THE RED AND THE BLACK

As racial, religious, and ethnic cleavages faded among the mass of industrial workers in the midst of the naked class war of the 1930s, the overt bigotry and narrow exclusionism that disfigured the AFL isolated it from the newly burgeoning workers’ movement of “self-organization.” The insurgency inside the AFL’s Machinists union (IAM) was exemplary of the enveloping schism within the AFL, in which the issue of interracial unity repeatedly came to the fore. Despite the IAM leaders’ announcement in March 1936 that they would extend their union’s jurisdiction to include metal and transport workers, skilled and unskilled alike, they refused to abandon their long-standing admissions policy of “whites only.”

Later that year, at the IAM’s November convention, young “Jimmy” Matles called for the abolition of the IAM’s secret initiation ritual restricting membership to “Caucasians.” Shutting blacks out, recalled Matles, “was something the industrial unionists didn’t intend to live with.” When he and his fellow delegates rose to speak for their motion, “the convention became bedlam [and] . . . chairs started to fly. The young delegates could hardly be heard amidst

1 The AFL’s leadership and its affiliates long had been deeply implicated in making “color a caste,” or in reinforcing an established “color-caste system” in which black workers, if they were hired at all, were “the last hired, and the first fired,” and were relegated, compared with white workers, to the more dangerous, dirty, and menial jobs; on the rare occasions when blacks held the same jobs as whites, they were paid less, based on discriminatory wage scales, and they were excluded from skilled jobs (Stevenson 1993, p. 45; Ross 1967, pp. 3–13; Cochran 1977, p. 222n; Spero and Harris 1931; Noland and Bakke 1949; Hill 1968a, esp. pp. 367–88; 1985, pp. 6–21; Marshall 1967a, pp. 17–23; Myrdal 1944, p. 475). A study of the constitutions of 100 AFL affiliates and independent unions found that, in the early to mid-1940s, 17 still had a clause expressly limiting membership to “whites” or “Caucasians,” and 35 excluded noncitizens or admitted only, as the Boilermakers’ constitution specified, “a citizen of some civilized country.” Other unions had tacit understandings or used Jim Crow initiation rituals to exclude blacks, Indians, and Mexicans (Summers 1946; Peterson 1944, p. 51).

2 Matles and Higgins (1974, pp. 46–47); Filippelli and McColloch (1995, p. 40); Freeman (1989, p. 151). Even during World War II, IAM, like other AFL unions that began belatedly to organize along industrial lines, excluded (or expelled) already employed blacks from both skilled jobs and employment in the mass production industries, by using closed shop contracts, e.g., at Boeing Aircraft in Seattle, or by cooperating with employers who already excluded blacks, e.g., at Vultee Aircraft and North American Aviation in Los Angeles (Foner 1974, p. 233; Northrup 1943, pp. 218–19, 220n; Hill 1985, pp. 174, 178). Also see note 10 of this chapter.

3 Zieger (1995, pp. 337, 372); Goldfield (1995). Depending, of course, on the meaning of “sustained” in Zieger’s statement, for the TUEL and its successor TUL, from 1922 through 1935 on the very eve of the CIO’s formation, certainly had embraced the aspirations of black workers and the struggle for interracial equality. (See below.)

the hooting and hollering [by the old guard]. At the height of the uproar, [IAM President Arthur] Wharton banged his gavel, declared the ritual inviolate and adjourned the session . . . .” The suppression of their call for equal membership rights for black workers aroused Matles and the lodges under his leadership to secede and join UE and the CIO.

The Red-led Transport Workers Union (TWU) was also in the IAM briefly and its leaders, Mike Quill and John Santo, like Matles, “had agreed to affiliate with the IAM only after receiving assurances that its white and black members would be treated equally, in spite of the IAM’s normal whites-only policy.” At the one-and-only IAM convention in which TWU was represented, Quill and Santo joined Matles and left-wing delegates from other new IAM affiliates in the unsuccessful fight to eliminate the IAM’s Jim Crow ritual. The TWU then also bolted and joined the fledgling CIO.2

“Like a Bad Dream Gone”

From the moment of the CIO’s conception as a rebellious “committee for industrial organization” inside the AFL, its organizers appealed to workers on their own ethnic or racial ground as a way, paradoxically, not of separating them but of “articulating worker unity.” Under the old radical banner of “black and white, unite and fight,” the CIO would embrace the aspirations of black workers and fight for black–white equality, in the words of Robert Zieger, “as had no previous sustained American labor organization.”

At the start of the CIO drive at Inland Steel in 1935, for example, a white steel worker exclaimed to his fellows that he now realized that “you must forget that the man working beside you is a ‘Nigger,’ Jew or ‘Pollock.’ . . . [He] is a working man like yourself and being exploited by the ‘boss’ in the name of racial and religious prejudice. You work together — [So]
Fight Together!!!" The CIO's interracial organizing had "done the greatest thing in the world gettin' everybody who works in the yards together," said a black packinghouse worker in 1939, "and breakin' up the hate and bad feelings that used to be held against the Negro." Or as another black worker described the change wrought by the CIO at Armour's slaughterhouse: "The white butchers hated the Negroes because they figured they would scab on them when trouble came and then get good-paying, skilled jobs besides... with the CIO in, all that's like a bad dream gone. Oh, we still have a hard row, but this time the white men are with us and we're with them."

For most of the CIO's two decades of independent existence -- as both union federation and radical political organization -- it was to be a major racially egalitarian force in American life. No less an observer than W. E. B. Du Bois -- then the nation's preeminent black leader -- affirmed in 1948 that the CIO probably had brought about

... the greatest and most effective effort toward interracial understanding among the working masses... [N]umbers of men like those in the steel and automotive industries have been thrown together, black and white, as fellow workers striving for the same objects. There has been on this account an astonishing spread of interracial tolerance and understanding. Probably no movement in the last 30 years has been so successful in softening race prejudice among the masses.  

Yet, on this cardinal issue, as on most others, the CIO was anything but a single, seamless piece. In general, CIO international unions carried out "determined and far-reaching efforts to combat racism."7 The efforts of some, however, were not as determined and far-reaching as others; they ran the gamut from militant confrontation with entrenched forms of racial inequality to cautious gradualism, if not actual accommodation. The question here is how the political consciousness of the leadership and the form of government,

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1 Cohen (1995, pp. 333-34, 337). Black workers in the South, of course, had an even harder row to hoe. Southern CIO leaders, even in heavy industrial centers, were often fearful of taking on specifically "Negro" issues. At the first CIO convention in Birmingham, Alabama, for instance, the executive board of the CIO's Industrial Union Council summarily rejected resolutions "endorsing federal anti-lynching legislation and urging the state of Alabama to drop the case against the Scottsboro defendants" (one young black man falsely accused of raping two white women in Alabama, in 1931) (Kelley 1990, p. 147; also Kelley 1996, p. 110).

2 Du Bois (1948, p. 236).

3 Rosen (1968, p. 204).

4 Stein (1993, p. 62); Meier and Rudwick (1979, p. 27n, emphasis added). An "in-depth" systematic analysis of racial egalitarianism in the CIO's internationals would require data on at least six aspects of equality: (1) access to union membership; (2) pay, job placement, upgrading, and promotion; (3) hiring and layoffs; (4) representation in local and international union office; (5) union social activities; (6) civil rights (cf. Goldfield 1993, p. 6).


