

# NO ENEMIES TO THE LEFT

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THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE UNITED STATES AND  
CRISES OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM, 1956-1968

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## Introduction

On the morning of August 21, 1968, Czechoslovaks awoke to find Soviet tanks and Warsaw Pact troops occupying their streets. Despite the seemingly successful negotiations between the Czech and Soviet Communist Parties just three weeks earlier, a Warsaw Pact force of approximately 200,000 troops and 20,000 tanks crossed the Czechoslovak border from all directions at 11:00 P.M. the previous evening. The “intervention” was the physical manifestation of ongoing Soviet practical and ideological fears. The Soviet leadership was not only concerned that Czechoslovakia might leave the Warsaw Pact—despite Czechoslovak leader Alexander Dubcek’s assurance that this was not his intention—but also that Dubcek’s “Socialism with a human face” might spread deviationist elements throughout the Eastern bloc, weakening Soviet hegemony.<sup>1</sup>

The invasion appalled numerous international communist parties and liberal organizations. The sharpest condemnations came from an already confrontational People’s Republic of China and Albania, with the latter officially withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact that same year. In Eastern Europe, Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Romania ridiculed the invasion, refusing to allow Warsaw Pact troops to pass through Romanian territory, and while Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and East Germany readily participated in the invasion, their respective populations protested Soviet action. In Western Europe, the invasion created disillusionment within the French, Spanish and Italian communist parties and pushed them further from Moscow.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jiri Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968* (Baltimore, M.D.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 147-49.

<sup>2</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 239-40.

International communists were ultimately stricken with a grim sense of déjà vu. Just twelve years earlier, Soviet tanks had rolled through Budapest to remove Hungarian revisionist leader Imre Nagy and smother the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in its infancy. International communists who grudgingly accepted the need to intervene in Hungary were shocked by the 1968 invasion. Dubcek was extremely cautious in not repeating the mistakes of 1956, stressing his “unbreakable friendship and alliance with the USSR.”<sup>3</sup> Despite the leader’s reassurance, the invasion proceeded as planned, and the words of Hungarian post-revolution leader Janos Kadar seemed to be sadly vindicated: “There has never been, is not, and never will be, anti-Soviet communism.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite the widespread condemnation of both invasions, one communist party consistently stood out in its staunch support: The Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). The American party supported the invasion of Czechoslovakia because of a consolidation of conservative party leadership from the late 1950s and into the 1960s around General Secretary Gus Hall, who closely toed the Moscow line. The American communists’ support for the 1968 invasion was noticeably more uniform than their reaction to 1956, when a “soft communist” coalition within the party, led by *Daily Worker* editor John Gates, sought to democratize the party and encourage greater discussion of the Hungarian crisis.<sup>5</sup> While Hungary created a clear divide within the party leadership, the invasion of Czechoslovakia barely

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Kramer, "The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion in Historical Perspective," in *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968*, eds. Gunter Bischof, Stefan Karmer and Peter Ruggenthaler (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 44. One of the primary catalysts for the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 was Nagy’s explicit intention to leave the Warsaw Pact.

<sup>4</sup> Herbert Aptheker, *Czechoslovakia and Counter-Revolution: Why the Socialist Countries Intervened*. (New York: New Outlook Publishers, 1969), 29. The exact date of Kadar’s quotation is unknown, although was most likely spoken between 1956 and 1966, since it was reproduced verbatim in the transcripts of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the CPSU.

<sup>5</sup> David A. Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism: A History of the Communist Party of the United States since 1945* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham Bookseller, 1971), 315-16.

produced any disagreement—the few members that condemned the invasion were swiftly ostracized and silenced.

Scholars of American Communism have repeatedly ignored the political and international history of the party after 1956. Scholarship on the previous three decades of Party history created a notion of political irrelevance and ultimate subservience to Soviet policies. Historians did not discuss the Hungarian revolution as a separate event, but rather as part of a much larger party crisis that occurred in 1956, starting with the revelations of Khrushchev's secret speech. When placing the CPUSA within the context of the broader American left, historian Paul Buhle notes that although the CPUSA remained active after the Party crisis of 1956, the burgeoning study of the New Left overshadowed its perceived importance among scholars.<sup>6</sup> The decimation of American communists during McCarthyism, as well as the fairly static leadership of General Secretary Gus Hall—lasting from 1959 to 2000—contributed towards the notion of CPUSA irrelevance on a political and international level.

Two opposing historical interpretations of the relevance and independence of American Communism emerged in the 1970s, with “traditionalists” on one side and “revisionists” on the other. The revisionists abandoned the political focus of the previous decades to focus on grassroots social and cultural movements. These various organizations and case studies were presumably the only aspects of American communism that were independent from the Moscow party line. Traditionalists, on the other hand, continued to analyze the political character of the party in its heyday and dismissed all later CPUSA activity as wholly submissive to Moscow. The prediction of prominent CPUSA historian Theodore Draper became the traditionalist hallmark: “Even at the price of virtually committing political suicide, American Communism would

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left*, (New York: Verso, 1991), 263.

continue above all to serve the interests of Soviet Russia.”<sup>7</sup> These types of predictions, however, were pure assumptions, and failed to acknowledge the changing character of both the Party and international communism. The flicker of democratic thought and opposition that occurred within the CPUSA in 1956 demonstrates a rare defiance to official Soviet policy. Through the next twelve years, this defiance disappeared.

The CPUSA’s gradual slip into Stalinism by 1968—and its complete extrication from the broader Left—is a product of leadership, ideological orthodoxy and the heightening of the Cold War by the early 1960s. The Party leadership, refusing to defy such Marxist-Leninist principles as democratic centralism, peaceful coexistence, refused to criticize a Soviet foreign policy that increasingly seemed to substitute *realpolitik* with genuine Marxist ideology. This contradictory foreign policy, which implied that whatever was good for the Soviet Union was ultimately good for world Communism, materialized first in Hungary. When the height of Cold War hysteria occurred during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Party leadership found in peaceful coexistence the ultimate justification for its continued ideological obstinacy. By 1968, the Party used all of the justifications and precedents of the previous twelve years to continue its support of Soviet foreign policy. Rising to power in the late 1950s, General Secretary Gus Hall used his domineering leadership style and the privileges of his position to exacerbate the Party’s slide into Stalinism.

This essay will address a substantial gap in the political and international historiography of the CPUSA after 1956. It will also address important questions about the continued role of American communism within the broader international Left and the implications of an increasingly realist Soviet foreign policy on the international communist movement. The first

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<sup>7</sup> Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia: The Formative Period* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 441.

chapter of this essay will analyze the Party's reaction to the Hungarian Revolution and its effects on Party unity. The second chapter will focus on the rise of Gus Hall and the effect of the Cuban Missile Crisis on the CPUSA's thinking. Finally, the third chapter will analyze the Party's reaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. By tracing the party's reactions through these three events, this study will challenge traditional assumptions of intransigence and passivity within the Party.

