

# THE OLD TRICK OF RED BAITING

## How Anti-communism is Used to Divide and Destroy the Rank and File Movement

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"Don't vote for those people on the rank and file ticket. They're just commies out to disrupt our industry. They'll lose you your job. They're doing the dirty ground work so the Chinese and the Russians can come over here and take your freedom away from you."

How many times have we heard accusations like these just when it seemed a group of workers was getting it together to offer a new kind of leadership to our locals? Whenever workers talk about the need for democratic elections, or when they want a new contract to be a real improvement over the old, very often the first response of the union leaders is to red-bait. And in the past, such red-baiting has been followed or accompanied by government investigations, public "trials" and national hysteria.

If the red-baiting is successful, the outcome of all this is always the same: the old leadership stays in control, the bosses get a contract on their terms, and the workers lose out, holding the empty slogan of "patriotic security" like an ice cream cone without the ice cream.

Unions are built on the understanding that "united we stand, divided we fall." But we workers aren't the only ones who know that our strength lies in our unity. The bosses know it too, and so do those union bureaucrats whose jobs depend on their cozy relationships with the bosses. And that's why both on the shop level and in the government they spend so much energy trying to split us up. They encourage race hatred and they encourage mistrust between male and female workers. And just in case we might get it together in spite of those obstacles, they are always ready with their final weapon -- the great red scare.

### THE RED ISSUE -- A DANGEROUS DIVERSION

What is red-baiting all about? Are those who use it really doing their patriotic duty and protecting us? Actually, when red-baiting goes on, communism versus capitalism isn't really the issue. Sometimes the workers being attacked do believe that we need a new system which distributes the wealth of our land equally among all the people. But most often the workers really haven't given our economic system that much thought. They're just trying to build a stronger union.

It would be just as relevant for the bureaucrats to call the opposition mother rapers or child molesters, or atheists, or whatever. The main purpose behind red-baiting is to divert attention away from the real issues -- like union democracy or the need to fight rate cuts -- and get everybody worried about some shapeless terror lurking behind every proposal for change.

In the late 30's, the United Mine Workers' John Brophy, director of the CIO, said, "Redbaiting, lies, slanders, raising the cry of 'Communist' against militant and progressive union leaders, is nothing more than a smokescreen for the real objective of the people that use them. The real objective is to kill the CIO, destroy collective bargaining, destroy the unity of the organized and unorganized that the CIO is building throughout the nation."

We've all been brainwashed from the time we were small children into fear of communism. We've been told that liberty is being allowed to work all our lives for peanuts while a few capitalists rake in the big money and that freedom is being able to choose who will tell us to tighten our belts from the White House. We've been convinced that the pursuit of happiness is being allowed to spend our hard-earned money on short skirts one year and skirts below our knees the next. We've been told that communism will bring chaos into our lives and turn us all into machines. So as soon as someone is labeled a "red" we instinctively shut our ears to what he or she is saying and run for the safe cover of the exploitation we're familiar with.



In 1938, alarmed by the rapid growth of militant industrial unions, Big Business tried to destroy CIO organizing drives with a well-financed red-baiting campaign. Two million of these pamphlets were published and distributed to workers throughout the nation by the National Association of Manufacturers. The workers weren't fooled, and the CIO kept going.



## WHO ARE OUR REAL ENEMIES?

But who is really threatening our well-being? Is it the rank and file groups that demand fair elections and an end to discrimination, and better working conditions? Or is it the union leaders who railroad through rotten contracts and hand-pick our stewards according to their ability to kiss up to the boss? The true disrupters are those who red-bait their opposition rather than deal with the real problems facing the membership. The true subversives are those who lead witchhunts within the union, those who spread distrust among the membership, those who try to suppress the ideas and rights of their opposition. These are the real enemies within our unions because they are representing the interests of the capitalists and not of the workers.

No one likes to be attacked or to be called a traitor. And so the effect of red-baiting is often to convince honest union members, those who believe in socialism and those who don't, to keep their mouths shut. And who benefits, besides the few bureaucrats and flunkies hanging onto their positions? It's the manufacturers who win out. Because red-baiting scares people away from sounding radical. And radical means anyone who wants a fighting union. So when red-baiting takes hold in the union, then the companies are assured of a union which will tow the bosses' line, sounding good and "American."

It's not too hard to see why red-baiting militant workers who never gave Communism a second look is dirty business. But what about red-baiting workers who do believe in socialism? Is it OK to bait for-real reds?

Baiting, no matter who it's aimed at, is name calling in an appeal to people's gut emotions rather than their minds. The point of baiting of any kind is to get everyone so worked up that they stop thinking. We can't ever let ourselves be fooled by such bully tactics. We can't let our misleaders get us fighting among ourselves over phoney issues or else they'll always be able to control us and choose our leadership for us.

If today a militant can be shut up for believing in socialism, then tomorrow any worker can be intimidated into silence for believing in trade unionism. If a worker is pushing the membership to fight a wage cut then that's the issue we deal with -- not whether he or she spends Sundays at Mass or in meetings. Every member of our unions must be guaranteed the right to speak his or her mind without fear. We must defend everyone's right to present their views even if we disagree with them.

## COMMUNISTS -- A FORCE FOR TRADE UNION PROGRESS

Finally, red-baiting real communists hurts all of us in another way. The whole point of communism is that it explains the nature of our daily oppression at work and in our communities. Communists understand that our society is divided into two classes, capitalists and workers, that capitalists exist thanks to their ability to exploit workers, and that therefore there can be no peace between

the two. Because of their understanding of society, communists are able to develop a consistent and militant trade union policy. Communists know that no good can come of making deals with the bosses and they know the need to develop a strong, united and conscious working class. So communists aren't likely to sell the rank and file out.