6 John Brueggemann and Terry Boswell (1998) argue that CIO internationals generally fostered interracial solidarity among industrial workers; a strategy of racial inclusion (appointing black organizers and encouraging the election of black officers) was crucial in realizing black/white interracial solidarity. Two especially relevant studies, the first by economist Orley...
Constitutional Equality

For black workers, who were long accustomed to being excluded entirely from AFL affiliates or relegated to "auxiliary," segregated units, it was a momentous and salutary event when the CIO and its constituent international unions called on them to join as equal members. By the late 1940s, according to our survey, twenty-nine of the CIO's thirty-six internationals, or 81 percent, had a provision guaranteeing membership to all eligible workers regardless of race or color. In contrast, this was true of only thirteen of the eighty-nine major AFL affiliates surveyed, or 14.6 percent, in the mid-1940s. 11

Segregated Locals

All told, according to information provided by Ray Marshall and Sumner Rosen, nine internationals— including a small number that had a constitutional guarantee of membership equality— are said to have had one or more segregated locals "at one time or another," mainly in the South— although neither reports how many segregated locals each international had or when or for how long.

Athenfelter, the latest by Maurice Zeitlin and L. Frank Weyer, have found that CIO unions overall, that is, without making any internal political distinctions among them, did, in fact, reduce black/white earnings and employment inequality. Athenfelter's analysis, using relative "occupational position" as a proxy for earnings, found that AFL unions increased black/white earnings inequality and CIO unions reduced it in the forty-eight contiguous states, in 1940 and 1950. He attributes this to the difference between "craft" and "industrial" unions, the latter supposedly being inherently "less discriminatory (more egalitarian)" than the former, rather than to the AFL's pattern of racial exclusionism as opposed to the CIO's interracial organization. Yet he himself notes that although "the CIO affiliates were all industrial unions and all of the craft... unions were AFL affiliates, a large fraction of the AFL affiliates were industrial union" (1972, p. 461, emphasis added; also see Athenfelter 1973). As we point out below, and contrary to Athenfelter's argument, AFL industrial unions were not "less discriminatory," even in the midst of World War II, than their fellow AFL craft unions. Analyses of data on the thirty-seven nonsouthern states by Zeitlin and Weyer show that (with labor demand held constant), the bigger the CIO was vis-à-vis the AFL— especially in the subset of fifteen highly unionized states— the closer to equality were the reductions of the unemployment rates of black and white workers during the decade of the 1940s (1997, 1998, 2001).

12 We examined the 1948 constitution of each international or, if it was missing, the constitution for the nearest year available. For the provisions of AFL constitutions and CIO constitutions as of the mid-1940s, see Summers (1946, pp. 192–207).

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these locals existed. 12 That the constitutional guarantee was "real" and not merely formal is indicated by the fact that "only" 21 percent of those with a

11 Marshall names three CIO internationals that "have or have had segregated locals": the oil workers (OWIU), textile workers (TWUA), and men's clothing workers (ACW), but notes that his "list is not complete" (1965b, p. 107, emphasis added). In fact, he does not name two others he mentioned a year earlier, as examples of what he calls "radically-led unions" that had segregated locals (1963a, p. 165): the Butte, Montana, mine, mill, and smelter local (MM), and the Portland, Oregon, longshore local (ILWU), both of which inherited these locals from their past AFL affiliation. Rosen also cites the OWIU, TWUA, and ACW, and adds the following four in which, he says, "segregated locals existed at one time or another": the IAW, United Paper Workers; rubber workers (URW); and USWA (1968, p. 204). That two "radically-led unions" such as ILWU and MM had segregated locals is anomalous but illustrative of the contradictory cohabitation of "intransigent racism" with "class rebelliousness" among white workers (Montgomery 1989, p. 131). The ILWU was born in a workers' insurgency led by Harry Bridges inside the International Longshoreman's Association (ILA) during the epochal 1934 general strike in San Francisco, and one of the left leadership's central demands, which the union won in the course of the strike, and which was later institutionalized throughout its jurisdiction by the new ILWU headed by Bridges, was for a union hiring hall and an end to racial discrimination, to replace the notoriously corrupt "shape up" system (Solomon 1998, p. 253; Kimeldorf 1988). Yet in December 1943, when the Portland local refused membership to a black worker, the only thing done by the ILWU's international leaders (perhaps because it was wartime) was that Bridges wrote a letter to the local's membership condemning the exclusion of a "man solely because he was a Negro" and urging them to "eliminate any form of racial discrimination from your ranks"; "outside of [this] letter," according to Nancy Quan-Wickham, "the International took no action." ILWU's leaders were not prepared to take concerted action against the local to abolish discrimination, as she points out, because this would have required that they make "a drastic modification of the hiring hall system" (1992, p. 64). In the years after ILWU's expulsion from the CIO, with the union now on its own and under attack, the international leadership feared, as its regional director said in 1952, that if they "kicked the Portland local out of the International because they discriminated," this would drive its members into the ILA and weaken the ILWU, and would "hurt the Negro longshoremen... as well as the whites. So we decided to live with it" (Riskin 1998, p. 162). "In time, the ideological commitment to racial equality among left-wing ILWUers prevailed, but only after many highly contested and costly battles in the postwar period..." (Quan-Wickham 1992, p. 67).

ILWU's longshore Local 13 in San Pedro, near Los Angeles, did not exclude blacks, but neither did it welcome them: A contingent of Mexican Americans but no blacks were employed on the San Pedro waterfront before the war. When some 500 blacks, or 10 percent of the longshoremen, got jobs there during the war, this sudden influx of "colored guys" affected "the sense of camaraderie" of the "54 men" and the "mutual respect underlying their working relationships." "Over time, the interaction among black, white, and Mexican American workers bred friendship and respect, as well as tension," but, again, with the
Left Out: Reds and America’s Industrial Unions

Black Representation

Genuine interracial unionism means “above all,” as former NAACP Labor Secretary Herbert Hill observes, “...sharing power.” Union leaders must be willing, as he says, “to accept blacks as equal partners in the leadership of unions...and to permit them to share in the power that is derived from such institutional authority.” Many union activists believed that black representation in a union’s highest councils was necessary to ensure that the “most vital needs” of black workers were met, and black unionists saw it as being “at the heart” of racial egalitarianism. 24 We found one survey of black representation, but it covered only twenty-three “well-known CIO internationals,” and twelve of them had a black “international officer or member of the executive board” as of 1947. 25

Postwar’s layoffs, led to black “exclusion.” The layoffs fell mainly on the black workers because of their lower seniority. Bridges and the International leadership refused to assist the aggrieved “Unemployed 500” on the grounds that the local had adhered strictly to its rules of seniority. In 1947, frustrated in their attempts to get Bridges to help resolve their grievances against the local, nearly 100 of the laid-off blacks sought restitution through the NLRB and the courts (Nelson 1998, pp. 163–73).

That MM’s Red leaders allowed segregation in its legendary Butte local, atop the country’s biggest copper mountain, is also remarkable, for at the same time, in the Birmingham area, in marked contrast to USWA, they “insisted on full equality in Red Mountain, Alabama, locals, in defiance of local custom and the preferences of many white members” (Ziegler 1995, p. 255). “More blacks were elected to leadership positions within Mine, Mill,” according to Robin D. G. Kelley (1990, p. 145), “than any other CIO union, and its policy of racial egalitarianism remained unmatched” (also see Huntley 1977, 1990).