### **Chapter 1: Hungary and Party Division**

By the time violence erupted in the streets of Budapest in late October, 1956, the CPUSA had been effectively under siege for more than a decade. The formative years of the Cold War had fostered a continuous governmental assault on Communism. The machinations of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover and Senator Joseph McCarthy, along with various legal measures enacted by consecutive presidential administrations, forced many American Communists into a panic. Using one's Fifth Amendment rights did not guarantee freedom from imprisonment, and many Party members either went underground or broke from the Party completely to avoid persecution. The historic events of 1956, ending with the Soviet intervention in Hungary, amplified this extreme outside pressure, and triggered an internal party-crisis of unprecedented scale.

The Hungarian episode would simultaneously invigorate and destroy the CPUSA. It stimulated the Party in extraordinary ways by encouraging new discussions of democratization and intelligent criticism of Soviet foreign policy. This refreshingly new thinking came at a price: Disagreements and factionalism over official policy regarding the intervention triggered a vicious conservative backlash within the Party leadership. Clinging to ideological precepts and a

strict adherence to Soviet policies, the conservative faction, led by the charismatic William Z. Foster, eventually overpowered *Daily Worker* editor John Gates' revisionists by 1957. Although optimism for a recovery of the CPUSA remained after the crisis, the complete defeat of one of the largest revisionist forces in Party history set the stage for a complete consolidation of conservative opinion within the Party leadership over the next decade.

It is important to analyze the Hungarian Revolution's effect on the Party within the context of the larger Party crisis of 1956, beginning with the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in February. Although it was the first Party Congress presided over by new First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev, international communists expected little out of the ordinary. On February 25, however, Khrushchev shocked international communists with his "Secret Speech." The speech shattered the previous invulnerability of Stalin by denouncing the former leader's cult of personality and severely criticizing the violent purges of Old Bolsheviks during his reign. An equally important idea presented at the Congress was the reaffirmation of the Soviet Union as the absolute leader of international communism and the protector of world peace. In maintaining Peaceful Coexistence with the West, the Soviet Union assumed a leading role in protecting the Communist nations of the world from dangerous, counter-revolutionary forces.

Many American Communists, most of which grew up revering Stalin, were traumatized by the heinous crimes against Socialism that the former General Secretary was accused of carrying out. While some communists insisted on leaving the Party after these revelations, Khrushchev's bravery and optimism gave many members a reason to stay despite their disillusionment. Existing revisionists within the party, particularly Gates, believed that if the CPSU was capable of self-criticism and honest discussion of past mistakes, then the CPUSA

could follow suit and reinvent itself. Opponents of party revisionism, led by Foster, minimized Khrushchev's accusations and advised against any changes to the Party structure. A very small minority within the leadership, chiefly represented by General Secretary Eugene Dennis, Southern California Communist Dorothy Healey and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, occupied a middle ground, which advocated patience and slow reform. The debates over Stalin's legacy formed the basis for the Gates-Foster confrontation that would peak by the end of the year.<sup>8</sup>

On October 23, thousands of Hungarian workers and students began to protest the presence of Soviet troops in the streets of Budapest. The protesters were attempting to recreate the apparent success of Polish communists during the previous weeks. The Poles, defying Soviet wishes in their election of nationalist reformer Wladislaw Gomulka, had somehow managed to forge their own road to Socialism and prevent a full-scale Soviet military reprisal, slightly extricating themselves from total Soviet control in the process. The Hungarians had no such luck, as tens of thousands of Soviet troops entered Budapest on October 24 to prevent what they perceived as a dangerous, counter-revolutionary force of fascists from trying to take control of the country. Intense fighting between Soviet and Hungarian forces continued until October 30, when Russian troops began a limited withdrawal—for a brief moment, the revolution appeared to be victorious. This brief interlude of stability would not last long as the revisionist policies of newly elected leader Imre Nagy triggered an even larger Soviet intervention on November 4. This time, Soviet forces brutally crushed the opposition, killing thousands of activists and executing Nagy before installing a friendly government headed by Janos Kadar.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> David A. Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism: A History of the Communist Party of the United States since 1945* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham Bookseller, 1971), 272, 276-7. While Khrushchev held nothing back in criticizing Stalin's crimes, he was extremely careful not to criticize the Party apparatus itself or the basic principles of Soviet Communism. This was an important, early example of the apparent limits of Party reform within the Soviet Union

<sup>9</sup> Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism*, 309-311. Nagy's invitation of non-communist groups to participate in Hungarian politics and his wishes to leave the Warsaw Pact—a move he believed would facilitate the

Between the first and second Soviet interventions, Gates channeled the message of the Secret Speech in his first editorials on the Hungarian situation. Hungary and Poland essentially showed that building Socialism through “Stalinist repression” was tantamount to political suicide and counterintuitive. “Socialism,” he argued, “will triumph if it proves its superiority to capitalism in every respect. It cannot triumph by repression or violations of democracy.” Gates also criticized the current Soviet leadership—a bold and unprecedented move for the *Daily Worker*—in claiming that the Soviet Union’s assessment of Hungarian revolutionaries was flawed.”[The Soviets] flew in the face of facts when they described the Hungarian upsurge as the work of a pro-fascist underground.” Further emphasizing the ideals of the optimism of the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, Gates argued that the recent Congress “registered the need for ending with Stalinism. And the Soviet Union was making changes in the direction of democratization. However, this process is too slow and hesitant, as the Soviet actions in the Polish and Hungarian crises demonstrate.”<sup>10</sup>

Gates’ criticisms were bold, and the Party’s National Committee was slow to announce an official statement on the crisis. Partially owing to Foster’s absence from the meeting due to health problems, the Committee eventually adopted a position that accepted the *Daily Worker*’s interpretation of events. The second Soviet intervention on November 4 essentially nullified the official statement.<sup>11</sup>

The second intervention precipitated the complete division within the Party between the “Gateseites” and the “Fosterites.” The primary point of contention lay in the justifications for the Soviet attack. Foster and his supporters justified Soviet actions as necessary for the prevention of

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creation of a more democratic Socialist state free from Russian influence—was particularly frightening to the Soviets

<sup>10</sup> Editorial, *Daily Worker*, October 29, 1956.

