Act was amended to grant all people "within the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities and privileges of places of public accommodation, resort or amusement." Actions such as this, amid the general atmosphere of freedom and equality on the march, greatly emboldened the black community. Before 1935, few civil rights cases were ever heard in Allegheny County courts. After the revision of the law, civil rights cases reached the Allegheny County courts

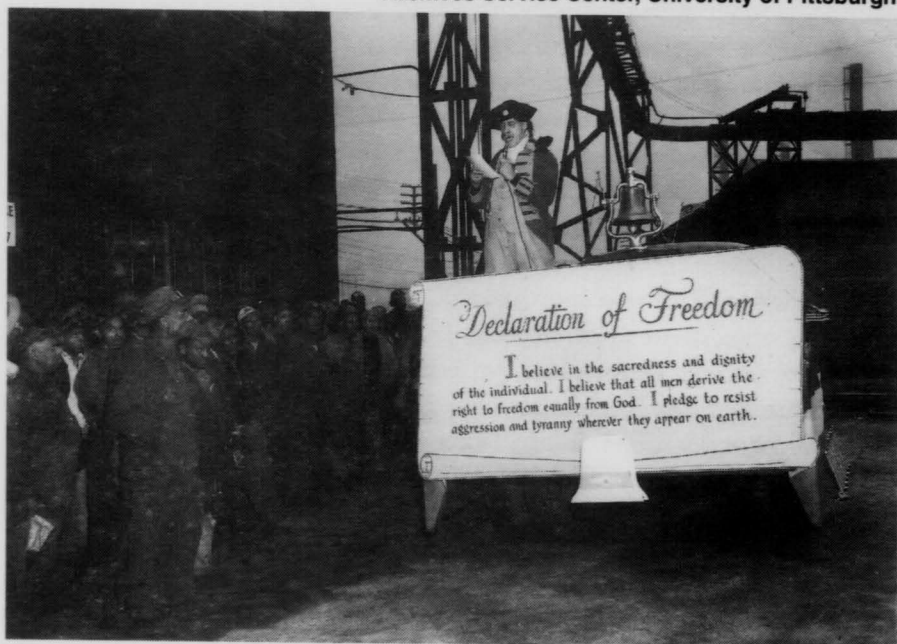
virtually every year, with 27 cases being tried between 1938 and 1949, while many more were settled before ever reaching court.¹²⁶

But it was in 1937 in Pittsburgh and 1938 in Steeltown, after the new SWOC administrations came into office, that Jim Crow policies really started to fall. In Pittsburgh proper, black teachers in 1937 for the first time successfully integrated the public school teaching staff. In John Mullen's Clairton, 3,000 black residents threatened to swim in the city's whites-only swimming pool when it opened for the summer of 1939, quickly forcing its desegregation.¹²⁷

Meanwhile, black residents of Homestead recall that blacks could not eat inside the "white" department stores and restaurants during the Thirties. They had to buy their ice cream cones, for instance, and eat them outside. Likewise, the Leona Theater, Homestead's principal picture palace — which, indeed, was the major theater for the entire Mon Valley — required blacks to sit in the balcony, segregated from the white audience on the main floor. This changed, with relatively little resistance, in 1938 after SWOC controlled Homestead's City Hall. A sit-in movement started. Dee Filipe, whose parents refused to let her participate in the movement because of her youth, remembers that her friends went and sat in the white section on the main floor of the Leona Theater. When they refused to move, the police hauled them off to jail. However, in the wake of this single sit-in, the Leona changed its policy of racial segregation — a change which was followed soon afterwards by the department and drug stores of Homestead. Evelyn Brooks was another black woman who remembers sitting upstairs in the Leona's segregated balcony. She used the word, "revolution," to describe what happened to Homestead race relations at that time.¹²⁸ This proto-Civil Rights Movement continued in the region into the 1940s. It was in the 1940s, for instance, that K. Leroy Irvis, then an Urban League staff member, later a long-time State Representative from Pittsburgh, led the picket lines at department stores in downtown Pittsburgh which resulted in the hiring of black salesclerks — "the first such incident in the nation."¹²⁹

Perhaps the relative ease with which the public facilities of SWOC-controlled Steeltown were desegregated in 1937, 1938, 1939 and the 1940s — 15 and more years before the Civil Rights Movement — has obscured the significance of the changes in attitudes and values which took place in Steeltown at this time. The belief that "all men are created equal" is an expansionist doctrine which, set in motion, doesn't stop at the color line, as the earlier cited "Declaration of Independence" letter by an Aliquippa "Colored Voter" attests. "Colored Voters" saw the drive by rank and file "foreign" steelworkers into the Democratic Party and into political office in a crusade for liberty and justice and freedom of speech as their crusade, as well.

Photo courtesy of William J. Gaughan Collection,
Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.



The Ideology of Revolt: Black steelworkers and voters were an essential part of the “colored-ethnic” class-based coalition which brought “Blue Collar Democracy” to Aliquippa, Clairton, Duquesne, Homestead, and other Steel Valley mill towns. In the 1937 elections, one Aliquippa “Colored Voter” explicitly justified the worker revolt by reference to the Declaration of Independence’s proclamation of the “inalienable rights” of all: “This is simply the will of an oppressed and aroused citizenry bent upon the execution of those national symbols which are embodied in the articles of our Constitutional guarantee,” he said. Such symbols long remained potent and unleashed unanticipated yearnings for racial, as well as class, equality. Here a white “patriot” dressed in Colonial costume reads a proclamation to an all-black crowd of Homestead steelworkers from a float parked at the entrance to the Homestead mill. The sign on the float declares, “I believe that all men derive the right to freedom equally from God.” The photo was taken in 1950 and such black steelworkers would soon be moving beyond a sublimation of their racial interest within a white-dominated class-based coalition to a more explicit demand for black equality based upon that very belief.

Duquesne’s “Blue Collar Democracy” proved popular. Maloy was pressured to run for a second four-year term in 1941, even though he felt he’d accomplished everything he set out to do. “I really didn’t want to run a second time,” he said. “I never wanted the mayor’s job. All I wanted to do in the first place was to take the place over. The union was strong enough now, so I didn’t give a damn.” Nevertheless, he allowed himself to be acclaimed as the Democratic candidate, although “I was too busy [with union business] to be bothered with campaigning.”¹³⁰

Maloy didn’t need to. Although he recalled that he was hardly in town during the campaign, others — the same ones who had carried him to victory on their backs the first time — did it for him. Maloy returned to the mayor’s

seat for another four years entirely, complained *The Duquesne Times*, because he had an "army" of "former residents of below the tracks," ethnic and colored "Roosevelt followers" who believed "the Democratic Party is on a level with Moses."¹³¹ Blue Collar Democracy in Duquesne, it seemed, had a life of its own, entirely independent of Maloy.