11 On the constitutions as effective embodiments of the real inner political life of the unions, see the discussion in Chapter 5.


13 John Williamson, author of the report on the survey, refers to “23 well-known internationals” (1947, p. 1012). But he lists only twenty-two and mistakenly omits the packing house workers (UPWA) from his list and also misclassifies the UE. We have put UPWA back on the list and corrected the misclassification of UE (see Crouchlow 1976, p. 236). Williamson does not say how many black officials an international had nor how long they served. We found no systematic data on black representation at lower union levels, as stewards or committeemen, or members of negotiating teams, grievance committees, and other union bodies. It seems likely, however, that such data would reveal a pattern similar to the one at the international level. So, for example, the ILWU had a top black international officer, but, as early as 1940, its main local 10, in the San Francisco Bay Area, also had three top black officers who served on its executive committee and board of trustees, as well as a dispatcher in its hiring hall (Foner 1976, pp. 231–32).


15 See Foner (1976, p. 257ff). It was in the face of the all-black MOWM led by Sleeping Car Porters’ head A. Philip Randolph that President Roosevelt issued his first executive order establishing the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) in June 1941, declaring that it was the “duty of employers and labor unions in ‘defense industries’ not to discriminate. Over 100,000 black workers had been expected to come to the capital, in Randolph’s words, to demand, as ‘loyal Negro-Hispanic citizens...the right to work and fight for our country” (quoted in Foner 1976, p. 240). When Roosevelt issued his order, Randolph called off the march. Roosevelt issued a second order in May 1943 expanding the FEPC’s jurisdiction to all industries affecting the national interest (Hill 1988, p. 179). The FEPC had no direct enforcement power, but its well-publicized investigations, in alliance with the CIO, served to expose racial injustice and spur black activism and often succeeded in pressuring employers to end discriminatory practices (Korstad and Lichtenstein 1988, p. 787; Rosen 1968, p. 180; Reid 1991, pp. 10, 85, 353; Ziegler 1995, pp. 157–58). Harry Truman ended FEPC in 1946. In 1944 and again in 1945, in hearings on proposed bills to establish the statutory basis for a permanent FEPC and a fair employment practice law, the AFL opposed them and actively contributed to their defeat. In contrast, the CIO’s leadership and CARD actively supported the proposed legislation (Hill 1988, pp. 374–77).

Index of Interracial Solidarity

We also use a simple measure of an international’s overall commitment to interracial solidarity. We assigned a “point” for each of the following aspects of solidarity possessed by an international: a guarantee of membership equality, a black officer or executive board member, and a committee to abolish discrimination. The index does not include having segregated locals, because, as we pointed out earlier, the information on this aspect of solidarity was not the product of a systematic review of all CIO internationals.19

Black Membership

We found only one published systematic survey of the black membership of the CIO’s internationals. The Labor Research Association provides estimates of the number of black members for twenty-two of the CIO’s internationals, as of December 1944, and we found an estimate for a twenty-third international elsewhere. We calculated the percentage of blacks per international by dividing the estimated number of its black members by its estimated total 1944 membership.20

A “Culture of Solidarity”

Union leaders who embraced black aspirations often found themselves not only fighting against employers and their entrenched discriminatory practices, but also, in Dwight McDonald’s phrase, against workers’ “grass roots prejudices.”21 Take NMU, for instance. It was a militantly egalitarian union’s union, whose Communist leaders worked far harder than most others in the CIO to advance black employment equality. But they “often found,” according to August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, “the prejudices of both white employers and many white workers serious enough to inhibit [the union’s] efforts at promoting

19 We also ran the tables using the index modified to include the absence of segregated locals, and every relationship shown here was strengthened.
20 Labor Research Association (1945, p. 73). Rosswurm (1992, p. 4) gives black membership estimates for three CIO internationals, but only one was not already on the Labor Research list. The total membership of CIO internationals is given in Huberman (1946, pp. 166–80). The membership of the UPW is the sum of the 1944 memberships of the Federal Workers and of the SCM, they merged with each other shortly afterward to form the UPW.
21 McDonald (1944, p. 294) was commenting on one of the many “hate” strikes during the war by white workers to protest the employment or upgrading of black workers.

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fully egalitarian practices in the industry.”22 In TWU, also, the “Communist-dominated . . . leadership, regardless of its ideals, was dependent on a white membership characterized by pervasive prejudices.”23

Even the Rouge plant suffered antiblack wildcats during the war, although black workers exerted considerable influence in its politics and blacks held major leadership positions, including recording secretary, in Rouge’s UAW Local 600. Archie Acciuca, a left-wing officer in the lily-white pressed steel unit, found himself caught in the middle of a wildcat when he tried to transfer two “high seniority” black workers into his unit: “I gave them a slip to go down there; and they replaced the youngest ones. Holy Toledo, . . . two blacks coming down there, there wasn’t a black person in there. . . . All hell broke loose and they had a wildcat over it. Man, I told them, ‘No way,’ then I stood my guns all the more. I told them, ‘Those people are going to go in there.’”

Local 600’s Ken Roche, a left-wing committeeeman, recalls that the “maintenance unit was what you call a real, racist unit”: “Rednecks from the South was in the leadership. . . . You would never find any blacks in the maintenance unit.” In 1944, as then Michigan Communist leader Saul Wellman recalls, despite Local 600’s “progressivism . . . the left progressive leadership was defeated . . . because the left and Communists in 1943 and ’44 had been trying to deal with the problem of Jim Crow in Dearborn.”24

23 Ibid., p. 193, cf. Lichtenstein 1997. During World War II, union leaders often found themselves having to oppose and discipline many of their own members who went out on wildcat “hate strikes.” For instance, when Packard workers walked off the job in early June 1943 to protest upgrading of black workers, UAW president R. J. Thomas gave them an ultimatum that they had to go back to work or, as he said in a speech to UAW delegates, “if it means that large numbers of white workers are going to get fired, then that is exactly what’s going to happen” (Winn 1943, p. 342; also see Keenan 1980, p. 232). Illustrative of the opposite way in which AFL leaders in the same city responded at the time to the struggle to break the color barriers in employment was the then head of a major trucking local. “No nigger,” Jimmy Hoffa boasted to the FEPC, “will drive a truck in Detroit” (quoted in Keenan 1980, p. 98). When violent black–white clashes broke out in the streets of Detroit during the week of June 20, 1943, in which thirty-four persons died and over a thousand were wounded, “no disorder occurred” within [Detroit] plants, where colored and white men (in CIO industrial unions) worked side by side,” as U.S. Attorney General Francis Biddle wrote to FDR, “an account of efficient (CIO) union discipline” (quoted in Lee and Humphrey 1943, p. 17, emphasis added). The head of the FEPC’s Detroit office observed further that “this behavior in the plants may well be credited to the fact . . . that these workers know each other better, have mutual interests and recognize their interdependence” (quoted in Keenan 1980, p. 93, emphasis added).
Thus, even in unions where the CIO’s “culture of solidarity” was at its most vital, there were plenty of white workers who formed a potential or actual opposition to racial egalitarianism.\(^5\) Yet even if and to the extent that such “grass-roots prejudices” set limits on the egalitarian actions of union leaders and activists, how they responded to these limits was not prefigured, nor were the limits somehow fixed in cement. Leaders and activists acted on their own racial prejudices and, more deeply, on their own innermost concepts and convictions. In turn, we suggest, how they translated these concepts and convictions into practice, how they dealt with the various issues of racial equality, in the union’s own political life and its battles with employers, also shaped the workers’ prejudices.