<sup>11</sup> Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism*, 313.

fascist forces within Hungary, funded by western imperialists, from threatening the peace in Europe. Fortunately for Foster, the concurrent Suez crisis in the Middle East—interpreted as a blatantly imperial, aggressive active by the West—fed his apocalyptic predictions of what would happen if counter-revolutionary forces had their way in Hungary.<sup>12</sup> Eugene Dennis, now slowly adopting Foster’s views, openly attacked the Gates faction for their unwarranted criticism of the Soviet Union and “making the mistake of looking at [the Soviet Union] through the eyes of the American imperialists.”<sup>13</sup>

Gates’ camp immediately recognized the contradiction of imposing peace through violent oppression. The Hungarian action, Gates argued in an editorial, “retards the development of socialism because socialism cannot be imposed on a country by force.”<sup>14</sup> Fellow editor Alan Max took a step further through an uncomfortable comparison of West Germany and Hungary: “To say that such a decision was inevitable only emphasizes the tragic errors of 11 years of Stalinist rule. Think of the implications of the fact that Hungary, after 11 years of a certain kind of Communist rule, faced a fascist resurgence, while West Germany after 11 years of Adenauer faces a labor-backed Social Democratic victory in the next election!”<sup>15</sup> Lester Rodney, the Sports editor for the paper, challenged the Soviet Union’s interpretation of events and its role in preventing counter-revolution: “I am afraid I no longer have confidence in the ability of the Soviet leaders to decide when a nation is fascist or going fascist. Eight years ago we were told that Yugoslavia was fascist.”<sup>16</sup> Many of these back-and-forth critiques appeared in the same issue of the paper, and sometimes even on the same page. The *Daily Worker* readership seemed equally divided, with numerous letters to the editor either condemning or adamantly supporting

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<sup>12</sup> Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism*, 316.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene Dennis, “Momentous Events in Eastern Europe,” *Daily Worker*, November 8, 1956.

<sup>14</sup> Editorial, *Daily Worker*, November 5, 1956.

<sup>15</sup> Editorial, *Daily Worker*, November 8, 1956.

<sup>16</sup> Lester Rodney, “A View on Hungary,” *Daily Worker*, November 20, 1956.

Soviet actions. The two sides appeared almost incapable of compromise, as the growing division within the Party seemed bound to result in a complete party split.

The Gatesites, however, suffered from their own disunity and indecision. Although Gates was a staunch supporter of changing the political direction of the Party, he frequently found himself compromising with Foster and his allies in order to prevent a split. Gates acknowledged that he had enough support within the Party to break away from Foster's camp. At this point, however, he believed that the Party had become too small and weak to survive another prominent split. For the next year, through a series of conferences and Party referendums, Foster's obstinacy forced Gates to lose the confidence of his supporters through a series of concessions, including a halt in the criticism of Soviet policies and open-ended editorials.<sup>17</sup> Reform-minded communists fled from the Party in droves, including most of Gates editorial staff. Gates also lost the support of Party moderates like Dennis and Flynn, who eventually believed that Gates' anti-Stalinism was more dangerous than Foster's dogmatism. As the ranks of the Gatesites gradually thinned, Foster, who had for a long time been unable to completely silence the revisionists or rebuff their critiques, began to gain the upper hand.

From the outset, the Fosterites had ideology on their side: As per Lenin's decrees, while national self-determination was paramount to the Communist movement, "the democratic interests of *one* country must be subordinated to the democratic interests of *several and all* countries."<sup>18</sup> Since the Soviet Union had long been "the first and mightiest Socialist power," it reserved the right to steer any deviationist or revisionist Socialist state back into the "correct path."<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Gates and his associates violated the cardinal principle of democratic

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<sup>17</sup> John Gates, *The Story of an American Communist* (New York: Nelson, 1958), 192-3.

<sup>18</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up," Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jul/x01.htm> (accessed November 24, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism*, 347.

centralism, which advocated a completely unified Party position on all policies. Gates, due to his refusal to adopt what Foster and Dennis believed to be the majority and “correct” policy on Hungary, became the embodiment of deviationism and a threat to the Party at large.

The lasting impact of any “moderate” position on the invasion is more difficult to determine. In the midst of the Gates-Foster quarrel, prominent west coast communist Dorothy Healey advocated her own neutralist position. While she believed that the invasion was necessary to maintain stability and a European peace, she denied Foster’s allegations of a Western conspiracy to topple the Soviet bloc and instead blamed the crisis on Soviet “great power chauvinism” and the mistakes of the pre-revolutionary Hungarian party leadership. While Healey maintains that “a majority” of American communists held a moderate view, a glance at the readers’ letters column of the *Daily Worker* in late 1956 shows a clear polarization of Party opinion.<sup>20</sup>

Although the *Daily Worker*’s debate on Hungary continued well into 1957, the Fosterites were clearly overwhelming the revisionists by the middle of the year. In May, prominent Party intellectual and Foster supporter Herbert Aptheker published *The Truth about Hungary* in an attempt to provide the scholarly last word on the overall debate. A Columbia University Ph.D. and specialist in African American history, Aptheker attempted to justify indisputably the Soviet actions in Hungary through an exhausting historical analysis. Agreeing with Foster, Aptheker’s primary conclusion was that “international imperialism played a basic and decisive role” in the decision to intervene in Hungary.<sup>21</sup>

The book’s first review in the *Daily Worker* was an uncharacteristically thoughtful critique in an era where virtually all Communist publications automatically received glowing

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<sup>20</sup> Dorothy Healey and Maurice Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers: A Life in the American Communist Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 161.

<sup>21</sup> Herbert Aptheker, *The Truth about Hungary* (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus Reprint), 1957.

reviews that resembled marketing endorsements rather than critical evaluations. The reviewer, Robert Friedman, while praising Aptheker's ability to extract a wealth of information from "many scattered sources," ultimately disagreed with the author's primary conclusions. Aptheker's description of events, Friedman argued, was not "the full and absolute truth on Hungary" and did not adequately justify the Soviet intervention.<sup>22</sup> Fosterites immediately attacked Friedman's review in five follow-up reviews, one written by Foster himself, within the next week. A "Faithful Reader" condemned Friedman's "obvious inadequacy in historical scholarship made all the more appalling by his dismissal of the book and his crude attack upon the Soviet Union." The only marginally supportive letter of defense for Friedman appeared in an Open Letter to the "faithful reader," which similarly denounced the reviewer's scholarship but defended his right to publish it in the daily.<sup>23</sup> The Fosterites, it would seem, had finally won the battle over Hungary in the pages of the *Daily Worker*.