Although not all the city council seats in Aliquippa had been up for election in 1937, and so the Republicans still retained a majority on the council, never again would Aliquippa be run as a company town. When the new municipal government was sworn in on January 3, 1938, the new labor-Democratic city councillors and burgess introduced a motion to fire six of the most vicious policemen. The resulting battle over control of the police force grew into what *The Aliquippa Gazette* termed a "Burgess-Council War,"¹³² the eventual culmination of which was neither a complete purge of the police nor a return to the *status quo ante* of unrestrained police terror. The political atmosphere of the town had been irrevocably altered: "The use of repressive political force in the company's interest abated. Incidents of police use or denied meeting permits to stifle union activity became less common."¹³³

Blue Collar Democracy in Aliquippa was a force even Republican Party boss J.A.C. Ruffner felt that, at long last, he must come to terms with. In a 1939 anniversary issue of Ruffner's previously anti-SWOC *Aliquippa Gazette*, the paper carried a full-page article on SWOC written by the local lodge recording secretary and "No hint of antiunionism appeared in the issue."¹³⁴ Indeed, in order to survive in Aliquippa's transformed political environment, even the Republicans had to become pro-union. In the 1941 mayoralty election, Republican candidate Charles O'Laughlin, former head of J. & L.'s police, did his best to out-SWOC the "new" Democratic leaders. Speaking at a SWOC-sponsored rally of J. & L. workers, he told them to, "spread the philosophy of 100% unionism....go to...meetings, pay your dues, follow your leadership, and fight for your rights and against wrong." His statements electrified his audience. "This," said the local newspaper, "represented a complete reversal in Republican tactics in handling the borough's 10-20,000 workers."¹³⁵

But Blue Collar Democracy meant more than the coming of the union. It meant, also, that the Bill of Rights, that democracy itself, had come to Western Pennsylvania. Robert Brooks asked an Aliquippa steel worker and SWOC leader what he thought the labor movement's greatest contribution had been. "[T]o be able to walk down the main street of Aliquippa," he answered, "[and] talk to anyone you want about anything you like, and feel that you are a citizen."¹³⁶

The story of Steeltown's Blue Collar Democracy also reveals how the New Deal was made possible, for Democratic national dominance was built by rank and file, ethnic, blue collar workers in towns like Aliquippa, Clairton, Duquesne, and Homestead. These workers were the ones who, on their own,

hammered home the New Deal political realignment, providing the bedrock upon which pro-working class policies at the national level were supported. Further, it clearly reveals the long-disputed nature of the New Deal itself.

The Nature of the New Deal

The New Deal was a fundamental departure from the truly feudalistic and hierarchical America which existed before. To make such a claim for the New Deal Era is to be at odds with two widely accepted interpretations of what the New Deal was all about. Some historians argue that what happened in the thirties and forties was the betrayal, co-optation, and suppression of a radical workers' movement by triumphant "corporate liberalism," that the grass roots working class political mobilization of the era brought only minor "short-lived gains."¹³⁷ Others insist that these were "Not so 'Turbulent Years'" because the reputed working class radicalism was a figment of romantic Leftist imaginations.¹³⁸ The New Deal, they say, was essentially a continuation of the old tradition of American liberalism, Progressivism triumphant.

I support another interpretation of the New Deal Era: a genuinely radical *departure* from earlier Progressivism more than it was a continuation such Progressivism; and more of a triumph for workers than it was for corporations. The workers won much — though not all — of what many of them actually wanted. And what they wanted was very different from liberal Progressivism. What they *wanted* was a "blue collar democracy" which valued them as "Americans" even if they came from Southern or Eastern Europe; which guaranteed them civil liberty and political power; and which, yes, *also* offered them economic security and advancement. Coming out of a recent past of widespread and frequent unemployment, of vast disparities of wealth, of political subservience and economic serfdom, these were indeed radical accomplishments.

Radicalism Betrayed and Subdued

Although the class polarization of New Deal Era politics remained high even into the early 1960s, nevertheless the mobilized working class began to play less of a decisive role as the 1930s receded further into the past and by the 1970s and 1980s overt class politics disappeared from the nation's political agenda. What happened?

Some say the radicalized working class was betrayed. Mike Davis is representative of these. There were several culprits, he says: Internal divisions among the workers; "accepting the discipline of the Cold War mobilization;" "the gradual bureaucratization of the new industrial unions;" and a "Barren Marriage" to the Democratic Party resulting from a "New Deal capture of the labor movement..." Thus, "by relying on backroom lobbies and campaign support for the Democrats...the CIO leadership willingly conceded the last

vestiges of its political independence and demobilized the rank-and-file militancy..." For this reason, the "forty years of marriage between labor and the Democrats have produced a politically dispirited and alienated working class."¹³⁹

Others have also cited, for example, the Cold War as a contributor to the demise of New Deal militancy. The international Cold War against Communism was also a domestic "Cold War against Labor," as the class politics of the time were perceived to be tinged with Communism. This resulted in a coerced yet nevertheless self-imposed post-war purge of Communists and other radical leaders from the CIO, and organized labor in general. In 1949 the militant Pacific Coast-based International Longshoreman and Warehouseman Union, led by ex-Wobbly Harry Bridges, was expelled from the CIO when it refused to purge itself of Communist officials. The United Electrical Workers (UE) was also expelled for similar reasons and faced workplace incursions from the rival International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, backed by the labor movement itself in an effort to destroy UE. With the most "class conscious" element of its leadership decimated, it is claimed, the organized working class was less able to resist the cultural and political impact of a 45-year-long Cold War against Communism. Combined with such things as a union bureaucracy which stifled shop floor activism, argues Nelson Lichtenstein, the Cold War generated "a passive and atomized consciousness among large sections of the industrial working class."¹⁴⁰

At the same time, there were dramatic changes in industrial relations which contributed to working class political demobilization. In a sense, a New Deal "Devil's Bargain" had been struck between labor and management in which workers and their unions consciously and voluntarily traded a large measure of class militancy for an equally large slice of the American Pie. In exchange for job security, higher wages, and increased employee benefits, organized labor abandoned its claim to share in management decisions. Confrontation over anything other than "bread and butter" issues was deemed illegitimate by both sides. This voluntary dismissal of "class conflict" helped create a political culture of social passivity and political acquiescence among blue collar workers and their unions, encouraging them to feel they shared common interests with management and blurring class identities.¹⁴¹ The potentially revolutionary New Deal thus ended in merely bolstering corporations and the capitalist state.¹⁴²

The Wagner Act and the Social Security Act are cited by some as prime examples of how the revolutionary potential of the workers was subdued, ending in the further entrenchment of capitalism. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, for instance, claim that the "guaranteeing of a minimum standard of subsistence" through such measures as unemployment compensation, Social Security, and work relief by the Roosevelt administration was done reluctantly and minimally and only in response to disruptive political actions

on the part of workers and the poor. Far from being seen as a "right" by the New Dealers, the public welfare system was viewed as reluctant charity serving capitalist-oriented social control functions. Once these functions had been performed, once workers and the poor had been pacified and "reintegrated" into capitalist society, the system was dismantled as much as possible.¹⁴³ This political reintegration and subordination of the masses worked. The election of 1936 was a landslide for the New Deal. "The years of discontent and disaffection, of protest and possibility, were over; the people had lined up behind the New Deal. What trouble and turbulence persisted were not sufficient to rock the New Deal or to alter its course."¹⁴⁴

Piven and Cloward are part of a neo-Marxist tradition which challenges what has been called "corporate liberalism," a political orientation, it is claimed, which has dominated much of American politics in the twentieth century. This is also the view of Barton Bernstein. In his pioneering essay, Bernstein argued that there was no beneficent, humane liberalism at work in the New Deal. Roosevelt and his disciples were "doctrinaires of the center" who had no desire to redistribute political or economic power. Rather, they were engaged in a self-consciously deliberate and successful rescue of large-scale corporate capitalism. True, the people on the bottom benefited somewhat from the backwash of this bailout of the capitalists, but we must not magnify their crumbs. "In moving to social security, guarantees of collective bargaining, utility regulation, and progressive taxation, the government did advance the nation toward greater liberalism, but the shift was exaggerated and most of the measures accomplished far less than either friends or foes suggested."¹⁴⁵ Additionally, "Not only was the extension of representation to new groups less than full-fledged partnership, but the New Deal neglected many Americans — sharecroppers, tenant farmers, migratory workers and farm laborers, slum dwellers, unskilled workers, and the unemployed Negroes. They were left outside the new order...