Rank-and-File Democracy and Interracial Solidarity

Remarkably, we have found no previous work that offers an explicit theory of the relationship between a union’s internal political life and its substantive racial policies and practices. From what we have said in preceding chapters, our own theory must already be evident. In a nutshell, the more vibrant a union’s political life, the more committed its members will be to interracial solidarity. If union leaders and activists are willing, whether as an expression of democratic ideals or egalitarian principles, or both, to challenge and engage the union’s members fully and freely in a real give-and-take about the issue of bigotry or brotherhood and try to bring them together, in practice, around common grievances, in common struggles, irrespective of “race or color,” then they are bound to develop mutual regard and respect or, in Du Bois’s words, “interclass tolerance and understanding.” In short, as we argued in Chapter 6, rank-and-file democracy – “members running their own union,” as Matles puts it – tends to create and sustain a sense of common identity among the union’s members, and to transform it into a solidarity workers’ political community that transcends any racial, ethnic, or religious differences among them.

Constitutional Democracy and Factionalism

What, then, do we find? On every measure except black representation (perhaps because the numbers with the relevant data are even smaller in these categories), the highly democratic internationals were far more likely than the oligarchic to evidence interracial solidarity. The pattern is even sharper for factionalism:

\(^5\) Fantasia (1988); also see Lizabeth Cohen (1990, pp. 333ff), who refers, in a parallel phrase, to “the CIO’s culture of unity”; Killian (1952); Sugrue (1996).

On every measure, the level of black/white solidarity was far higher among the internationals with organized factions than among those with none. The deep gap between the internationals in these polar categories is indicated by their average scores on the solidarity index: 1.9 for the highly democratic versus 0.9 for the oligarchic internationals, or a “solidarity ratio” of over 2 to 1 in favor of the highly democratic, and a score of 1.9 for those with organized factions versus 0.75 for those with none, or a solidarity ratio of 2.5 to 1 in favor of organized factions (see Table 9.1).

Size of the Black Membership

It might be argued that to the extent that democracy allows a racial minority to organize and express its demands openly and, especially, to exert pressure through the exercise of its “bargaining power” in the struggle among rival factions for union leadership, our findings are really a mere reflection of the relative size of the black membership. Thus, some leading analysts of the economics of racism argue, as does Orley Ashenfelter, for instance, that the “extent to which the [union’s] jurisdiction is composed of actual, or potential, black workers” is the main determinant of a union’s “racial policy” – that is, “the larger the fraction black, “both prior and subsequent to unionization,” the “more egalitarian [the] race policy.”\(^6\) Hill, the NAACP’s former labor secretary, argues that CIO unions “found it necessary at their inception, to accept black workers into membership in order to organize . . . industries . . . [with] a significant concentration of black workers.” In his view, the “imperative of race” (that is, the relative racial composition of the union’s membership) was “decisive” in determining the “racial practices” of CIO unions. He even goes so far as to assert that the CIO’s “admission of black workers into union ranks was the most effective method of achieving control” over them and preventing them from becoming an antinunion force.\(^7\)

Certainly, black workers were among the strongest proponents of racially egalitarian unionism. So it is plausible that otherwise unresponsive officials would be unlikely to ignore a large black membership, because of its


\(^7\) Hill (1996, pp. 199, 201–2); cf. Olson (1970). Although Hill asserts that what made it "necessary" for CIO unions, "at their inception, to accept black workers into membership" was the "significant concentration of black workers" already employed in the places that they were organizing, none of the new AFL industrial unions (e.g., in aircraft, shipbuilding, steel, and transportation) in places with a "significant concentration of black workers" — as Hill knows but ignores in making his argument — "found it necessary, at their inception, to accept black workers."
Table 9.1. Percentage of CIO international unions with specified aspects of interracial solidarity, by constitutional democracy and factionalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constitutional democracy</th>
<th>Guarantee of membership equality&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Segregated locals at one time or another&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Committee to abolish discrimination&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt; (N)</th>
<th>Black officer or executive board member&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Index mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly democratic</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>44 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately democratic</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>71 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oligarchic</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>43 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>(35)</td>
<td>52 (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log odds ratio</td>
<td>1.65&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-1.60&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.54&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part 2. Interracial solidarity by factionalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factions</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>(10)</th>
<th>37 (8)</th>
<th>1.9 (8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Log odds ratio</td>
<td>2.63&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-0.89&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.23&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>The international's constitution had a provision guaranteeing equal eligibility for membership "regardless of race" (Summers 1946, pp. 192–207).

<sup>b</sup>The international had one or more segregated locals "at one time or another" (Rosen 1968, p. 204; Marshall 1965, p. 107n27; 1964, p. 186).

<sup>c</sup>The international established a committee to abolish discrimination in 1942 (Foner 1974, p. 257n).

<sup>d</sup>The international had an elected black officer or executive board member. The numbers (in parentheses) in the categories in this column differ from the numbers in the total column because the survey of black officials covered only "23 well-known internationals" (Williamson 1947, p. 1012).

<sup>e</sup>The total number of internationals is reduced to twenty-three here because of missing data on internal factions for the other internationals.

Potential for "making trouble" and threatening their rule – or even bolting to another, rival union more responsive to distinctive black needs. But, as Michael Goldfield suggests, "a large percentage of Black workers in a union was almost never sufficient . . . to create . . . interracial solidarity and egalitarian unionism," and, at the same time, several internationals with small black memberships displayed, as he points out, "a strong commitment to racial equality."<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, our ability to assess the independent effect of the relative size of the black membership in determining a union’s commitment to interracial solidarity is highly limited by missing data (not only on this variable itself, but also on one or another of the three components of the solidarity index and on factions). Missing data reduce the set of relevant internationals to sixteen for the assessment of the independent effects of both the size of the black membership and the level of democracy, and to thirteen for the assessment of the effects of both black membership and the presence of factions. So, to facilitate analysis, we simply split the internationals into two categories on each variable: democratic versus oligarchic, factions versus no factions, and "small" black membership (10 percent or less) versus "large" (over 10 percent), and we measured the commitment to interracial solidarity by the mean score on the solidarity index – though taking these steps, as we see below, scarcely rescues the analysis from the bane of shrinking numbers.

Both overall among all internationals and in the democratic column, the relative size of the black membership barely made a difference in their measurable commitment to interracial solidarity. In the democratic column, the scores earned on the solidarity index by the internationals with a small versus a large black membership were not far apart; indeed, the ones with a small black membership scored slightly higher than those with a large black membership. But among the internationals in the oligarchic column, the difference was sharp (and consistent with what we might call the Ashenfelter/Hill hypothesis): Among the oligarchic internationals, the ratio of the solidarity score of those with a large black membership to the score of those with a small black membership was 4.5:1. The pattern is similar when we take into account both factionalism and the size of the black membership. Among the internationals with no factions, the solidarity score of

<sup>20</sup>Goldfield (1993, pp. 22, 25). Among these antiracist unions with small black memberships, for instance, were UAW Local 248 discussed in the previous chapter, which was 4.2 percent black (and well over half Jamaican) at the war’s end; the NMU, 9.4 percent black (see Critchlow 1976); FE, 4.2 percent black (see Gilpin 1993); and IFLWU, 11.0 percent black (see Foner 1950). (Except for Local 248, these percentages are for December 1944, based on data in Labor Research Association 1945, p. 73, and Huberman 1946, pp. 166–80.)
### Table 9.2. Average interracial solidarity score by the size of black membership, constitutional democracy, and factionalism in CIO international unions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative size of black membership</th>
<th>Highly and moderately democratic (N)</th>
<th>Oligarchic (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small (0–10%)</td>
<td>2.3 (6)</td>
<td>0.3 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (&gt;10%)</td>
<td>2.2 (5)</td>
<td>1.5 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.3 (11)</td>
<td>0.8 (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative size of black membership</th>
<th>Organized and sporadic (N)</th>
<th>None (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small (0–10%)</td>
<td>2.3 (4)</td>
<td>0.3 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (&gt;10%)</td>
<td>2.0 (5)</td>
<td>1.0 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.1 (9)</td>
<td>0.5 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The international that had a large black membership was far higher than the score of those with a small black membership. But among the internationals with factions, those with a small black membership had a slightly higher score.