Behind the scenes, Foster worked diligently to undermine Gates position through the destruction of the *Daily Worker*. This action would not prove difficult: Ironically, a period of incredible democratization and open editorial policies within the paper coincided with extreme financial hardships. By 1956, the daily was in a critical financial situation, paying for publication virtually issue-by-issue using rapidly diminishing reader donations. Although the Party leadership had long considered the daily to be an integral part of the Party's operation, Foster was willing to sacrifice the publication to crush Gates and unify the Party. As Gates' position continually weakened, Foster finally managed to secure a National Committee referendum to

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Friedman, "Review of Aptheker's Truth about Hungary," *Daily Worker*, June 19, 1957.

<sup>23</sup> "Letter to the editor," *Daily Worker*, June 26, 1957.; "Open Letter to a 'Faithful Reader,'" *Daily Worker*, July 2, 1957.

shut down the *Daily Worker*. On January 9, the paper ran its last issue; with his primary vehicle for reform now defunct, Gates resigned his position as Editor-in-Chief the next day.<sup>24</sup>

The effective purge of Gates and the consolidation of a conservative leadership group around Foster and Dennis had ominous consequences for the future of the Party. Through staunch their use of ideological precepts, the Foster camp effectively neutralized any opposition within the Party by 1957. The Party justified violations of national self-determination through the prevention of counter-revolution and the promotion of world-peace. Within the Party itself, the Fosterites advocated a strict adherence to democratic centralism to blunt any criticism towards the Soviet Union. The Hungarian crisis should have sparked a continuous inner-party debate on the true role of Soviet leadership in the international Communist movement. Instead, it set the party on the path to complete Stalinization. As the rest of the international communist movement moved towards reform and away from Stalinism—as per the decrees of the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress—the CPUSA retreated into isolation and conservative reaction.

## **Chapter 2: “A Victory for Peace”**

While the Hungarian Revolution revealed the discomfiting reality of Soviet foreign policy and the contradictions of peaceful coexistence, the events of October 1962 shockingly justified the Soviet concept’s practical foundations—the prevention of thermonuclear war. In its coverage and analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the CPUSA—similar to its line on Hungary—used both ideological and practical reasoning to promote a peaceful resolution to the emergency. The Party emphasized practicality more prominently than before, reflecting how seemingly close the world came to a nuclear holocaust, in an effort to reassert itself within the Left’s global outcry for world peace. However, the Party still could not reconcile the contradictions between

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<sup>24</sup> Gates, *The Story of an American Communist*, 190.

its practical political objectives and its ideological precepts; the latter objective continually trumped the former. The Party's complete loyalty to Moscow and outright refusal to criticize Soviet policy during the crisis hurt American Communists politically by marginalizing them further from the broader Left. A steady consolidation of conservative leadership within the Party, led by new General Secretary Gus Hall, made this distinct position possible.

In the years after the 1956 party crisis, and the subsequent purge of the Party's "soft-communist" faction, the CPUSA continued to receive criticism on its contradictory policy of promoting peace. These critiques resulted from the Party leadership's absolute refusal to modify their old position. While opponents of the Party claimed that the Soviet Union's actions in Hungary invalidated the superpower's position as vanguard of world peace, the CPUSA turned the intervention into the greatest justification for Moscow's continued actions.

John Gates' experience speaking at Boston's Ford Forum in November 1957 illustrates what the journalist described as the Party's "tragic mental attitude" towards peace and the Soviet Union. Speaking on the same platform with Granville Hicks—a former communist who left the Party following the signing of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact in 1939—Gates advocated what he believed to be a tempered and proactive initiative for achieving world peace. "As an American," Gates proclaimed, "I wanted to see my country try to take the initiative in halting the H-Bomb tests, and gain for itself the moral credit of such a step; as a Communist, I wanted to see the Soviet Union take the initiative; as a human being, I wanted both countries to agree to the simultaneous cessation of tests."<sup>25</sup>

Although the more moderate crowd in Boston received his words with praise, his position produced a considerable stir at the Party headquarters in New York. Benjamin Davis—a prominent party conservative and Stalinist—criticized Gates not only for making a distinction

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<sup>25</sup> John Gates, *The Story of an American Communist*, 187-8.

between communists and Americans, but also for even suggesting the notion that the Soviet Union cease its bomb tests. Ironically, the Soviet Union would in fact be the first nation to call for a three-power moratorium in nuclear testing less than six months later, laying the foundation for the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty.<sup>26</sup>

Criticism of the Party's calls for peace also continued from the US Government. Although the darkest days of the party's persecution under McCarthyism were over, the US Government continued to subpoena many of its leaders, including Gus Hall, to testify before the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act about the current nature of the movement. Gus Hall's testimony before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary in February 1960 was the centerpiece of the US government's interpretation of the CPUSA's position on peace and its objectives to discredit the organization further. Hall was a model of ambiguity and secrecy, and his near-constant use of his Fifth Amendment rights visibly frustrates the committee members. His rare outbursts and continued silence in response to the committee's probing set the stage for the Party's reaction to the Cuban Crisis.

If the committee's explicit purpose was to investigate the direction of the Party under its new leadership, its implicit purpose was to discredit the party and its policy of peaceful coexistence. The committee first attempted to discredit Hall as a communist pretender, asking from where he produced the funds to purchase his own gasoline station and fund his nation-spanning "vacation" after his release from jail.<sup>27</sup> The committee then proceeded to question Hall's commitment to the Soviet Union's conception of peace by highlighting his ideological training in subversion and guerilla warfare at Moscow's International Lenin School. "In

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<sup>26</sup> John Gates, *The Story of an American Communist*, 189.

<sup>27</sup> Subcommittee To Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws (Senate Committee on the Judiciary), *Communist Leadership. "Tough Guy" Takes Charge. Testimony by and about Gus Hall*, 1960. Ironically, Hall himself used these critiques of being a "communist pretender" to discredit former Party Chairman Eugene Dennis before his ousting in 1959

communist parlance,” the committee taunted, “‘peace’ means ‘a state of affairs under which there is no opposition any longer to communism.’”<sup>28</sup> The committee used Hall’s prior history to juxtapose the Party member’s previous sponsorship of class warfare and violent government overthrow with his current policy of peaceful coexistence.