"Yet, by the power of rhetoric and through the appeals of political organization, the Roosevelt government managed to win or retain the allegiance of these peoples. Perhaps this is one of the crueller ironies of liberal politics, that the marginal men trapped in hopelessness were seduced by rhetoric, by the style and movement, by the symbolism of efforts seldom reaching beyond words."¹⁴⁶ Thus, the New Deal was a great charade, doling out crumbs, style, and rhetoric, without fundamentally altering the political landscape for most people or addressing their aspirations.

To a large measure, Paul K. Conkin agrees with this assessment.¹⁴⁷ He adds, however, that much more than a dramatic corporate rescue effort was accomplished by the New Deal. For instance, there was not a return to the rampant but unstable corporate capitalism of pre-1929. Rather, while tossing a few plums in the direction of the populace, Roosevelt and his followers

created a "welfare state for business" and enabled American capitalism to emerge from the Depression stronger, healthier, wealthier than could have been imagined. "After the New Deal innovations, entrepreneurs and major producers were increasingly more secure in their property, more certain of high profits, less vulnerable to economic cycles, and more heavily subsidized and more extensively regulated by the federal government, while welfare policies guaranteed at least a minimum of subsistence for those excluded from, or those unable to compete effectively for, the benefits of a capitalist system."¹⁴⁸

One major problem with these neo-Marxist critiques of "corporate liberalism" is that they demand the existence of a Machiavellian cabal of capitalist manipulators to pull the whole charade off. But, as Theda Skocpol points out, this interpretation fails to fit the facts of the major New Deal reforms efforts at all. True, corporate capitalism was not seriously challenged during the New Deal, either by Roosevelt or by any other dissident forces. But important and serious changes did take place, principally the transformation of the federal government from "a mildly interventionist, business-dominated regime into an active 'broker state' that incorporated commercial farmers and organized labor into processes of political bargaining at the national level."¹⁴⁹

Skocpol also investigates the "political functionalism" of Nicos Poulantzas, who argues that an "autonomous state" automatically benefits the capitalist class and operates to the detriment of the working class. This is so because the state is basically a vehicle of system maintenance and capitalism is the system being maintained. Therefore, there is no need for capitalists to be class-conscious and act in their own best interests. The state will do it for them.¹⁵⁰

The problem with this argument is that, before the New Deal, there really was no autonomous federal bureaucracy to act in the interests of the capitalist class. The government was essentially a "state of courts and parties," as Stephen Skowronek has phrased it, and was physically incapable of intervening systematically in the economy to regulate it for capitalism. Indeed, this was the very reason so many of the members of the NIRA regulatory bodies were drawn from the business world. The state had no personnel of its own to staff such vast watchdog agencies.

Progressivism Triumphant

Thus, the coming of the New Deal represented a dramatic change from the past in that it created a new governmental apparatus which was an active "broker state" between labor and business — while nevertheless, argued an entirely different group of historians, cementing the final triumph of the best elements of that same past. These historians, exemplified by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in his "Age of Roosevelt" series, argued that the New Deal was a dramatic change from the conservative Republican "normalcy" of the past. The nature of that change, however, was to bring about the triumph of the

Progressive liberal tradition of that same past. In the very first paragraph of his first book in the series, Schlesinger stated that, "The nation, in responding to the bitter challenges of depression and war, summoned up the resources, moral and intellectual, of an earlier progressivism, an earlier war effort, and a decade of business leadership. Roosevelt's administration must be understood against this background of a generation's ideas, hopes, and experience."¹⁵¹

William E. Leuchtenburg also viewed the New Deal as a continuation of Progressivism. Leuchtenburg is typical of this school in describing the accomplishments of Roosevelt's New Deal as the work of "Heirs of the Enlightenment [who] felt themselves part of a broadly humanistic movement to make man's life on earth more tolerable, a movement that might someday even achieve a co-operative commonwealth." The Enlightened co-operative commonwealth wasn't reached, there was only a "halfway revolution." Nevertheless, "The New Deal achieved a more just society by recognizing groups which had been largely unrepresented."¹⁵² People came to see the federal government for the first time as their friend and protector, a cruel and exploitative industrial system was made more humane, and, most importantly, people who had been left out realized that the benefits of the society were their inalienable heritage. Presenting an entirely opposite interpretation of New Deal programs from Piven and Cloward, he argues that, "The New Deal assumed the responsibility for guaranteeing every American a minimum standard of subsistence...The Roosevelt administration gave such assistance not as a matter of charity but of right. This system of social rights was written into the Social Security Act."¹⁵³

More recently, it seems that Alan Brinkley has also put forth this interpretation in his discussion of the end of New Deal liberalism. For Brinkley, as with Schlesinger and Leuchtenburg, New Deal achievements were brought about from above by progressive liberal elites, not by ordinary voters, workers, and minorities who "became part of the deliberations from time to time, but they rarely shaped the tone or the tenor of the conversation decisively."¹⁵⁴

New Deal Democrats were thus elite "heirs of the Enlightenment" using immigrant votes to implement old-style Progressivism. In the sense that it was the final triumph of Progressivism, many of these historians claim that the New Deal was America's "Third Revolution," a "revolutionary response to a revolutionary situation."¹⁵⁵ And the reason Schlesinger's "Politics of Upheaval" ended in the post-war period was because the revolution had won, it was over, there was no longer any need for political upheaval.

Blue Collar Democracy

I take issue with both these major interpretations of the New Deal Era. It was neither a period of quasi-revolutionary potential betrayed and subdued, nor of triumphant liberal Progressivism. Rather, it was a largely successful and fundamental break from the past brought about by ordinary working

people who, up to a point, created a new social and political order — *in their own image*. It was revolutionary, but not because it was ideologically Marxist or because workers wanted to replace capitalism with some variant of socialism. Rather, it was revolutionary because it was a successful popular uprising against oppressors which fundamentally altered the political balance of power and brought forth, to use Lincoln's phrase, "a new birth of freedom." The new socio-political culture and order created by ordinary working people put the New Deal "Progressive liberals" into power and, to a large extent, determined their agenda.

One major difference about the thirties from other periods was that underlying social and cultural changes brought into existence a sufficiently large, coherent, and self-identified community of the dispossessed who had an ideology of revolt which helped mobilize them to enter the political arena on their own behalf. Gary Gerstle has called that ideology of revolt, "Working Class Americanism."

According to Gerstle, the dominant political discourse of the thirties — and, indeed, even today — was that of "Americanism." The term is ambiguous, "But Americanism was not so amorphous as to resist definition. It can best be understood as a political language, a set of words, phrases, and concepts that individuals used — either by choice or necessity — to articulate their political beliefs and press their political demands." So elastic was the concept that even Republican capitalists could wrap themselves in the flag of Americanism, "But for every individual looking to Americanism for comfort and security, we can counterpose another who found in Americanist rhetoric an inspiration for political revolt....[Who used] Americanist rhetoric to focus attention directly on the unequal distribution of power between capital and labor that prevailed in the workplace, community, and nation." So dominant was this ideology that it forced "virtually every group seriously interested in political power — groups as diverse as capitalists, socialists, ghettoized ethnics, and small-town fundamentalists — to couch their programs in the language of Americanism."¹⁵⁶ For "working-class Americanists," that program was "democratizing relations between capital and labor," as exemplified in the great CIO insurgency which saw itself as, "a grand struggle for freedom and independence."¹⁵⁷