Although an oligarchic international leadership, or one faced by neither a durable nor even a sporadic opposition, would otherwise have been unresponsive to the will of the rank and file, a large cohesive black membership, apparently was able, compared with a small one, to exert sufficient pressure on such leadership to win more egalitarian racial policies and practices. But in the democratic internationals, or where rival factions competed for leadership, not the size of the black membership but the essence of rank-and-file democracy itself enhanced interracial solidarity.

This reasoning is also consistent with our finding (contrary to Hill’s reasoning) that, whether the black membership was small or large, the average solidarity score of the democratic internationals was far higher than that of the oligarchic internationals, and the pattern was the same for factionalism (see Table 9.2).
In the early 1930s, as Communists and their radical allies built rank-and-file committees inside AFL affiliates and organized new TUUL unions, they fought for the rights of black workers, and for their inclusion at all levels. “During the strike wave of 1934,” as Mark Solomon points out, “Communists targeted wage differentials based on race, fought segregation, and insisted that every vestige of union discrimination be addressed and eliminated.” TUUL cadres were “unrelenting advocates of black rights” who went on to imbue the new CIO unions with their racial egalitarianism.14

TUUL cadres also worked hand in hand with the Communist-led Unemployed Councils in the major industrial cities, seeking to ally people of all races and ethnicities.15 So, for instance, here is what Brown Squires, a black TUUL organizer, told a gathering of the unemployed in Chicago in January 1931:

The working class, not by color, or not by creed, produces everything that is produced . . .; and yet they are none of it. . . . The only way by which the ruling class can keep us from food, from jobs, or even from controlling what we produce, is by using one laborer against another, one race against another.

The Communists’ battle against rent evictions especially won them black support. “Evictions, evictions,” TUUL’s William Z. Foster said at the same gathering at which Squires spoke:

the other day in Pittsburgh, I was present when the eviction took place—that is, when they tried to make it take place. A Negro woman, a woman with seven children, a widow—they came down to evict her from her home, because she could not pay the rent. Well, fortunately, we were able to stop it. We gathered up a few of the neighbors, one hundred or two, and they waited for this constable and this landlord. When they came to make this eviction, they gathered around this constable and this landlord, and they were damn glad to get out of there with whole skins without evicting this woman.16

Black participants in the unemployed movement especially “gloried in standing up to the landlords and police while singing the old spiritual ‘I shall not be moved,’” as Lizabeth Cohen observes, “and in thwarting the efforts of the utility companies to turn off gas and electricity when bills went unpaid. With pride, they asserted their rights before social agencies that long intimidated them. ‘It was a period of great learning,’ black Communist leader William Patterson remembered.”17

Blacks were highly prominent among the leaders of the Unemployed Councils. In Chicago, for instance, 21 percent of the leaders and 25 percent of the members of the Communist-led Unemployed Councils were black, compared with only 6 percent of the leadership and 5 percent of the membership of the socialist-led unemployed workers’ Committees. In 1932, a disproportionate 17 percent of those who voted for Foster for president of the United States lived in the Chicago Black Belt’s second and third wards.18 Black–white unity in many cities had thus been forged both in earlier Red unionism and in the Communist-led unemployed movement, and this in turn was a crucial source of interracial unity in the CIO’s organizing drives.

Everywhere, but especially in the South, “Communists won the confidence of black workers,” as George M. Fredrickson explains, “because they seemed to be free of racial prejudice and committed to the cause of black civil rights as well as to the expansion of industrial unionism.”19 Class-conscious radicals, mainly Communists and their allies, forged a strategy in which they tried “to show southern workers a different way of livin’ by stimulating labor militancy and class confrontation” and creating a unique blend of southern male conceptions of “personal honor and class identity,” of “individual combativeness and class struggle.” They appealed to both black and white workers by stressing their common, class interests and linking “racial oppression” and “class exploitation.”

In practice, of course, the success of this strategy of interracial unity “depended on a series of subtle tactical opportunities, in which the organizer had to choose the appropriate moment to raise racial concerns . . . Seemingly intractable racial tensions could often be defused by the organizer’s response.” So, for instance, “Blackie” Merrell, a former NMU organizer and officer, recalled:

I had one white guy on a ship I was on who refused to sleep in the same quarters with a black guy after we integrated. Instead of rammin’ it down his throat, I told him, now look, I’ll sleep there tonight, and let you have

16 Lasswell and Blumenstock (1939, p. 158, 160).
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my bunk. The next night he was okay, and that was the turning point, everything straightened out then.

Or, as A.C. Burrtram, a radical Steel Worker organizer in the mid-1930s in Birmingham, Alabama, explained:

We had a city ordinance here in Birmingham about segregated meetin’s. You had to have a partition between colored an white, to within two inches of the ceiling. You know what we told ‘em? Go to hell! We’re meetin’ in this damn union hall, payin’ rent on this son of a bitch! ... And the white guys went along with this, because they knew it was in their own interest, plain and simple.88

In fact, the surprising consensus of scholars about the Communists’ crucial role in organizing interracial unions and fighting for black equality contrasts sharply with the fractious scholarly debates about other aspects of their record. The Communists, says Herbert Northrup, were among “the staunchest supporters” of black unionists. Or as Jack Barbash, an ardent Reuther supporter at the time, puts it: “The Communist unions have always pursued vigorous antidiscrimination policies as a matter of political ideology and tactics.”89 David Shannon also concedes in his study of “the decline of American Communism” that “the Communists have, in their own way, vigorous champions of the rights of minorities....” “Communists,” says Ray Marshall, “... almost always adopted egalitarian racial positions. Although many doubted the sincerity of the Communists’ racial policies, there can be little question that, by emphasizing the race issue to get Negro support, the Communists forced white union leaders to pay more attention to racial matters.” “The Communist-led unions, according to Sumner Rosen, were “the more militant and devoted advocates of racial justice.... Clearly the [Communist] Party’s role inside the CIO was to... participate effectively in organizing many Negro workers, and to single out for special attention the

problems, grievances, and ambitions of Negro workers in individual CIO unions.”90

“Communists played very active roles in combating discrimination in both shop and union affairs. In union after union,” according to Harvey Levenstein, “Communists challenged the traditional devices built into the rules of union and work places perpetuating segregation of the races and second-class status for blacks. Their record in unions... was generally exemplary on this score.” Michael Goldfield concludes, on the basis of his study of the secondary literature on “the racial practices of CIO unions in all parts of the country, but especially in the South, that, in general, left-led unions, “usually with integrated... organizers, officials, and cadre... were more committed in principle and in practice to racial egalitarianism than [unions led by] nonleftists.”91