Although Hall’s ideological background had been on prominent display, the Party leader rejected the notion that his politics were disconnected from reality. Responding to whether or not he would defend the United States in the event of a war with the Soviet Union, Hall calls the committee’s questioning “ridiculous in the present set of circumstances, with atomic weapons and hydrogen weapons. I don’t think that kind of question is even practical or makes any sense whatever.”<sup>29</sup>

The rise of Gus Hall to the position of General Secretary was an important point of transition for the CPUSA, and his leadership would have a clear impact on the party’s future course. Although he had been a prominent communist agitator for decades, Hall was a relative newcomer to the Party’s inner circle. Since he had been in prison during most of the tumultuous 1950s, Hall never needed to take a position on events such as Hungary and the Secret Speech, which ultimately established his reputation as a fresh outsider. A shrewd politician and charmer, Hall skillfully outmaneuvered several popular Party members, such as Henry Winston and Gil Green, to secure his position as General Secretary.<sup>30</sup>

Hall also displayed remarkable optimism in a time when American Communism was in danger of becoming completely irrelevant. Dorothy Healey recalls an informal Los Angeles Party gathering in the early 1960s, where Hall triumphantly told a group of Party officials that the Sino-Soviet split was ending. Healey confronted him as to the origins of his information,

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<sup>28</sup> Subcommittee, 1960.

<sup>29</sup> Subcommittee, 1960.

<sup>30</sup> Healey and Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers*, 172.

which completely contradicted her own observations that the conflict was only intensifying. He responded, “Yes I know, but I said it anyway because it makes the comrades feel better.”<sup>31</sup> Healey eventually began to refer to Hall as “Dr. Pangloss,” in reference to the irrationally optimistic character in Voltaire’s *Candide*, and claimed that the General Secretary’s positive thinking was more appropriate for authors of self-help books than for leaders of revolutionary movements.<sup>32</sup> Despite evidence to the contrary, Hall believed that the international Left was growing more united every year, and the General Secretary could turn almost any situation into a victory for the Party. With most of his enemies purged and his Old-Communist benefactors—including William Z. Foster and Benjamin Davis—deceased, imprisoned or retired by the early 1960s, Hall assumed an unopposed senior role within the party.

Along with fellow Stalinist Herbert Aptheker, Hall became a prolific pamphleteer and the dominant voice within Communist publications such as the *Worker*—now distributed weekly—and the monthly *Political Affairs*. Hall emphasized his position on peaceful coexistence—unchanged since the 1950s—in an April 1962 pamphlet entitled *The US in Today’s World*. Perhaps in an effort to attract mainstream liberals, Hall agreed with President Kennedy’s popular idea of the “new frontier.” He notes, however, that Americans must view this frontier as moving specifically towards peaceful coexistence, the end of the Cold War, disarmament and neo-colonialism. He urges readers to refrain from falling into the “reactionary trap” of right wing war mongers within the US Government, contending that the “enemy of our security, freedom and peace is not abroad, the enemy is here at home.”<sup>33</sup> While Hall successfully defines peaceful coexistence as competition through technology, economy and culture, he fails to address several

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<sup>31</sup> Healey and Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers*, 204.

<sup>32</sup> Healey and Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers*, 205.

<sup>33</sup> Gus Hall, *The United States in Today's World: Report to the National Committee of the Communist Party, U.S.A.* (New York: New Century Publishers, 1961), 27.

glaring ideological discrepancies that remained from his committee hearing, such as how peaceful coexistence would continue alongside class warfare.

When the Cuban Missile Crisis flared up in October 1962, Hall's influence on the Party press was immediately evident, with editorials and general proclamations by the General Secretary appearing in nearly every issue of the *Worker* for the next several weeks. An editorial by Hall in the *Worker* on October 28—when the crisis reached its height—dictated the CPUSA's official position on the crisis. Invoking the “fundamental ethic of religious faith” of “do unto others,” the CPUSA declared that President Kennedy's threats of a blockade would “become the death warrant for world peace and the life of our nation.” The editorial and its surrounding articles have a clear Soviet slant, adopting the official Moscow line of “defensive nuclear missiles” on the island and declaring American actions against Cuba criminal and imperialist in nature. Another article delves deeper into Marxist dogma, suggesting that President Kennedy is using the crisis as a means to distract the people from a looming economic recession, domestic racial issues and a seemingly shaky American leadership position in NATO.<sup>34</sup>

A number of articles in the October 28 issue indicate a sincere desire by the Party to connect with the peace movement. Hall's editorial cites numerous opinion polls—although he mentions no specific pollster—that indicate a majority of Americans are opposed to further aggressive action by Kennedy in the crisis. Hall, as well as other columnists, ultimately stressed Communist agreement with what appears to be a majority of the nation. The issue includes numerous full-page features and extensive coverage of the United Auto Workers union demonstrating against the “warmongering bosses,” the 700 women of the Strike for Peace in front of the United Nations building, the 2,000 Student Peace Union protesters in Washington

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<sup>34</sup> Daniel Mason, “Kennedy Listens to the Warmongers, Not the People, on Cuba Issue,” *The Worker*, October 28, 1962.

D.C., and the speeches of various “peace candidates”—candidates for the United States Senate who urged the President to cease aggression.<sup>35</sup> While these reports lauded the various peace activists for the efforts, there was no mention of direct Party participation in any of the gatherings, or an independent gathering of the Communist Party itself.

Eventually, the Party press abandoned its relief and returned to its ideological attacks against the United States. On October 30—two days after the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw its missiles in exchange for Kennedy’s promise not to invade Cuba—the subheading on the front-page of the *Worker* declared a “victory for peace, responsibility, for the love of humanity, for plain common sense. The winners were all mankind.” As the article continues, however, the author reiterates the objective moral superiority of the Soviet Union, as well as the notion that the crisis was “a direct result of a policy of antagonism to the Cuban people initiated during the Eisenhower administration, and carried out so disastrously during the Kennedy administration. It was precisely the constant threats, the intimidations by Washington that forced Cuba into a posture of defense.” The final Party analysis suggested that the Soviet Union, which was “profoundly committed to peace,” acted solely as an honest protector of Cuban sovereignty, while the United States displayed unparalleled imperialism and aggression in its policies. The CPUSA essentially negated any degree of legitimacy within the peace movement it had gained over the previous week through its strict adherence to Soviet ideological justifications.