Among the Catholic French-Canadian textile workers of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, that Gerstle studied, Americanism coalesced in the thirties to produce an insurgent working class that was both "anticapitalist but anticommunist, patriotic but parochial, militant but devout." Upon this unique foundation the local textile union fashioned a campaign for "industrial democracy" which, in itself, represented a radical rupture with the past. As the union leadership defined it, "Industrial democracy...promised workers a very tangible kind of empowerment: control over their hours, their wages, their jobs,

their chances for promotion, and even their employers' pricing and investment decisions." This economic crusade was the axis around which political life spun, not only in Woonsocket, but in America as a whole. To make industrial democracy the nation's political litmus test was "an important achievement" because, "It meant that left-liberal forces had managed to extract from the democratic language of Americanism the words necessary to establish capital-labor relations as a political, even moral, issue of cardinal importance. It meant that radicals and liberals had shifted the balance of ideological power between capital and labor in labor's favor after a long period of unchallenged corporate domination. And, finally, it focused the attention of the American polity squarely on the glaring problem of industrial autocracy in a society ostensibly dedicated to democratic principles."¹⁵⁸

The establishment of economic independence for wage earners as the nation's — and Woonsocket's — battleground was made possible by an equally revolutionary break from the past: the political empowerment of the ethnic working class. The textile union leaders told their membership that the road to power led through the ballot box — and Woonsocket's long-suppressed workers followed that road to dominance in the city's political affairs by 1938. "Exercising these electoral rights may appear, in retrospect, a rather tame tactic for radicals to have advocated. But ethnic workers in Woonsocket, like their counterparts elsewhere in the North and the West, had only begun to think of themselves as American citizens with the full complement of rights that such citizenship entailed. To them, casting a ballot to determine who would govern and what policies would be implemented constituted a bold, even radical, political act....the use of the ballot in the 1920s and 1930s, in cities like Woonsocket, signified a profound political awakening among millions of ethnic Americans. Its significance for national politics was every bit as great as the dramatic growth of black Americans' electoral participation in the 1970s and 1980s."¹⁵⁹

There were, however, definite limits to Woonsocket's New Deal which this new-found political power brought about. A large part of this limitation was self-imposed. Despite the formulation of industrial democracy which, at least by some union radicals, included worker participation in managerial decisions, the primary goal of the working class leaders upon coming to political power in Woonsocket was "a municipal administration that would respect labor's right to organize, picket, and strike, and eventually sponsor municipal welfare and industrial planning programs."¹⁶⁰ Woonsocket's New Deal gave them this much. And no more.

Lizabeth Cohen, who looked at Chicago workers but argued that she told a national story, also agrees that the workers' New Deal was more conservative than most Leftists would like; it was never, for instance, anti-capitalist. Nevertheless, it was also far more radical than the neo-Marxist or corporate liberal

theorists would acknowledge. And, contrary to the Progressive school which saw the New Deal as the triumph of liberal elites, Cohen argues that it was class conscious workers who made the New Deal what it was by "participating in a political movement that was made by, and for, average working people."¹⁶¹ Whereas the great organizing drives of 1919 had been defeated by the huge ethnic and racial divisions which fragmented the working class, the triumphs of the New Deal were made possible because workers of all ethnic and racial identities had forged a "culture of [class] unity" which created a "common ground" of class consciousness and class-based politics. This class unity — expressed through support of "cross-ethnic working class institutions" such as the Democratic Party and the CIO — was "the big news" of the Thirties.¹⁶² Thus Cohen cites a 1936 national conference of ethnic fraternal societies in Pittsburgh which the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) organized to support its unionization drive. The success of the conference, trumpeted SWOC, demonstrated that, "a fundamental change...has been taking place in American life...that some half a million Americans of foreign birth or extraction...all agreed to unite for a common purpose, the improvement of the lot of the nation's steel workers by union organization."¹⁶³

Workers used their new-found class unity to accomplish a common goal: the creation of a "moral capitalism." Instead of Gerstle's "Working Class Americanism," Cohen identifies this moral capitalism as the characteristic blue collar ideology, an ideology which turned to "state and union...[to]...provide the security formerly found through ethnic, religious, and employer affiliation as well as ensure a more just society."¹⁶⁴ Workers, Cohen argues, continued to believe in capitalism, but they no longer trusted capitalists to make it fair. Therefore, through their CIO unions and the Democratic Party, they demanded and created an increasingly interventionist state to make capitalism moral and fair — "capitalism with a human face," if you will.¹⁶⁵ These "greater expectations for the state" were a fundamental departure from the past and represented a new and symbiotic relationship between the federal government and the working class.¹⁶⁶ Thus a working-class New Deal, created by and for workers.

While Cohen sees the working class creation of an interventionist state as the major accomplishment of the New Deal Era, Karen Orren argues this could not have been accomplished without the prior working class destruction of a feudal past. Historians and political theorists have long mistaken the true nature of American political society, Orren claims. Where many, from the days of de Tocqueville and de Crevecoeur on, viewed America as "exceptional," in that it did not have a feudal past to overcome (and therefore did not develop its extreme opposite, socialism), Orren finds the *persistence* of feudalism to be the major factor in the creation of the American polity. And the locus of that feudalism was in the master-servant work relationship inher-

ited from medieval England and protected by a reign of common law beyond the reach of democratic politics. The destruction of this feudalistic master-servant regime by the labor movement — formalized by the 1937 victory of Aliquippa steelworkers over their J & L bosses in the U. S. Supreme Court case, *NLRB vs. Jones & Laughlin* — created modern American liberalism and “accomplished the separation between state and society that since the eighteenth century had been understood, prematurely, to distinguish American liberalism from its feudal antecedents.”¹⁶⁷

Orren does not use the term “feudalism” rhetorically. “My argument,” she says, “is not that there was a resemblance between late-nineteenth-century employment law and feudal law, or that capitalist employment practices were analogous to feudal practices, but that there was, in actuality, an unbroken line stretching from labor regulation in Tudor England — with strands evident from Plantagenet England and even earlier — to labor regulation in Gilded Age America.... Thus, when I describe American labor relations in the nineteenth century as feudal, it means that the substance of relations between employers and employees still was under the ultimate jurisdiction of the courts, as was the case in the Middle Ages, and that the old common-law rules of labor governance had been left standing while other institutions had been changed or dissolved.”¹⁶⁸

The dismantling of this literally feudal labor relationship — a 60-year struggle which culminated in the 1930s — was the revolutionary basis for all further social progress. By bringing the workplace, at last, within the reach of legislative action and legitimizing voluntary collective action, this transformation fundamentally changed the American state and created modern liberal politics. Not only did labor’s triumph bring the business corporation under the authority of constitutional law, but it also cleared the way for subsequent social movements, from the civil rights and women’s movements to environmentalism and the culture wars of the present. “Moreover, at the same time that the private sector was opened up by the labor movement as a field of legally sanctioned collective action, the forms of pressure invented by the unions — the picket line, the consumer boycott, the sit-down — were likewise adopted and modified to other ends.”¹⁶⁹

Thus, far from being co-opted and compromised by some dominant and insidious liberalism, as some critics have charged, the labor movement gave birth to that very liberalism out of its own struggle and triumph. “The significance of the labor movement in American politics,” says Orren, “lies not in the preemption of a socialist state, but in the construction of a liberal state. The results of that project have established the basis for subsequent change, both within the framework of liberal politics and beyond it.”¹⁷⁰

The New Deal Era, then, was *sui generis*. It was not a continuation of old-style Progressivism, nor was it the still-born socialist revolution which some

Leftists saw as the task of the working class. Nevertheless, it was the revolutionary birth of a new political order upon the ruins of a repressive past as the working class dismantled a feudal remnant which had existed for centuries and, both in politics and in economics, created the modern liberal state. And it is with the creation of Steeltown's "Blue Collar Democracy" that this revolutionary transformation of America can be seen most clearly. Western Pennsylvania was one of the major battlegrounds upon which ordinary workers created modern America.