Robert Zieger similarly concludes that “the Communists and their allies... created and sustained the most principled biracial unions of the CIO era, unions that in some cases pioneered in promoting egalitarian workplace practices and in energizing somnolent civil rights organizations.”92 Even John Earl Haynes, author or coauthor of a number of recent works intended to illuminate the “dangerous and intolerable” activities of the Communists, whose “goal,” he says, “was the destruction of American society,” acknowledges that the Communists and “progressives” aligned with them were “civil rights pioneers. Communist-led CIO unions were noticeably more aggressive than others in championing equal treatment for black workers....”93

Communists and their radical allies in the CIO were especially prominent among unionists who pressed for a permanent, constitutionally legitimated black presence in the top leadership of the internationals. As Zieger observes, “pro-Soviet unions made special efforts to recruit blacks into leadership roles and to insure African-American representation on negotiating teams, grievance committees, and other union bodies.” Indeed, Irving Howe and Lewis Coser remark derisively that “Stalinists appointed themselves the special defenders of the Negro unionists. ... And with mechanical regularity, they kept pushing Negroes into the leadership of their unions or factions, quite regardless of whether these Negroes were competent.”94

Perhaps the most important dissent from the consensus about the Communists’ outstanding devotion to the struggle for black equality comes from the NAACP’s Hill. He argues, based on his examination of “litigation records and

89 Northrup (1944, p. 235; also see p. 131); Barbash (1946, p. 62). Barbash, remember, was the author of a famous diagnosis of “Communist penetration of unions as... a form of union pathology” (Bashbash 1956, pp. 324–25).
90 Shannon (1959, p. 6); Marshall (1967b, p. 24); Rosen (1968, p. 200).
92 Zieger (1995, pp. 373–74; 375–76, 153); also see Stevenson (1993, pp. 47, 50).
other documents, that the only unions "controlled by the Communist Party operating as CIO affiliates" that stood out as racially egalitarian — "for a brief period, mainly in the South" — were those which "were essentially all-black unions where black workers assumed leadership positions," for example, FTA. These Communist-controlled unions, he says, certainly "conducted militant struggles against the blatant racist practices of employers." But, in general, he concludes:

Industrial unions with a communist leadership and with a predominantly white membership were substantially no different in their racial practices than other labor organizations. ... No less for communist-controlled unions ... than for the rest of organized labor, the imperative of race was decisive and the prevalence of white racism overwhelmed the few scattered examples of interracial unionism.40

Judith Stein is less critical of Communist unionists than Hill, but she insists that "many egalitarian measures, praised in left wing unions, were standard in 'right-wing' unions," such as the efforts by the Steel Workers' international leadership to end the southern black/white differential in wages. Overall, she argues,

[the] Communist party's role was smaller than some have argued. Insofar as the party's doctrines on "the Negro Question" encouraged racial essentialism, it was a positive hindrance to interracial unionism. National policies on race oscillating between campaigns against white chauvinism and then against black nationalism, stemmed more from party struggles than from the experiences of local unionists. The party bureaucracy often overrode the judgment of local blacks and whites.47

Communists and their radical allies, despite their adherence to a doctrine of class struggle, early on recognized and emphasized the specificity of black oppression, which they saw as an inherent evil to be fought and extirpated. We see no reason, however, to accept Stein's assertion that this conviction itself hindered interracial unionism. Rather (as she herself also observes) what undermined black (and other radical) support for Communist unionists, if anything, was the shifting and opportunistic line (especially during the war) of

40 In fact, the estimated black share of the FTA's entire membership in 1944 was only 9.2 percent (Labor Research Association 1945, p. 73). We found no regional breakdown of the racial composition of its membership.

41 Hill (1996, pp. 201-2, emphasis added).

42 Stein (1993, pp. 54, 64, emphasis added).
The Communists, as Julius Jacobson sums up the charge, were now "prepared to sacrifice the rights of Negroes in the interests of the war [effort]." In 1949, Roy Wilkins, then NAACP Acting Secretary, remembered "...that during the war when Negro Americans were fighting for jobs on the home front... [the Communists] abandoned the fight for Negro rights on the ground that such a campaign would 'interfere with the war effort.' As soon as Russia was attacked by Germany they dropped the Negro question... [and] sounded very much like the worst of the Negro-baiting southerners." Shannon says that "the Communists took the position that unity for the war effort demanded that racial discrimination be at least temporarily tolerated if not condemned." Wilson Record also concludes:

For most of the war [the CP's] main activity was to stifle Negro protest and to urge black workers and soldiers to [comply]... with the white man's terms, just as it urged unions to get on with the production job, on the bosses' terms if necessary... [although] by late 1943, the Communists used such organizations as the NNC [National Negro Congress] and the SNYC [Southern Negro Youth Congress] to launch occasional protests in the military and industry.51

This sort of critique of the Communists' wartime history relies mainly on an examination of the pronouncements of party officials or of enunciations of the "party line" on the "Negro question" in party publications. But what Communist unionists and their allies were actually doing often differed markedly from what an examination of that "line" alone might lead one to conclude (as we have shown in our analysis of the relative prolabor content of the wartime contracts won by Communist-led internationals). As Martin Glaberman remarks correctly in his book on workers' wartime militancy: "Although the policies of the Communist Party are easy to document, [gauging] the support for the March, the Communists undoubtedly lost prestige in the black community because of their earlier hostility to the MOMW and the time it took to come out in its favor." (1976, p. 278).

51 Jacobson (1968, p. 7); Wilkins (1950); Shannon (1959, p. 6); Record (1964, pp. 120-25). Even some leading black Communists, among them Benjamin Davis, then a New York City councilman representing Harlem, also retrospectively denounced the party's wartime "errors" and "illiberal conclusions" in "the field of Negro work," and charged that the party's "slogan [of] ending racial discrimination was in effect seriously weakened..." (quoted in Hill 1951, p. 10, from an article in the Daily Worker, July 22, 1945). This "self-criticism" was a premonition of the party's self-inflicted paroxysm over "white chauvinism" among its members. See Chapter 11, esp. note 2.}

Influence of the party [in the shops] is something else again." Glaberman, who was an auto union activist in Detroit at the time, observes -- even though he was a fierce adversary of the Communists -- that "during the war... [the Communists] were especially consistent and principled element in the labor movement in fighting for the rights of black workers." 52

Similarly, regarding the charge that the Communists stifled black protest during the war, Bert Cochran remarks that it is "valid but... not the whole story." Rather, he notes that the "party stake[d] out positions in different localities and organizations battling for Negro rights by varied and energetically pursued efforts... Communists found favor among black activists in unions by repeatedly and forcefully advancing their demands." 53

Despite "the [Communists']...tendency to subordinate the grievances of black workers to the interests of winning the war," Philip Foner argues, "the left-wing unions had the best record in the fight against racial discrimination during World War II." Zieger's conclusion, too, is that "[a]lthough Communist-oriented unions rarely risked shop-floor confrontations during the war over race or anything else that might jeopardize output, they did more than other affiliates to address the distinct interests of black workers." 54