In analyzing the Party’s strict ideological position on the crisis, it is just as important to examine the information that the Party press *left-out*. In the immediate aftermath of the crisis, numerous international intellectuals and news outlets referred to the Soviet action towards Cuba

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<sup>35</sup> Fred Gilman, “700 Women Picket UN, Hit Blockade as Periling World,” *The Worker*, October 28, 1962. By the end of the crisis, the protest in front of the UN would grow to 10,000 peace activists.; Mike Davidow, “Peace Candidates Warn Blockade Perils World” *The Worker*, October 28, 1962.

as a modern day “Munich”—in reference to the Western European Great Powers abandoning Czechoslovakia to the Nazis in 1938. James Reston, writing for the *New York Times* on October 28, believed that the Soviet Union had ultimately committed a “Munich” towards the Cubans. The crisis’ aftermath, Reston writes, demonstrated that the United States “*did not* make a deal with the Soviet Union at the expense of Turkey, while the same thing can scarcely be said about the Soviet Union in its relations with Premier Fidel Castro.” Likewise, an editorial in the Chinese *Peking People’s Daily* directly accuses Khrushchev and the Soviets of “playing the Munich scheme against the Cuban people” and practicing a policy of appeasement towards the United States.<sup>36</sup> British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, no doubt conscious of his own country’s history, offered a more imposing analysis of the Cuban aftermath in his address to the House of Commons. While the Prime minister mostly agreed with Reston’s analysis, he was more forceful in lauding Kennedy’s firm stand against the Soviets, and warned that any wavering could have resulted in “a kind of ‘super-Munich’ that easily could have led to the collapse of the free world.”<sup>37</sup>

The *Worker* completely ignored the accusations of a “Munich style” deal throughout the crisis. Furthermore, while the paper published numerous statements by both Kennedy and Khrushchev, it published only one statement by Fidel Castro throughout the entire crisis—a statement which merely mimicked the Soviet proclamation of Cuban sovereignty from American imperialism. Castro himself would later admit that the Soviet decision to withdraw the missiles

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<sup>36</sup> John Roderick, “Chinese Likened Soviet Action on Cuba to Munich Appeasement,” *The Washington Post*, November 6, 1962.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Estabrook, “New ‘Munich’ Avoided, Says Macmillan,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1962.

without consulting the Cuban government “offended us a great deal.” He felt that the final agreement was reached essentially behind his back.<sup>38</sup>

The Party response to this and other criticisms was conspicuously absent until the publication of Gus Hall’s next pamphlet in early 1963, *The Only Choice: Peaceful Coexistence*. Hall reaffirmed his and the *Worker’s* previous support for peaceful coexistence, and adopted the Cuban Missile Crisis as the primary model for the principle’s success. His response to recent criticisms of the Party and the Soviet Union, however, was extremely underwhelming. In response to the accusation of a Soviet “Munich” toward Cuba, Hall offered no concrete rebuttal, stating succinctly, “such slander must be rejected.”<sup>39</sup> Hall’s response towards an earlier recurring criticism—concerning the collision between peaceful coexistence and class warfare—was slightly more grounded, but still weak in substance. Hall stated, rather bluntly, that there was *no contradiction* between peaceful coexistence and class struggle. He further stressed the practical necessity—now made existential by the Cuban Missile Crisis—of peaceful coexistence, arguing that it was “the result of a changing *objective world reality*, of *realism*, and of good common sense” Offering no further evidence for his claim, he declares that peaceful coexistence “enriches Marxism, and, therefore, enriches the class struggle.”<sup>40</sup>

Once again, the CPUSA allowed a pervasive, ideologically driven devotion to the Soviet Union to further erode its position among the broader American left. The Party achieved their explicit and immediate political objective through the prevention of nuclear war. They failed, however, in a more implicit political objective that involved reestablishing a broader base of support among liberal circles. Had the Party—or more specifically Gus Hall—withheld its inert

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<sup>38</sup> Ignacio Ramonet, Fidel Castro and Andrew Hurley, *Fidel Castro: My Life: A Spoken Autobiography* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 278.

<sup>39</sup> Gus Hall, *The Only Choice: Peaceful Coexistence* (New York: New Century Publishers, 1963), 27.

<sup>40</sup> Hall, *The Only Choice*, 25.

dogmatism to actively engage with various peace activists in 1962, and allowed more democratic discussion within the Party ranks, it may have been able to regain its long lost political relevance within the Left. The Party, however, seemed satisfied in its own “victory” for peaceful coexistence. The Cuban Missile Crisis was arguably the last opportunity for the Party to reclaim its relevance on the political left. Through its spectacular affirmation of peaceful coexistence, the events of October 1962 would instead serve as a critical juncture for the complete Stalinization of the Party by 1968.

### **Chapter 3: Czechoslovakia and Party Consolidation**

In the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Gus Hall would continue his mission to steer the CPUSA towards a more traditional Marxist-Leninist path. While new, younger leaders and activists were simultaneously invigorating the broader American Left, Hall’s political agenda would largely mimic that of the Soviet Union. In 1964, a group of hard-liners within the CPSU politburo, led by Leonid Brezhnev and Alexei Kosygin, would remove First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev from the First Chairmanship of the Soviet Union. Disturbed by the former leader’s erratic behavior—especially his perceived cowardice in the face of President Kennedy during the Cuban Crisis—the new leadership wished to reestablish a more stable, conservative approach to socialism within the Soviet Union, free from revisionism. Hall would similarly stifle reform within the CPUSA. His quick and decisive suppression of Party dissent in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was a product of his ruthlessly orthodox leadership style and his use of the apparent ideological and practical lessons of the previous twelve years.

Throughout the mid-1960s, Hall’s policies would continue to isolate the CPUSA from the broader left and cause dismay among the few Party reformers that remained. Dorothy Healey and

Al Richmond's SCDCP was the largest and seemingly only viable source of opposition to Hall in the National Committee. Healey confronted Hall's policies as a member of the National Committee, and Richmond's editorial policies in the west-coast *People's World* continued to deviate from the official party line set by the east-coast *Worker*. Hall continuously attacked numerous positions taken by Healey, including her decision to support Democrat Pat Brown for the 1966 California Governor's race. While Healey believed that her support for Brown against a conservative and fiercely anti-Communist Ronald Reagan would attract more liberals to the Party, Hall found Brown's support for the Vietnam War completely unacceptable and unworthy of support, regardless of Reagan's own positions.<sup>41</sup> Privately, Healey began to lose hope for any sort of reform within the Party so long as Hall remained its leader. In a letter to her friend and fellow National Committee member Gil Green in 1967, she wrote, "I am convinced that the time has run out for this Party. Gus has managed to strip it of any capacity for relevancy and that has its continuing, and algebraic, effect on the future."<sup>42</sup> Her prediction would hold true for the Party leadership's reaction to the next crisis of international Communism.

Reform-minded communists and Leftists around the world were surprised and elated by the new developments in Czechoslovakia at the beginning of 1968. Spurred by a mounting economic recession, several younger leaders within the Czechoslovak Communist Party, including Slovakian Regional Secretary Alexander Dubcek and Economist Ota Sik, began to challenge the leadership of aging First Secretary and President Antonin Novotny. Dubcek would subsequently replace Novotny as First Secretary on January 5, while fellow reformer Ludvik

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<sup>41</sup> Healey and Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers*, 204.

<sup>42</sup> Dorothy Healey to Gil Green, ca. 1967; Gil Green Papers; TAM 095; box 1; folder 17; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives  
Elmer Holmes Bobst Library  
70 Washington Square South  
New York, NY 10012, New York University Libraries.