Notes

1 In the wake of the 1937 elections, Democratic Party voter registrations in Allegheny County surpassed Republican registrations for the first time, *never to be altered up to the present*. Final voter registration figures for the district before the November, 1938 elections showed that Pittsburgh, for example, had 334,424 registered voters, with 95,373 more Democrats than Republicans. Registration in Allegheny County as a whole exceeded 662,000, with the Democrats enjoying a 112,355-voter majority. See *The Pittsburgh Press*, October 8, 1938.

2 Richard Oestreicher, "Urban Working-Class Political Behavior and Theories of American Electoral Politics, 1870-1940," *The Journal of American History*, V. 74, No. 4, March, 1988, pp. 1264, 1283.

3 George Powers, *Cradle of Steel Unionism: Monongahela Valley, PA.*, Figueroa Printers, Inc., E. Chicago, Ind., 1972, p. 132.

4 This story is a particularly difficult one to recreate as the "SWOC Era" is almost totally lacking in documentation. The current districts of the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) were not established until 1942. Beginning then, and even more so from the mid-40s on, the USWA is fairly well documented at both the local and international level. Most, but not all, of these USWA records can be found in the files of the official depository of the union: the United Steelworkers of America Papers, Historical Collections and Labor Archives, Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University Libraries. However, explained Peter Gottlieb, Curator of the USWA Papers, "No SWOC collection ever existed. Either SWOC was not the type of organization which generated files, or such files have been lost." This dearth of documentation is one reason we know so little about this period. Interview, conducted by Eric Leif Davin, October 5, 1988.

5 See, e.g., Gordon Berg, "The Workingmen's Party — A First in Labor Politics," *Worklife*, 1, March, 1976, pp. 23-26. An excellent overview of these early efforts can be found in Alden Whitman, *Labor Parties, 1827-1834*, International Publishers: N.Y., 1943. Also, see Nathan Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States, 1828-1928*, Rand School: N.Y.,

1928.

6 See, e.g., "The Workingmen's Party of California, 1877-1882," *California Historical Quarterly*, 55, 1976, pp. 58-71 (no author listed), and Neil Larry Shumsky, *The Evolution of Political Protest and the Workingmen's Party of California*, Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 1991. The rise and fall of the local labor parties of the 1880s can be traced in Leon Fink's *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics*, U. of Ill. Press: Urbana, 1983.

7 Indicative of this on-going struggle is Samuel Gompers' polemic against the enduring labor party idea, *Should A Political Labor Party Be Formed?*, pamphlet published by the AFL, 1918.

8 On farmer-labor party movements of the Twenties, see, e.g., Hamilton Cravens, "The Emergence of the Farmer-Labor Party in Washington Politics, 1919-1920," *Pacific North West Quarterly*, LVII, 1966, pp. 148-157; Wayne Flynt, "Florida Labor and Political 'Radicalism', 1919-1920," *Labor History*, IX, 1968, pp. 73-90; Stuart A. Rice, *Farmers and Workers in American Politics*, Columbia University Press: N.Y., 1924; Hayes Robbins, *The Labor Movement and the Farmer*, Harcourt Brace: N.Y., 1922; Stanley Shapiro, "'Hand and Brain': The Farmer-Labor Party of 1920," *Labor History*, 26, Summer, 1985, pp. 405-422 and Murray S. Stedman and Susan W. Stedman, *Discontent at the Polls: A Study of Farmer and Labor Parties, 1827-1948*, Columbia University Press: N.Y., 1950.

An interesting article dealing with the Non-Partisan League is William C. Pratt, "Socialism on the Northern Plains, 1900-1924," *South Dakota History*, 18, Spring/Summer, 1988, pp. 1-35.

For an overview of the educational efforts, see Susan I. Wong, "Workers Education, 1921-1951," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1976. Also, Peter E. Van DeWater, "The Workers' Education Service," *Michigan History*, 60, 1976, pp. 99-113 and Richard Dwyer, "Workers' Education, Labor Education, Labor Studies: An Historical Delineation," *Review of Educational Research*, 47, Winter, 1977, pp. 179-207.

The Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers, which lasted from 1921-1938, was another example of a successful "labor college." During its existence, 1,700 working class women were recruited from blue-collar jobs for an intensive two-month program in left-wing trade unionism. See Lucille A. Maddalena, "The Goals of the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers as Established During its First Five Years," Ph. D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1979, *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 40, 76-A. A fine film documentary on this school is, "The Women of Summer," written, produced, and directed by Suzanne Bauman and distributed by Filmmakers Library.

In 1923, philosopher Will Durant, later famous for *The Story of Philosophy*, was the Director of New York's Labor Temple School. Meanwhile, Bertram D. Wolfe directed The Workers School in New York City, which was militantly class-conscious and supportive of a labor party. See its announcement of classes for 1926-1927, "Training for the Class Struggle," The Workers School: N. Y., 1926. An interesting labor college of the time was the Commonwealth College. On it, see William H. Cobb, "From Utopian Isolation to Radical Activism: Commonwealth College, 1925-1935," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 32, 1973, pp. 132-147. On Brookwood Labor College, see Richard Altenbaugh, "Forming the Structure of a New Society Within the Shell of the Old: A Study of Three Labor Colleges and Their Contributions to the American Labor Movement," Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1980, *Dissertation Abstracts International* 41, 565-A (a study of Brookwood, Commonwealth College, and Work People's College); Charles F. Howlett, "Brookwood Labor College and Work Commitment to Social Reform," *Mid-America*, 61, 1979, pp. 47-66; Charles F. Howlett, "Brookwood Labor College: Voice of Support for Black Workers," *Negro History Bulletin*, 45, 1982, pp. 38-39; and James W. Robinson, "The Expulsion of Brookwood Labor College from the Workers' Education Bureau," *Labour History* [Canberra, Australia], 1968, No. 15, pp. 64-69.

The story of Brookwood's decline and fall

is told by Jonathan D. Bloom, "Brookwood Labor College: The Final Years, 1933-1937," *Labor's Heritage*, April, 1990, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 24-43. From reading the account by Bloom we glean the answer to a puzzling question: Why should Brookwood, the most successful of the labor colleges, collapse in 1937 at the very height of labor's insurgency, after having survived the "lean years" of the Twenties so well? The answer is Brookwood's continued advocacy of a Labor Party while the unions which were its major financial support — principally Sidney Hillman's Amalgamated Clothing Workers and David Dubinsky's International Ladies Garment Workers Union — abandoned their long-held support for a Labor Party in favor of Roosevelt and the Democrats. When these unions pulled the financial plug on Brookwood, it was unable to go on, despite a last desperate attempt to form an alliance with the United Auto Workers, where Labor Party sentiment remained high. Roy Reuther, brother to Walter and Victor and, like them, a Labor Party champion, was a Brookwood faculty member during these final years and was seen as a link to the UAW.

9 I recommend two interesting studies on the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party. The first is Millard L. Gieske's *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism: The Third-Party Alternative*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1979. The other, more provocative in its argument for the viability of localized radical political movements, is Richard M. Velelly's *Radicalism in the States: The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and the American Political Economy*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1989.

10 See, e.g., Karel Denis Bicha, "Liberalism Frustrated: The League for Independent Political Action, 1928-1933," *Mid-America*, 47, 1966, pp. 19-28, and Richard J. Brown, "John Dewey and The League for Independent Political Action," *Social Studies*, 59, 1968, pp. 156-161.

