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# When the World Seemed New: UE Local 301 and the Decline of the American Labor Movement

By Jacob Houser

On February 19, 1954 Senator Joseph McCarthy made his return to Albany, New York to expunge any subversive elements within the defense industry, particularly at the Schenectady General Electric plant. McCarthy was willing to bring anyone down with him that he could. A man named Charles Rivers was called forth to testify on the first day of the hearings. Rivers did not know that he was being brought before Senator McCarthy as a suspected Communist, but McCarthy in turn did not know that Rivers did not even work for General Electric. Once he realized he had the wrong man, all the Senator could do was apologize by saying, “May I say that we sent out a subpoena for Charles Rivers who had been head of the military strategy of the Communist party in this area. I am inclined to think that we definitely have the wrong man. We should apologize to you.”<sup>1</sup> McCarthy believed the ends justified the means, even if that Machiavellian strategy hurt honest, hard-working people. The Albany Times Union ran a story on February 20, 1954 reporting that at the hearing of suspected Schenectady GE Communist Robert Northrup, Adele Northrup, Robert’s wife, jumped out of her seat, ran toward the bench where McCarthy was seated and shouted at him, “When you are smearing these people do you ever think of their families? Do you want him to lose his job?”<sup>2</sup> Northrup indeed lost his job, along with about a dozen other Schenectady GE workers, even if there was no proof against them and countless more had their reputations tarnished.

Senator McCarthy had a penchant for turning complex issues into a black and white story of good versus evil. In McCarthy’s eyes the evil of the world had its roots in Communism and in order for Communism to be stopped abroad, any traces of it domestically had to be put down

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<sup>1</sup> “Subversion and Espionage in Defense Establishments and Industries”, Testimony of Charles Rivers, February 19, 1954, U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations.

<sup>2</sup> *Albany Times Union*. February 20, 1954.

first. By the time McCarthy came to Albany for the second time in February 1954 much of UE Local 301's story was over, and many Americans were getting tired of McCarthy's divisive rhetoric. A few months after McCarthy visited Albany the Army-McCarthy hearings were in full swing and by the end of the summer of 1954 McCarthy had lost most of his credibility. However, that final push he made early in 1954 against the left-wing elements of the labor movement was characteristic of McCarthy, a subject David Oshinsky has written at length about. Oshinsky states that McCarthy, "was adept at probing the weak spots of opponents" and that, "above all, the Senator provided a simple explanation for America's decline in the world. He spoke of a massive internal conspiracy, directed by Communists and abetted by government officials."<sup>3</sup> The weak spot of UE Local 301 was its ties to the openly Communist leaders of the National UE. That is what made the rank-and-file Schenectady GE worker vulnerable, regardless of whether or not they harbored Communist sympathies.

McCarthy's visits to Albany did not spark the trouble Local 301 faced. Rather, they were the final chapter in a long battle. This paper tells the story of the rise and fall of one of the largest electrical industry unions, the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), during the early years of the Cold War through the lens of their Schenectady branch, Local 301, which represented workers at General Electric. Post-war anxiety in the United States over international relations began at the grassroots level and ended up being exploited by both ordinary people and national figures like McCarthy. UE Local 301 had to defend itself from red-baiting and raiding from within the labor movement itself, from the more right-leaning IUE, which was chartered by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1949 but which had

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<sup>3</sup> Oshinsky, David. *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pg. 507.

been a divisive faction within the UE for several years prior. The relationship between these factors: the government, McCarthy, and the IUE, was not always clear-cut. In fact, they often were not on the same page, as certainly the IUE was hostile to anti-labor legislation as well. However, whether explicitly or not, these factors worked together to crush the influence of the UE because it was accused of being led by Communists and because it frequently broke the CIO party line in favor of Soviet-sympathizing policies. On the surface this seems like a cut and dried, good versus bad story of Communism versus anti-Communism, of left versus right, but through this story larger truths are uncovered about what it meant to be an American during the 1930s through the 1950s.

### **Historiography**

Much has already been written about how organized labor functioned within the context of the Cold War. While some historians have chosen to emphasize labor's battle against the state others have chosen to emphasize labor's battle against McCarthy and other elements of anti-Communism within American society. For the most part, the earliest interpretations of this time are critical of the labor movement and are more sympathetic to the forces that sought to reign in the influence of organized labor. For the most part the works published while the Cold War was in full-swing, during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, blamed one side or the other.<sup>4</sup> In the 1980s, as historians began to reexamine the early Cold War years, a noticeable shift occurred in these labor histories which saw the story being treated in a far more sympathetic, evenhanded approach.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cochran, Bert, 1977. *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. Cochran criticizes the Communists within the labor movement for having a detrimental impact on radicalism. He sees their internal issues as being the cause of their demise as opposed to external factors like McCarthy.