A crude indicator of black workers' wartime support for the Communists comes, as Cochran put it, from "Communist recruitment figures... for whatever they are worth." Cochran notes that these figures "show no falling off of appeal [to blacks] in the war years": In the 1935-36 period, 15 to 17 percent of the total number of newly recruited party members were reported to be black; by 1943, black recruits rose to 31 percent of the total; and by 1944, to 37 percent. 55

The influential Negro Digest, a popular black magazine, took a poll of its readers in late 1944 and found that some seven in ten thought the Communists

52 Glaberman (1980, pp. 69, 73, emphasis added); cf. Seidman (1950).
53 Cochran (1977, pp. 227-28). Take, for example, IFLWU, "which had an avowedly Stalinist leadership" (Zieger 1995, p. 290). The international expanded its interracial organizing throughout the war, while at the same time ardently adhering to the no-strike pledge. The union even opened an organizing "drive to the South": its organizers in tanneries scattered across the South, in Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina, were both black and white, and its campaign steadfastly adhered to a commitment to "full and equal rights for all members of the union, Negro and white." (Foner 1950, pp. 622-23).
55 Cochran (1977, p. 228).
were still loyal to the fight for black rights: "The majority opinion was," the Digest noted in its December issue, "that the Communists in their all-out support of the war are supporting a cause which is synonymous with the fight for racial equality."56 In 1945, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., former pastor of New York City's Abyssinian Church, who had been elected to Congress from New York, declared: "There is no group in America, including the Christian Church, that practices racial brotherhood one tenth as much as the Communist Party." That same year, a prominent black Communist, Benjamin Davis, Jr., of Harlem, who had first been elected to the New York City council on the Communist ticket in 1941 and had been reelected during the war in 1943, again won reelection. In 1946, a Communist candidate for the Massachusetts legislature got one sixth of the total vote, and much of his support came from "Boston's twelfth ward, Roxbury, a generally poor neighborhood with considerable Negro and immigrant population.... The following year, a Communist candidate for city council from that ward received one fourth of the vote."57

"Operation Dixie"

Left/right differences on the question of confronting racism are illuminated by "Operation Dixie," the CIO's brief postwar Southern Organizing Campaign (SOC), which began in 1946 and faded soon after. SOC functionaries insisted that the campaign involve "no extra-curricular activities — no politics — no PAC — no FEPC, etc."58 Banning "political agitation," as Ziegler says, was "a coded way of marginalizing the [Communist] left [which]... had pioneered in linking industrial unionism and civil rights" in the South. The campaign — in contrast to earlier unionization drives led by "the CIO's Communists and their allies who had built small but impressive enclaves of aggressive biracial unionism in Dixie"— mainly "bypassed those industries in which large numbers of blacks toiled." SOC's head, Van Bittner, declared that they were not "mentioning the color of people." So far as the CIO was concerned, he said, there is "no Negro problem in the South."

Despite their disagreement with this strategy, and their being shunted aside, Communist unionists and their allies publicly supported the campaign. "But unionists associated with a dozen or so affiliates in which pro-Soviet leaders were prominent... suggested a different approach. Instead of futile assaults

56 The Negro Digest article is quoted in Keenan (1980, p. 231).
57 Powell (1945, p. 69); Shannon (1959, pp. 99, 100).
58 Quoted in Ziegler (1995, p. 233), from SOC minutes, April 11, 1946.

The Red and the Black

on the textile citadels, why not throw resources into areas of previous success? Why not, for example, make use of black workers' proven support for the CIO to extend organization into food processing, wood and lumber working, transport and goods handling, and tobacco working?" Men such as UEB's Matles, FTAs Donald Henderson, and NMU's Joe Curran reiterated their view that "bipartisan unionism and... recruitment of black workers held the key to CIO success in the South."59

The Political Camps and Black Rights

Now, gauging how much the Communist-led internationals differed from those in rival camps on the "black question" presents a special problem, because their influence radiated throughout the CIO and, as Rosen observes, "strengthened the rhetorical and political commitment to racial equality." That is, "competition within the CIO between Communists and non-Communists caused the latter to adopt more outspoken egalitarian positions in order to gain the allegiance of Negro workers." Even such a severe critic of the Communists as Record points out that

it is not likely that union leaders would have given as much attention to the matter or developed the specific programs they did in the absence of prodding from Communist elements.... [They] often made the question of Negro rights an intra-union political issue and consequently forced non-Communist groups to take practical cognizance of it.... It is questionable, for example, whether the UAW-CIO would have developed its remarkably effective program for combating union and management discrimination had not the Communists served as a hair shirt.

"Often it was only the insistence of Communists and their allies," Ziegler also emphasizes, "that forced CIO bodies to address such 'extraneous' matters as civil rights and civil liberties.... Locals with vigorous Communist presence in the UAW and Packinghouse Workers [UPWA] fought for the rights of African Americans within both the union and community." In fact, long after the anti-Communist purge, the UPWA's leaders, whose exemplary record of interracial unity was exceptional, still "found themselves suspect because of their emphasis on racial justice, which some in the CIO believed smacked of Communist enthusiasms." CIO officials even withheld the organization's

support from the UPWA's efforts to organize both black and white workers in the sugar- and other food-processing industries.  

Given the racially egalitarian impact of Communists and their allies on the policies of the UAW, UPWA, and other internationals, especially in the "shifting" camp, the measured difference between the levels of interracial solidarity in the rival camps may well be smaller than these differences were in reality.

Yet we find, despite this, that the Communist camp stood out on our measures of interracial solidarity, except for having a committee to abolish discrimination, which was more frequent in the shifting camp: 94 percent of the sixteen Communist-led internationals, 70 percent of the ten shifting internationals, and 70 percent of the ten anti-Communist internationals had a guarantee of membership equality.  

That a higher proportion of the internationals in the shifting camp than of those in the Communist camp had a committee to abolish discrimination may, paradoxically, reflect the pressures exerted in these internationals by "a strong Communist faction contending for [their] leadership." In fact, the only international in the anti-Communist camp with a committee against discrimination was the American Newspaper Guild, which had a strong Communist faction, and both the New York and the Los Angeles chapters of the guild were led by Communists. As to black representation, 64 percent of the fourteen internationals in the Communist camp and 53 percent of the nine in the shifting and anti-Communist camps combined had a black officer or executive board member.

Now, using the solidarity index, the pattern is consistent with and provides further evidence in support of the historians' consensus that, "in regard to race ... the Communist-influenced CIO affiliates stood in the vanguard." The fourteen internationals in the Communist camp had an average solidarity score of 1.9 but the nine internationals in the shifting and anti-Communist camps combined had an average score of 1.2.

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65. Log odds ratio (uniform association) = 0.82, P < 0.12; standard error = 0.53.

66. Log odds ratio (uniform association) = -0.75, P < 0.11; standard error = 0.48.

67. Log odds ratio (uniform association) = 0.49, P < 0.30; standard error = 0.48.


69. Log odds ratio (uniform association) = 0.62, P < 0.14; standard error = 0.55.


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This Anti-Communist average excludes an outlier, the virtually all-black membership of the Red Cap union, UTSE. Its estimated 1944 black membership was 77 percent. This is probably an underestimate because it was based on the racial composition of workers in the industry. With the Red Caps included, the mean size of the black membership in the anti-Communist camp was 22.8 percent.
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Table 9.3: Average interracial solidarity score by political camp and by the size of black membership in CIO international unions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of black membership</th>
<th>Political camp</th>
<th>Shifting and anti-Communist (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communist (N)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small (0–10%)</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.7 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (&gt; 10%)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.2 (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ideological commitments per se”) interacted in determining the internationals’ commitment to interracial solidarity, and it was especially where the black membership was small and might otherwise not have been able to win racially egalitarian policies and practices that leadership by Communists and their allies made the difference.