11 For a history of one such local labor party, which dominated the city of Berlin, New Hampshire, from 1934-1943, see Eric Leif Davin and Staughton Lynd, "Picket Line and Ballot Box: The Forgotten Legacy of the Local Labor Party Movement, 1932-1936," *Radical History Review*, #22, Winter, 1979-80, pp.

43-63. See, also, David J. Pivar, "The Hosiery Workers and the Philadelphia Third Party Impulse, 1929-1935," *Labor History*, Winter, 1964. For a study of the United Rubber Workers' efforts to create a labor party, see Richard W. Shrake, II, "Working Class Politics in Akron, Ohio, 1936: The United Rubber Workers and the Failure of the Farmer-Labor Party," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Akron, 1974. Daniel Nelson treats, superficially, the United Rubber Workers' labor party efforts in "The CIO at Bay: Labor Militancy and Politics in Akron, 1936-1938," *The Journal of American History*, 71, Dec., 1984.

Hugh Lovin has done much work on the Midwest and Pacific Northwest efforts to form a labor or farmer-labor party during this period. His work includes: "The Fall of the Farmer-Labor Parties, 1936-1938," *Pacific North West Quarterly*, 62, Jan., 1971; "Toward A Farmer-Labor Party in Oregon, 1933-1938," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, V. 76, 2, June, 1975; "The Persistence of Third Party Dreams in the American Labor Movement, 1930-1938," *Mid-America*, 58, Oct., 1976; "The Ohio Farmer-Labor Movement in the 1930s," *Ohio History*, 87, Autumn, 1978; "The Farmer-Labor Movement in Idaho, 1933-1938," *Journal of the West*, V. 18, 2, April, 1979; "The Automobile Workers Unions and the Fight for Labor Parties in the 1930s," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 77, 1981; and "CIO Innovators, Labor Party Ideologues, and Organized Labor's Muddles in the 1937 Detroit Elections," *The Old Northwest*, 8, Fall, 1982.

For a contemporary and somewhat comprehensive survey of labor party efforts nationwide, see the special issue on the subject in *Industrial Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 11, Feb., 1938 by Harry W. Laidler, "Toward a Farmer-Labor Party."

An additional argument for and survey of contemporary labor party building efforts may be found in Brookwood Labor College instructor Joel Seidman's booklet, *A Labor Party for America?*, published by the Education Department, United Automobile Workers of America, Detroit, 1937; and the book by Brookwood instructors Katherine H. Pollak and David J. Saposs, *How Should Labor Vote?*, Brookwood Labor College Publications:

Katonah, N.Y., 1932. (This latter was considered the organizational blueprint by many local labor parties at the time.)

Also, see Paul H. Douglas, *The Coming of A New Party*, McGraw-Hill: N.Y., 1932, and Morris Hillquit and Matthew Woll, *Should The American Workers Form A Political Party of Their Own?*, Rand School: N.Y., 1932. The latter is a debate on the subject between Hillquit and Woll, with Hillquit (of the Socialist Party) in favor and Woll representing traditional AFL opposition to the idea.

12 *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 27, 1985.

13 *The New York Times*, April 29, 1985.

14 Author's notes of a speech to a labor/academic luncheon, Pittsburgh, Sept. 19, 1986.

15 Walter Dean Burnham, "The End of American Party Politics," in Frank Otto Gatell, Paul Goodman, and Allen Weinstein, *The Growth of American Politics, Vol. II, Since the Civil War*, Oxford University Press: N.Y., 1972, p. 518. Originally in *Trans-Action*, 7, December, 1969, pp. 12-23.

16 Burnham, "The End of American Party Politics," pp. 518-519.

17 Paul Kleppner, *Who Voted? The Dynamics of Electoral Turnout, 1870-1980*, Praeger Publishers: N.Y., p. 89.

18 Bruce Stave, "The Great Depression and Urban Political Continuity: Bridgeport Chooses Socialism," in Bruce Stave, ed., *Socialism and the Cities*, Kennikat Press: Port Washington, N. Y., 1975, p. 158. Sam Hays also argues that control of the White House is not the best measure of the transformation wrought by this political revolution. Instead, he says, we should look at Democratic dominance of the U.S. House of Representatives, which was virtually unbroken between 1932 and 1994 — with brief Republican resurgences in 1946 and 1952 when, despite Eisenhower's popularity, the Republicans gained only a bare majority. This dominance is "one of the most important phenomena in American political history....No party has ever before approached such a long-term dominance of any one branch of the federal government." Indeed, the secular trend was toward increasing Democratic numerical dominance since 1932. "While Truman's Congress averaged 248 Democratic seats, that of Kennedy-Johnson reached 266

and that of Carter 284....To put it rather strikingly, by the Reagan-Bush years the Democratic congressional contingent in a Republican administration had reached a higher level than it had during the Democratic Truman administration." Samuel P. Hays, "The Welfare State and Democratic Practice in the United States Since World War II," unpublished paper presented at a history conference at the University of Pittsburgh, 1992, p. 13.

19 Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics*, Harper & Brothers: N.Y., 1952, pp. 3, 2, 1.

20 *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Sept. 19, 1948.

21 David Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, Alfred A. Knopf: N.Y., 1967, p. xi.

22 James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, The Brookings Institution: Wash., D.C., 1973, pp. 200, 203, 202. Similar arguments are made by Everett Carl Ladd, Jr. and Charles D. Hadley, who found that the "submerged, inarticulate urban masses" were central to the creation and consolidation of the new Democratic majority. See Ladd and Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System*, W.W. Norton: N.Y., 1975, pp. 31-87.

23 Lubell, *The Future of American Politics*, pp. 51, 6.

24 See "Attitudes of Economic Groups," Arthur W. Kornhauser, *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, April, 1938, p. 268.

25 See "Gallup and Fortune Polls," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, September, 1940, p. 537.

26 Letter to the Editor, *The Homestead Daily Messenger*, October 3, 1936.

27 Rev. S. H. Solomon, Letter to the Editor, *The Homestead Daily Messenger*, September 19, 1936.

28 Paul Kleppner, *Who Voted?*, p. 96.

29 Herbert J. Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans*, The Free Press: N.Y., 1962, p. 175.

30 Walter Dean Burnham, *The Current Crisis in American Politics*, Oxford University Press: N.Y., 1982, p. 146.

31 See Bruce M. Stave, *The New Deal and the Last Hurrah: Pittsburgh Machine Politics*, University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh, 1970, pp. 36, 37.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 180, 181.

33 See his classic description of this trend in

Chapter Three, "The Revolt of the City," *The Future of American Politics*, Doubleday & Co., Inc.: Garden City, N.Y., 1956, 1951.

34 Lubell, p. 29.

35 See the useful discussion of this, as well as other possibilities, in Eric Foner, "Why is There No Socialism in the United States?," *History Workshop*, No. 17, Spring, 1984, pp. 57-80.

36 Of the ten largest American cities in 1930 — including New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, Los Angeles, Cleveland, St. Louis, Baltimore, Boston, and Pittsburgh — only St. Louis and Baltimore had majority native white populations, and that by only 3.4% and 3.1% respectively. See Table 5, p. 41, Stave, *The New Deal and the Last Hurrah*.

37 Lubell, p. 32.

38 Paul Kleppner, *Who Voted?*, pp. 85, 97.

39 Philip Klein, et al., *A Social Study of Pittsburgh: Community Problems and Social Services of Allegheny County*, Columbia University Press: N.Y., 1938, p. 294. The John R. Commons reference is from "Wage-Earners of Pittsburgh," in *Charities and the Commons*, Vol. XXI, p. 1051.