If red-baiting is allowed to take hold, then the majority of the workers will be cut off from the best leadership available to them -- in fact, the only leadership which can lead the working class struggle out of its present vicious circle of dogfights with various manufacturers. It's not just a coincidence that manufacturers' associations and the government have always taken special pains to destroy communist influenced unions like the Fur and Leather Workers, UE, and much of the early CIO movement.

The capitalists know who their real enemies are, and who the best friends of the workers are. And when our leaders bait communist in our unions they are playing out the bosses hand. They are allowing the bosses to pick our leaders for us and allowing them to veto those who really would represent us.

The history of our own unions can teach us in the clearest possible terms how disastrous it is for the masses of workers to allow themselves to be scared away from communist leadership. Our history also teaches us the central role that communists played in building the labor movement. One of the best examples of the contribution of communists can be found in the birth and development of the CIO.

## CIO AND ANTI-COMMUNISM

When John L. Lewis punched Bill Hutchinson of the Carpenters' Union in the jaw at the AFL convention and stalked out to form the CIO, he was simply acting out the last symbolic gesture for a movement which had been built by thousands of organizers for many years. John L. Lewis was no lover of communists. And yet, in 1935 he knew that he owed much of his success to the tireless work of communists, socialists and other militant workers during the difficult and depressing years of 1933 and 1934. It was the communists who refused to give up in 1933 when the AFL did everything it could to discourage workers from organizing into necessary industrial unions.

Communists had understood the importance of industrial organizing for decades, and they were not sidetracked by the treachery of the bureaucrats of the AFL whose privileged jobs depended on being able to control the militancy of the US working class. When the AFL betrayed the early attempts of the auto workers to organize, the workers built bonfires with their AFL membership cards. But the communists continued to organize, and when Lewis prepared to help the organization of auto workers he found communists like Wyndham Mortimer and Robert Travis in their leadership.



It was no secret to anyone that the communists were a driving force in the development of the CIO. When Lewis finally brought the Chrysler Corporation to its knees, Walter Chrysler said to Lewis, "Mr. Lewis, I do not worry about dealing with you, but it is the Communists in these unions that worry me a great deal." But when he was accused of having communists in his organization, Lewis said, "I do not turn my organizers or CIO members upside down and shake them to see what kind of literature falls out of their pockets."

### THE CASE OF THE ELECTRICAL WORKERS

The working class had paid and is still paying the high price of falling for red-baiting. One of the best examples can be found in the history of the UE and the formation of the IUE.

In 1947 the Taft-Hartley Law was passed, pushed for by the National Association of Manufacturers and supported by the AFL leadership. Along with a great many other union-busting measures, the Taft-Hartley Bill institutionalized red-baiting. It required all union leaders to swear to "non-communist affidavits" in order to be able to use the National Labor Relations Board, or appear on the ballot for union recognition. This provision was meant to start witch hunts within the unions, and established the basis for legal discrimination against union militants. It was no longer enough for a leader to be a legitimate member of the union. Now his or her political beliefs were to be controlled and investigated.

At first the majority of the CIO refused to co-operate with the bill. But as the national political climate became more reactionary and as the pressure by the government and manufacturers increased, one by one the CIO unions fell in line behind the repressive bill. The UE was one of the few unions to stand firm on the rights of union members to be free from political persecution.

As a result of the UE's refusal to buckle under, they were unable to use the machinery of the National Labor Relations Board. Taking advantage of the fact that the UE couldn't appear on ballots for union recognition, other CIO unions began raiding UE locals. After numerous protests the UE withheld their dues to the CIO, and was finally expelled from the CIO in 1948. Another organization, the IUE was formed on paper by the CIO leadership.

Of course, this was exactly what the manufacturers wanted. In 1949, GE and Westinghouse petitioned for new elections, for here was their golden chance to get a more co-operative union and "to get out from under the domination of the left wing UE", as one GE personnel officer put it. The Taft-Hartley Bill was clearly paying off. The manufacturers did all they could to help the CIO destroy the UE. As a top GE lawyer told a Senate Committee in 1952, "We took Mr. Carey (head of the new IUE) off the hook by filing our own petitions for an NLRB election. This, under NLRB rules, made it unnecessary for the IUE and CIO to show any membership at all."

### EXPERIENCE SHOWS WHO GAINS FROM RED-BAITING

It didn't take long for the workers to realize that all this red-baiting was helping no one but the manufacturers. In 1950 the vicious joint campaign of GE and the CIO led to the election of the IUE over the UE in the GE plant of Lynn, Mass. Within 3 years, conditions had degenerated so much that the workers themselves petitioned for a new election.

What happened in Lynn, Mass was not just an isolated incident. Up until 1948, the militant UE represented electrical workers in a united body and had won some of the best conditions in the country. After the raids and the formation of the IUE electrical workers were stripped of their most important weapon, unity. The IUE locals lost many of the former UE provisions, and slowly, during the 50's, electrical workers fell economically far behind workers in auto and steel.

The costs of division are seen most clearly at G.E. where the employers have consistently taken the most hard-line negotiating position. G.E.'s take-it-or-leave-it habit at contract time, known as "Boulwarism" is made possible by trade union disunity and the isolation of militant leadership.

Class conscious workers must stand firm against any attempts to whip the working class into the hysteria of anti-communism. Not only can we not afford to have our ranks broken by mistrust and internal harassment, but we also cannot afford to lose the leadership of Communist workers, who offer to the working class the most consistent program for the development of the workers' movement.