A Case Study: Two Locals, One Plant

The decisiveness of the leadership’s political consciousness, and thus of the struggles they led, in determining interracial solidarity, irrespective of the size of the black membership, is illustrated by the contrast between the FE and UAW locals at the International Harvester plant in Louisville, Kentucky. Recall from Chapter 6 that the plant opened in 1946 with FE as the representative of all production and maintenance workers. But when the company began production three years later in a new foundry at the same plant, it became a separate bargaining unit, represented by the UAW.

Toni Gilpin found that the two locals conducted themselves very differently on issues of black/white equality, but not because of any so-called imperative of race. The FE local had an active rank and file who participated in frequent, well-attended meetings on both workplace and community issues. Its extensive steward system protected the workers on the shop floor, and they often engaged in work stoppages and belligerently defied management to enforce their grievances. The local’s militancy, as we noted in Chapter 6, provoked an official of the company to exclaim that FE’s stewards were less interested in resolving grievances than engaging in “class warfare.” Many of the FE local’s officers, members of the bargaining committee, and shop stewards were black, and the local aggressively fought to defend black rights. The local demanded and won the abolition of the until then separate and unequal “White” and “Colored” locker rooms and washrooms, and also integrated the cafeteria. Its frequent social events, involving the workers’ spouses and families, were integrated, and the local also mobilized its membership to fight for integration of transportation, parks, and hotels in Louisville. Yet only 14 percent of the local’s membership was black.

In contrast, the UAW foundry workers’ local in the same plant, as we discussed earlier, emphasized “stability in labor relations” rather than “class warfare.” In turn, this translated in practice into accommodation with local “custom and tradition” in race relations: According to a 1953 National Planning Association study cited by Gilpin, the UAW local challenged neither the vestiges of racial job differentiation in the foundry itself nor the segregated locker rooms and washrooms to which its members were subjected. Yet one half of its members were black.

Clearly, the contrasting racial strategies of these Red and anti-Red locals were determined not by any so-called racial imperative but by the differences in their leaders’ political consciousness: Communist or radical in the FE, and liberal, at best, in the UAW. FE’s radicalism was, however, inseparable from its rank-and-file activism and democratic political life, and both – radicalism and democracy – interacted and reinforced each other, as Gilpin’s analysis reveals, in shaping the local’s racial egalitarianism.

Rank-and-File Democracy, Radicalism, and Solidarity

This raises a crucial analytical problem, for, as we know, radicalism and democracy tended to coincide in the CIO’s internationals: 53 percent of the nineteen internationals in the non-Communist camps combined were oligarchic, but 94 percent of the sixteen in the Communist camp were democratic. Looked at from the opposite angle, the preponderant majority of democratic internationals were in the Communist camp, whereas the opposite was true of the oligarchic internationals: 70 percent of the ten highly democratic and 57 percent of the fourteen moderately democratic internationals were in the Communist camp, but 90 percent of the eleven oligarchic internationals were in the non-Communist camps (and split evenly between them, 45 percent in each). So, in reality, and in a double sense, Communist-led unionism was democratic rank-and-file unionism.

comparison possible to assess the effect of Communist leadership while holding the level of democracy constant, we find that among the moderately democratic internationals, the percentage with segregated locals in the non-Communist camps combined was two and a half times the percentage in the Communist camp (see Table 9.5, part 1).

With factions, the pattern (at least what there is of it that we can examine) is similar: The presence of organized versus sporadic factions made no difference in the Communist camp, but in the combined non-Communist camps, and despite the small numbers in the relevant categories, the internationals with organized factions had by far the smallest percentage with segregated locals. Now, conversely, among the internationals with organized factions, the Communist and non-Communist camps had the same percentage with segregated locals, but among those with sporadic factions (and again despite the small numbers), we find a striking difference: The percentage with segregated locals in the combined non-Communist camps was well over three times that in the Communist camp (see Table 9.5, part 2).

**Conclusion**

In July 1949, as the bitter attacks on the CIO’s Communist left were escalating, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a leading black newspaper, already was condemning the CIO’s CRC as mere “window dressing” and charging that it had done little or nothing to overcome discrimination against black workers. In fact, the *Courier* writer declared, some CIO unions were signing contracts that “set up discriminatory job level classifications in various plants” in Pittsburgh and other cities (the probably meant, in particular, the USWA). A couple of months later, a black member of CRC, reflecting such charges, reported that “the Negro community is saying...we’re being Uncle Toms for the CIO.” CRC’s head, Willard Townsend, “was especially concerned,” in Marshall’s words, “that Negroes in the South were supporting the Communist-dominated Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, in preference to the CIO Steel Workers,” which was engaged in fierce raiding of MM. 77

The growing disenchantment with the CIO among blacks coincided in time with the arrival of what Marshall Stevenson calls “the overt anti-Communist phase of [CIO] history” from 1946 on. Open attacks on CIO Communists and their allies escalated after the defeat of Henry Wallace, whom they had supported openly, in the 1948 presidential election. “Wallace, unlike any other candidate, had barnstormed the South for racial equality during 1948” and produced the largest interracial meetings yet seen in southern cities. But by

then the CIO’s interracialism was already being openly abandoned in the South. By 1949, any antiracist union was at risk within the southern CIO, many of whose “older leaders,” as Michael Honey remarks, “opposed ‘communism’ and antiracism as if they were interchangeable evils.” 78

At the fall 1949 CIO convention, CIO officials pushed through an amendment to the CIO constitution to enable them to purge Communists from their midst, and during 1950, as we know, they subjected its Communist-led internationals to pseudotrials, threw them out, and went on to “cleanse” virtually all the (other) unions in which Communist influence had been significant... And,” says Rosen, “to the extent that the unions expelled had been the more militant and devoted advocates of racial justice, the cause itself lost much of its meaning and appeal.” 79

In 1955, having lost its own radical identity, the CIO returned to the bosom of its old nemesis, the AFL. Ironically, the lone prominent opponent of the CIO’s self-liquidation was TWU president “Red Mike” Quill, who had been a Communist but had split with the party in 1948 because of its support for Wallace’s presidential campaign. Quill denounced the merger agreement as a “surrender” to the “three R’s” of the AFL—racketeering, rank-and-file, and raiding. He was certainly right about the CIO’s capitulation to the AFL’s first “R”: For “after the merger...” as Hill says, “the CIO’s enlightened racial policies were, in many cases, replaced by the traditional racial practices of the major AFL affiliates.” 80

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77 Marshall (1964, p. 17).
78 So, for instance, when two white unionists “demanded desegregation of the CIO union hall at a meeting of the Memphis CIO’s Industrial Union Council in 1947, the Council expelled them both for ‘Communist’ agitation” (Honey 1999, pp. 245, 181–82). Under the left leadership of the Memphis local of the International Furniture Workers, the growth of employment of black women in the Memphis furniture industry had been much greater than elsewhere in that industry (Cornfeld 1980, p. 211). Such antiracist southern locals were raided by other CIO internationals under the cover of the Taft–Hartley Act and anti-Communism (see, e.g., Lembcke and Tarum 1984).
79 Rosen (1968, pp. 199–208); also see Cornfield (1991).