40 Richard C. Keller, "Pennsylvania's Little New Deal," *Pennsylvania History*, v. 29, #4, October, 1962, p. 400.

41 Keller, p. 401.

42 Federated Press dispatch in *The American Guardian*, Sept. 18, 1936.

43 Thomas T. Spencer, "'Labor is with Roosevelt': The Pennsylvania Non-Partisan League and the Election of 1936," *Pennsylvania History*, v. 46, #1, January, 1979, p. 7. The continuing presence in Pennsylvania flea markets and antique stores of Philadelphia-manufactured Non-Partisan League buttons urging Roosevelt's re-election, some of which I have purchased, corroborate this effort.

44 Spencer, p. 14.

45 Robert R.R. Brooks, *As Steel Goes... Unionism in a Basic Industry*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 1940, p. 119.

46 Keller, pp. 404-406.

47 *The Bulletin Index*, November 11, 1937.

48 *The Bulletin Index*, November 11, 1937.

49 *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 3, 1937.

50 *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 3,

1937. The Crawford quote can be found in David Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919*, J. B. Lippincott Co.: Philadelphia and N.Y., 1965, p. 94.
- 51 *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 3, 1937.
- 52 *The Bulletin Index*, November 11, 1937.
- 53 Mullen remembered that McDonald "fooled around" and finally came up with \$425. "Am I supposed to run a political campaign for mayor on \$425?" Mullen complained. "That's all I have," McDonald answered. John J. Mullen Interview, United Steelworkers of America Papers, Historical Collections and Labor Archives, Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University Libraries, p. 15, hereafter cited as USWA Papers. There is no account of this event in McDonald's autobiography. See David J. McDonald, *Union Man*, E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York, 1969. This suggests that Mullen's Clairton campaign was not an official policy of the top SWOC leadership and was of no great interest to McDonald, personally.
- 54 Mullen Interview, USWA Papers, p. 15.
- 55 Mullen Interview, USWA Papers, pp. 15-16.
- 56 *The Union Press*, v. 1, #11, Oct. 29, 1937.
- 57 *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 3, 1937.
- 58 *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 3, 1937.
- 59 *The Bulletin Index*, November 11, 1937.
- 60 *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 3, 1937.
- 61 *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 3, 1937.
- 62 *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 3, 1937.
- 63 Joel Seidman, "Organized Labor in Political Campaigns," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, October, 1939, pp. 650-651.
- 64 Brooks, *As Steel Goes*, pp. 251, 252.
- 65 Powers, *Cradle of Steel Unionism*, pp. 134, 142.
- 66 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Vintage Books: NY, 1963, p. 712.
- 67 John A. Fitch, *The Steel Workers*, New York: The Russell Sage Foundation, 1910, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989, p. 229.
- 68 Fitch, pp. 234-235.
- 69 Fitch, pp. 235-236.
- 70 David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era*, Harvard University Press, 1960, pp. 112-124.
- 71 *The Union Press*, #11.
- 72 Interview by Eric Leif Davin and Karen L. Steed, Nov. 23, 1980.
- 73 The 1930 U.S. Census listed the population at 21,396, while the 1940 U.S. Census listed it at 20,661. Duquesne was thus the third largest community in Steeltown after McKeesport and Aliquippa.
- 74 Separate figures are not available, but the combined employment in 1937 at the four Allegheny County U.S. Steel facilities — Duquesne, Clairton, Homestead, and Braddock — was 22,981. See *Ninth Industrial Directory of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1938. In 1940, 8,000 men were working in the Duquesne facility, which was composed of six blast furnaces and 32 open hearths. See *The Bulletin Index*, September 19, 1940. "At one period during the Depression," said the *Index*, "when all six blast furnaces and 28 of the open hearths were shut down, a mere 4,000 men were employed."
- 75 Elmer Maloy Interview, United Steelworkers of America Papers, Historical Collections and Labor Archives, Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University Libraries, pp. 6, 8. Hereafter cited as USWA Papers.
- 76 Maloy Interview, USWA Papers, p. 32.
- 77 The 1930 U.S. Census placed Aliquippa's population at 27,116. The 1940 U.S. Census put the population at 27,021, making Aliquippa the second largest community in Steeltown after McKeesport. In 1937 there were 9,388 workers in Aliquippa's Jones & Laughlin Steel facility, making it the primary employer. See *Ninth Industrial Directory*.
- 78 According to *The Beaver Valley Labor History Journal*, V. 1, #2, June, 1979, p. 6, Democratic registration in Aliquippa hovered between 50 and 100 throughout the Twenties.
- 79 Interview conducted by Eric Leif Davin and Karen L. Steed, Nov. 23, 1980.
- 80 Marguerite Young, "Ruffner Led Vigilante Committee," *The Union Press*, #10, October 20, 1937, p. 2.
- 81 All Muselin statements from Pete Muselin,

"The Steel Fist in a Pennsylvania Company Town," in Bud Schultz and Ruth Schultz, *It Did Happen Here: Recollections of Political Repression in America*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, pp. 69, 70, 71.

82 Muselin, p. 70.

83 Maloy Interview, USWA Papers, p. 8. Parentheses in the original.

84 Interview conducted by Eric Leif Davin and Karen L. Steed, Nov. 23, 1980.

85 Interview conducted by Eric Leif Davin and Karen L. Steed, Nov. 23, 1980.

86 See George Martin, *Madam Secretary, Frances Perkins*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976, Chapter 24.

87 John A. Fitch, "A Man Can Talk in Homestead," *Survey Graphic*, V. 25, #2, February, 1936.

88 Edward Levinson, *Labor on the March*, Harper & Bros.: N.Y., 1938, p. 188.

89 *Homestead Daily Messenger*, June 17, 1933.

90 Staughton Lynd, "The Possibility of Radicalism in the Early 1930s: The Case of Steel," *Radical America*, v. 6, #6, November-December, 1972, p. 56.

91 Lynd, p. 58.

92 *The McKeesport Daily News*, January 4, 1938, p. 20.

93 Maloy Interview, USWA Papers, p. 11.

94 *The McKeesport Daily News*, January 4, 1938, p. 20.

95 Interview by Eric Leif Davin and Karen L. Steed, Nov. 23, 1980.

96 Interview by Davin and Steed, Nov. 23, 1980. Reinforcement of idea that police actions had an important influence on whether or not organized labor turned to electoral politics can be gleaned from other accounts, as well. See, e.g., Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1976, p. 226: "It is said that history does not repeat itself, but the history of Lynn between 1860 and 1890 contradicts that axiom, because a certain sequence of events that occurred first in 1860 recurred with uncanny similarity in 1878 and again in 1890...Each time there were three steps in the sequence: (1) a strike occurred, (2) bringing out the police, (3) causing the strikers to mount a political campaign to unseat the incumbent officials and dismiss

the police chief."

Also, see Eric Leif Davin and Staughton Lynd, "Picket Line and Ballot Box: The Forgotten Legacy of the Local Labor Party Movement, 1932-1936," *Radical History Review*, #22, Winter, 1979-80, which details how the labor movement of Berlin, New Hampshire, entered politics as a result of state force used against strikers. And the same thing happened in New Bedford and Akron. See Eric Leif Davin, "The Very Last Hurrah? The Defeat of the Labor Party Idea, 1934-1936," in Staughton Lynd, ed., *We Are All Leaders: The Alternative Unionism of the Early 1930s*, University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1996.

97 *Aliquippa Gazette*, April 3, 1936.

98 Interview conducted by Eric Leif Davin and Karen L. Steed, Nov. 23, 1980.

99 Brooks, pp. 111ff.

100 This would have meant his visit was roughly in April, 1934.

101 Philip Murray's account is found in the 1935 Office Files of AFL President William Green, AFL Papers. The copy is badly damaged and there are no page identifications.