Svoboda would completely remove him from power by succeeding him as president on March 22. The new leaders, realizing that economic and political reforms needed to work in tandem, embarked on a campaign of liberalization and democratization known as the “Prague Spring.” Their initiatives to promote “socialism with a human face” would include abolishing censorship, removing conservative Communist Party members from the Party, curtailing the powers of the secret police, and the possibility of a multi-party government in the future.<sup>43</sup>

The implications of a reformed socialist democracy in Czechoslovakia were genuinely exciting for reformist communists in the United States and elsewhere. Travelling throughout Eastern Europe in the spring, Healey described the joy of the liberalization of Czechoslovakia when compared to the dull atmosphere of its neighbors: “Here I had just come from East Germany, with its Prussian-style Communism, which had led me to the brink of despair. And now I was in a neighboring Communist country where these Communist intellectuals... were freely debating the same kinds of questions that had so disturbed me ever since the Twentieth Congress [of the Soviet Union].”<sup>44</sup> Healey returned to the United States that summer with the sense that a true, non-repressive Socialist democracy was possible; the relatively cautious Soviet response gave her little reason to worry.

As the initially modest reforms began to widen into a sort of cultural renaissance for Czechoslovakia, Soviet leaders became increasingly concerned. The Prague Spring reforms, they worried, were rapidly spreading beyond the control of the Czech Communist Party. Thinking of future contingencies, and remembering the lessons of Hungary, the Soviets feared that if reforms continued unchecked, Czechoslovakia would become a new breeding ground for counter-

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<sup>43</sup> Kramer, *The Prague Spring*, 39.

<sup>44</sup> Healey and Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers*, 226.

revolutionary danger. Dubcek, also cognizant of Nagy's mistakes in 1956, constantly reassured the Soviet leadership of his commitment to friendship with the Soviet Union.<sup>45</sup>

The CPUSA official position on the Prague Spring was one of disapproval and concern that was in line with the Soviet reaction. Most of the Party's criticism emerged in the *Daily World*, a new daily paper that replaced the weekly *Worker* in early 1968. The creation of the paper itself was one of several efforts by Gus Hall to combat the growing influence of Al Richmond's *People's World*. The political views of the paper's co-founder and Editor-in-Chief, John Pittman, were drastically different from former *Daily Worker* editor John Gates. Pittman and his editorial policies reflected both the conservative position of the American Party leadership and the official line in Moscow. Initial criticism of the Prague spring by the *Daily World* was slow and sporadic, and seemed to intensify as the summer progressed and Soviet fears intensified. Articles frequently criticized the mainstream press, particularly the *New York Times*, in their approval of democratization in Czechoslovakia: "The purpose [of this praise], of course, is to provide a political cover for anti-socialist enemies of the Czechoslovak government and Communist Party."<sup>46</sup> The hand of western imperialism was once again seen a ubiquitous force that operated under the guise of democratization.

The eventual invasion of Czechoslovakia on August 21 took much of the Party leadership by surprise. While the Secretariat of the Party scrambled to assemble the National Committee for an official statement on the crisis, Hall used his privilege as General Secretary to get the secure the first-word on events in Prague. While he acknowledged that the Party did not have "all the facts necessary to make clear whether or not there was any alternative" to military action, he concluded that the Soviet actions were ultimately necessary for the defense of socialism.

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<sup>45</sup> Kramer, *The Prague Spring*, 44.

<sup>46</sup> Erik Bert, "The Times' ideological attack: The Cia's 'idealist' banner in East Europe," *Daily World*, August 17, 1968.

Establishing the CPUSA's authority on the counter-revolution, as a "party existing within the world center of imperialism," Hall urged his readers not to underestimate the apparent undercurrents of imperialism and anti-socialist sentiment in Czechoslovakia prior to the intervention. Hall also sought to define the exact meaning of "freedom" and "democracy" in the context of the invasion in order to blunt possible criticism that the Soviets were suppressing the development of Social democracy: "We are for the defense of socialism. We are for the development of a democratic structure that is in keeping with the advancement of socialism. We are for freedom. But we are *not* for the freedom of those who endanger socialism."<sup>47</sup> Healey, exasperated by the General Secretary's bold attempt to circumvent the National Committee, responded to by releasing her own analysis. Contrary to Hall's interpretation, Healey's SCDCP declared the Czech invasion to be a "violation of the principles of autonomy and independence for each Communist Party."<sup>48</sup>

By essentially upstaging the National Committee through his own personal statement, Hall once again invoked the concept of democratic centralism: Since he was effectively establishing the "correct" policy on events, the rest of the Party was ideologically bound to follow him. When the National Committee finally met for an emergency meeting on Labor Day weekend, they voted on whether or not to endorse Gus Hall's statement, rather than form an objective response to the events. This decision was crucial: it enhanced the need to adhere to democratic centralism, since the structure of the Party—based off of the Soviet Union's own hierarchy—predicated complete adherence to the General Secretary's opinions and directives. The Committee voted by a margin of five-to-one to endorse Hall's statement. Healey and Richmond were the most vocal of the four National Committee members who denounced Hall's

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<sup>47</sup> Gus Hall, "Defense of socialism decisive—CP leader," *Daily World*, August 21, 1968.

<sup>48</sup> Healey and Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers*, 230.

statement.<sup>49</sup> The third dissenter was Herbert Aptheker's daughter Bettina, who seemed more interested in opposing her father than genuinely denouncing the invasion.<sup>50</sup> Gil Green, the final dissenter, would resign his position on the National Committee in protest of the results.<sup>51</sup>

The *Daily World's* editors immediately sided with Hall's analysis and showed considerable bias towards the Soviet justifications for invasion. Unlike most mainstream sources in the United States and Europe, who had reporters on the ground in Prague, the *Daily World* relied exclusively on wire dispatches from TASS—the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union—to report on the invasion. The overt bias of the Soviet news source was immediately obvious in the August 22 issue of the *Daily World*. The paper printed two articles side-by-side—one summarizing an August 20 statement from TASS on the invasion, and the other a description of a Prague Radio address from the Czech Communist Party on the same day. While the former column stated that Czechoslovak leaders essentially “invited” the Soviets to intervene, the latter claimed that the invasion happened “without the knowledge of the President of the Republic, the Chairman of the National Assembly, the Premier, or the First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.”<sup>52</sup> While few readers of the *Daily World* would pick up on this editorial blunder, the mainstream press would sharply criticize the Soviets on this stark contradiction.