102 Brooks, p. 117.

103 *The Pittsburgh Press*, July 6, 1936.

104 Fitch, p. 243.

105 Maloy Interview, USWA Papers, pp. 33, 36.

106 Maloy Interview, USWA Papers, p. 33, 34. Tom Striegel, Maloy's son-in-law, recalled that the company also supplied free electricity to all Duquesne churches from its private power plant, which insured church hostility to SWOC. Interview conducted by Eric Leif Davin, June 6, 1989.

107 Maloy Interview, USWA Papers, p. 34.

108 Maloy Interview, USWA Papers, p. 35.

109 Maloy Interview, USWA Papers, p. 35.

110 "Union Mayor, Union Town," *Friday*, December 27, 1940, v. 1, #42.

111 "Union Mayor, Union Town."

112 The following account comes from undated, unidentified newspaper clippings in the personal papers of Elmer J. Maloy. Now in the possession of his daughter, Jean Striegel, they are hereafter designated Maloy Papers.

113 Maloy Interview, USWA Papers, p. 35.

114 *The Union Press*, #4, September 8, 1937, p.3.

- 115 *The Union Press*, #4, p.2.
- 116 *The Union Press*, #4, p.2.
- 117 *The Union Press*, #10.
- 118 Maloy Papers.
- 119 Maloy Papers.
- 120 Maloy Interview, USWA Papers, p. 32.
- 121 "Union Mayor, Union Town," *Friday*.
- 122 It also seems that Maloy used the Fire Dept. as an ancillary to the Police Dept. in protecting SWOC organizers. In October, 1940, Maloy's jurisdiction over the Fire Dept. was transferred to Republican City Councilor Frank Koprivier (later to be his losing mayoralty opponent in 1941). The reason given was that Maloy "called on the firemen to help quell a disturbance at the main entrance to the Duquesne Steel Works during a dues picketing drive by the local CIO union, of which Mayor Maloy is a member." Maloy Papers.
- 123 "Union Mayor, Union Town," *Friday*.
- 124 "Union Mayor, Union Town," *Friday*.
- 125 Maloy Papers.
- 126 Martha E. Foy, "The Negro in the Courts: A Study in Race Relations," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1953, p. 88.
- 127 See *The Pittsburgh Press*, June 23, 30, 1939.
- 128 Dee Filipe and Evelyn Brooks interviews conducted by Eric Leif Davin and Anita Alverio, summer, 1980.
- 129 Laurence Glasco, "Double Burden: The Black Experience in Pittsburgh," in Samuel P. Hays, ed., *City at the Point: Essays in the Social History of Pittsburgh*, University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh, 1989, p. 93.
- 130 Maloy Interview, USWA Papers, p. 36.
- 131 *The Duquesne Times*, November 7, 1941. *The Duquesne Times* was the only newspaper in town and was closely identified with both the Republicans and with the steel corporation. In fact, the U.S. Steel logo was emblazoned to the left and right of the masthead at the top of page one.
- 132 February 25, 1938.
- 133 Karen L. Steed, "Unionization and the Turn to Politics: Aliquippa and the Jones and Laughlin Steel Works, 1937-1941," (graduate seminar paper, University of Pittsburgh, 1982), p. 18.
- 134 Brooks, p. 129.
- 135 *The Aliquippa News*, November 19, December 10, 1941.
- 136 Brooks, p. 129.
- 137 The words of an anonymous peer review reader of this paper.
- 138 See, for instance, Melvyn Dubofsky, "Not So 'Turbulent Years': A New Look at the 1930s," in Charles Stephenson and Robert Asher, *Life & Labor: Dimensions of American Working-Class History*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986, pp. 205-223.
- 139 Mike Davis, "The Barren Marriage of American Labour and the Democratic Party," *New Left Review*, 124, 1980, pp. 43-84, later a chapter by the same title in his book, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the U. S. Working Class*, Verso: London, 1986, pp. 52-101. Citations on pp. 96, 53, 99, 101.
- 140 Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home, The CIO in World War II*, Cambridge University Press: N.Y., 1982, p. 244. See, also, his discussion of the impact this had on "deradicalizing" UAW leader Walter Reuther in the post-war period, pp. 85-89, as well as his "From Corporatism to Collective Bargaining: Organized Labor and the Eclipse of Social Democracy in the Postwar Era," in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, N.J., 1989, pp. 122-152.
- 141 See, for instance, David Brody's arguments along these lines, "The Uses of Power I: Industrial Battleground," and "The Uses of Power II: Political Action," in *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle*, Oxford University Press: N.Y., 1980. In addition, see Ronald Radosh, "The Corporate Ideology of American Labor Leaders from Gompers to Hillman," in James Weinstein and David W. Eakins, eds., *For a New America: Essays in History and Politics*, Random House: N.Y., 1970, pp. 151-152; and Melvyn Dubofsky, "Not So 'Turbulent Years': A New Look at the American 1930s," in Charles Stephenson and Robert Asher, eds., *Life and Labor: Dimensions of American Working-Class History*, State University of New York Press: N.Y., 1986, pp. 205-223.

Emerging labor law also played a role in limiting labor's possibilities. On this, see Karl E.

- Klare, "Judicial Deradicalization of the Wagner Act: The Origins of Modern Legal Consciousness, 1937-1941," *Minnesota Law Review*, 65, 1978, pp. 265-339; and Christopher Tomlins, *The State and the Unions*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 99-316.
- 142 cf. Barton J. Bernstein, "The New Deal: The Conservative Achievements of Liberal Reform," in Bernstein, ed., *Towards A New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*, New York: Vintage, 1967.
- 143 Frances Fox Piven, and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*, New York: Vintage, 1971, p. xiii.
- 144 Piven and Cloward, p. 100.
- 145 Bernstein, p. 275.
- 146 Bernstein, p. 281.
- 147 Paul K. Conkin, *The New Deal*, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1967.
- 148 Conkin, p. 23. Other historians who have contributed to this interpretation of the New Deal Era include Ronald Radosh, "The Myth of the New Deal," in Radosh and Murray Rothbard, eds., *The New Leviathan: Essays on the Rise of the American Corporate State*, New York: Dutton, 1972, pp. 146-187, and, more recently, Colin Gordon, *New Deals: Business, Labor, and Politics in America, 1920-1935*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- 149 Theda Skocpol, "Political Response to Capitalist Crisis: Neo-Marxist Theories of the State and the Case of the New Deal," *Politics & Society*, v. 10, No. 2, 1980, p. 171.
- 150 See Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, Verso: London, 1975.
- 151 Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Crisis of the Old Order: 1919-1933*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957, p. ix.
- 152 William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940*, New York: Harper & Row, 1963, pp. 345, 347.
- 153 Leuchtenburg, p. 332.
- 154 Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War*, New York: Knopf, 1995, p. 13.
- 155 Carl Degler, *Out of Our Past*, New York: Harper & Row, 1959, p. 416.
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- 157 Gerstle, pp. 5, 1.
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- 159 Gerstle, pp. 179-180.
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- 161 Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 367.
- 162 Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, p. 362; Lizabeth Cohen, "Reflections on the Making of *Making a New Deal*," *Labor History*, Fall, 1991, V. 32, #4, p. 598.
- 163 Quoted by Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, p. 338.
- 164 Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, p. 253.
- 165 These are my words, not Cohen's, alluding to Alexander Dubcek's failed attempt in 1968 to create "Communism with a human face" in Czechoslovakia.
- 166 Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, p. 267.
- 167 Karen Orren, *Belated Feudalism: Labor, the Law, and Liberal Development in the United States*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1991, p. 215.
- 168 *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.
- 169 *Ibid.*, p. 216.
- 170 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.