Every editorial and guest article that appeared in the *Daily World* for the next month unquestionably supported the invasion. Familiar ideological justifications, such as the general threat of counter-revolution, the periodical focused on the practical fear of the Prague Spring mushrooming into a global conflagration. The paper printed numerous articles featuring West German troop movements along the Czech border—insinuating that the West was initiating its

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<sup>49</sup> “US Communist Party View of Czechoslovakia Events,” *Daily World*, September 4, 1968.

<sup>50</sup> Bettina Aptheker, *Intimate Politics: How I Grew Up Red, Fought for Free Speech, and Became a Feminist Rebel*, (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006), 211.

<sup>51</sup> Healey and Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers*, 236.

<sup>52</sup> “On Prague Radio,” *Daily World*, August 22, 1968.

own invasion ahead of a Czech insurrection. The *Daily World* exacerbated these fears by exploiting the thirtieth anniversary of the Nazi annexation of Czechoslovakia, documenting former Nazi Generals within the ranks of the West German Army, and manipulating rumors of a NATO deal to share Hydrogen bombs and delivery systems with the Federal Republic.<sup>53</sup>

While the *Daily World's* "From our Readers" column was noticeably smaller than equivalent section of the former *Daily Worker*, the new paper briefly adopted a recurring column expressly dedicated to readers' letters on the Czech crisis. Unlike 1956, where a majority of *Daily Worker* readers condemned Soviet actions in Hungary, the readers of the *Daily World* overwhelmingly supported the suppression of the Prague Spring. Both proponents and opponents of the Soviet action manipulated the memory of Hungary in their arguments. Those who supported the invasion argued that a preemptive action by the Soviets was necessary to halt the inevitability of the Prague Spring's counterrevolutionary nature. Those who denounced the invasion advocated that the peaceful reforms of the Czechoslovaks in 1968 were incomparable with the virtual collapse of the Hungarian Communist Party in 1956. One reader echoed the condemnations of 1956 and questioned the Soviet Union's ultimate commitment to world communism when he claimed that the "violation of the self-determination of a people is not consistent with the ideals of socialism; Socialism cannot be spread across national boundaries with tanks and bayonets." On the Soviet fusion of Marxist ideology and *realpolitik*, the reader stated that the Soviet Union, rather than be guided by the principles of Marxism, was "guided by considerations of ugly international realities and practical politics."<sup>54</sup>

As critics of the invasion, Dorothy Healey and Al Richmond did not match the success of John Gates twelve years earlier. Within weeks, Hall managed to isolate and ostracize Healey

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<sup>53</sup> "W. Germany aids Czech rightists," *Daily World*, August 29, 1968.

<sup>54</sup> "More Discussion Wanted," *Daily World*, September 10, 1968.

within the National Committee, even turning her own Los Angeles district against her. Also, Hall's good relationship with current *Daily World* editor John Pittman ensured that the Party press would censor and ignore dozens of critical articles written by Richmond. By the end of the year, the Party's discussions of Czechoslovakia were essentially over. Healey and Richmond, now treated as general pariahs, left the Party in disgrace. By the end of the crisis, Hall had firmly consolidated his conservative leadership, and virtually guaranteed the Party's continued slide into irrelevance within the broader political left.

### **Conclusion**

The overlooked history of the CPUSA from 1956 to 1968 was a critical juncture for the Party on its eventual path to political irrelevance. This slide into conservative dogmatism and triviality, however, was hardly inevitable, despite the assumptions of traditionalist historians. The evolving international situation during those twelve years, and the crises that it produced, created opportunities for the Party to steer itself away from the path of Stalinism. The continued prevalence of past ideological concepts, however, hindered this evolution. Eventually, the international situation allowed the Party to merge ideology and practicality in order to justify its positions, regardless of the fairly obvious contradictions of these approaches. Certain levels of disagreement within the CPUSA may have provided an opportunity for the Party to change its tack. Nevertheless, ideology, now fused with realism, proved decisive in the organization's eventual outlook.

The role of individuals during this struggle cannot be ignored. This is particularly true in the case of Gus Hall, who almost single-handedly managed to steer the party towards Stalinism after a brief period of reform during the late 1950s. Thus, while the rest of the international Left

moved towards reform during the 1960s, the CPUSA went in the opposite direction. The CPUSA's bureaucratic structure—modeled after the Soviet Union—allowed Hall to essentially dictate the Party's course himself. This was, of course, one of the original great ironies of political Communism: While the Party itself was supposed to be a vehicle for the masses, all power within this Party was still concentrated at the top levels.

In retrospect, it is interesting to imagine how the Party's course would have changed if someone other than Hall succeeded Eugene Dennis after 1959. The fact that Gil Green—who was in position to become General Secretary in 1959—protested the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia shows that the Party's course could have been altered in the 1960s. Of course, Eugene Dennis' eventual "conversion" to the Foster camp in the wake of the Hungarian invasion shows that even the General Secretary is susceptible to internal influence. Hall's own determined leadership style, as well as the lack of any firm revisionist opposition by the late 1960s, demonstrates the limits of internal influence and reform within the Party.

Despite the decline of communism's significance today, this essay should raise several important questions about contemporary politics. The conflict that the Party always thought it was fighting with the outside world—one that pitted revolutionaries against reactionaries—seemed to manifest itself within the internal Party ranks. Why the Party reformers consistently faltered in the face of conservative opposition begs the question of why the overall political Right is consistently so much more organized and determined than the Left.

Moving beyond Communism, it is important to consider that the Party, at its core, is an ideologically driven organization. Although the realities of the time period had a substantial impact on their thinking, Marxist-Leninist ideology colored American Party's reactions considerably. Ideology is not confined to politics or political organizations, manifesting itself in

religion, social activism, scientific groups and elsewhere. Examining this episode in the CPUSA's history adds insight to how these organizations deal with the contradictions that can form when realism and ideology essentially become one and the same.

Moving even further, beyond ideology, this essay should raise certain questions from the standpoint of contemporary foreign policy. American Communists constantly wrestled with the notion that the Soviet Union was the *de facto* moral and ideological leader of the world Communist movement—one that was supposed to be based on international unity and equality. Was what was good for the Soviet Union *really* good for the entire Communist movement? One can ask the same question in regards to the United States. Despite obvious differences in ideology and values, the United States has, for much of its recent history, engaged in a similar “world project” as the Soviet Union. Are the United States' best interests truly identical with those of the world, or is there the same conflict between ensuring strictly national interests and promoting the “common good?” What is the proper role of ideology, and how can one understand the contradiction of spreading democracy and freedom through the barrel of a gun. While this particular twelve-year case study of the CPUSA cannot hope to answer these difficult questions definitively, it can at least provide an additional avenue for addressing them.

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