<sup>5</sup> Filippelli, Ronald and McColloch, Mark, 1995. *Cold War in the Working Class: The Rise and Decline of the United Electrical Workers*. Albany, New York: State University of New York

These works came out during the years when archives began to open in the Soviet Union and scholars developed a renewed interest in the effects of the Cold War on all walks of American life as the 40-year struggle was winding down. Most labor histories that focus on the 1940s and 1950s use the Cold War as the framework for their argument. In doing so, much of the nuance within these stories is missed, as Communism becomes a distraction. This paper removes the boundaries of the Cold War to illuminate the actual strategies used by the labor movement to gain power and influence.

By using UE Local 301 as a case study, the scope of this paper is far narrower than those that tell a more sweeping story of labor's struggles during this time. There have only been a handful of other historians who have used UE Local 301 as their case study. Most either tell the story of the National UE from a broad perspective or tell the story of other equally important UE Locals, such as those located in Erie, Pennsylvania or Lynn, Massachusetts for example. This paper tells the story of this union with a sympathetic eye, looking at its left-wing elements more as victims of a rigged system than as evil subversives who sought to sabotage important defense industries. This approach falls in line with the more contemporary labor histories. Looking at the vast expanse of Cold War labor literature available, this paper will fill in some gaps by placing an emphasis on ideology. While there were several factors that brought about this union's demise, what often gets left out is the ideology behind the motivations of the major characters. This analysis concentrates on ideological debates such as liberalism versus conservatism, Communism versus anti-Communism, and nationalism versus internationalism to name a few. These ideals speak to larger themes of American identity within a changing global atmosphere.

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Press. Filippelli and McColloch treat the Communist UE leaders as harmless activists. Those leaders are viewed as dedicated but victims of a rigged system.

This paper recognizes that pure ideological motivation was concentrated at the top of the UE's leadership. Few rank-and-file union members followed the Communist Party line. Most simply threw their support behind the union that had won them strong contracts. The number of actual Communists in the UE was extremely low. Masuda Hijami argues that social repression levied on groups such as labor unions was less about anti-Communism and more about a growing social conservatism aimed at weakening liberal influence and non-conformity.<sup>6</sup> However, that argument does not fit at GE. The UE's split from the CIO on foreign policy issues and political endorsements was rooted in ideology and the resulting Communist label attached to left-wing unions was taken advantage of by society's conservative elements to weaken liberal influence. An ideological issue was exacerbated by the amalgamation of government officials, Supreme Court justices, large corporations, and conservative union leaders who sought to deepen the divide between the left and the right.

A focus of this paper will be the strategies adopted by both the UE and its opponents as the United States navigated the early Cold War years. The UE embraced international events to bolster its domestic claims. This strategy was adopted by conservatives in order to erode the support base of liberals in the immediate aftermath of World War 2. Rather than telling this story along the axis of good and evil, the paper will disregard the typical relationship between Communism and anti-Communism. This paper compares UE Local 301 to the National UE and the CIO during the years 1936-1954. Within those years, the Soviet Union went from being an ally of the United States to its greatest threat to national security. Also, World War 2 came and went, reinventing American expansion along the way to levels that would have been unheard of

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<sup>6</sup> Hajimu, Masuda, 2015. *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

just a few decades before. The new American identity that rose out of the ashes of the Great Depression and spearheaded democracy's defeat of fascism abroad carried with it a domestic debate about what it meant to be an American. This paper examines how and where the UE and the CIO separated, particularly on foreign policy issues. This is important because as relations between the United States and the Soviet Union grew increasingly tense, preaching co-operation with the Soviet Union became synonymous with disloyalty. This approach reveals deeper cultural and international anxieties within the United States that significantly weakened the influence of one of democracy's greatest bastions, organized labor.

The early Cold War years were a turning point for the American labor movement. Within just 20 years, the movement went from being strong and unified to being delegitimized and cast to the fringe of American politics. The story of UE Local 301, a microcosm of the larger labor movement, remains relevant today because many of the issues that the local had to deal with so many years ago are still casting a shadow over the public's perception of labor unions. While historian Peter Steinberg made the argument that the rebellion of the 1960s could be traced back to the "shutting off effective means of communication and debate" during the Truman administration, the effects of that time reverberate even further than that.<sup>7</sup> The labor movement has never been able to fully recover and effectively remobilize after purging its own left-wing factions in the late 1940s. What emerged from the interunion civil war of the 1940s was a labor movement that has had one hand tied behind its back ever since. To better understand labor's struggles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is critical to have an understanding of the early Cold War years.

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<sup>7</sup> Steinberg, Peter. *The Great "Red Menace": United States Prosecution of Communists, 1947-1952*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984. Pg. 292.



## The City that Lights and Hauls the World

Schenectady itself is unique in the way it fostered the development of left-wing politics. Its rich history of industrial growth and diversity is part of what made UE Local 301 arguably the strongest UE local in the Northeast. Thomas Edison got off the train carrying him to Schenectady on August 20, 1886 and from there the city's industrial center exploded. Formed out of the Edison Electric Works, General Electric was born in 1892, prefacing decades of continued population growth and ethnic diversity.<sup>8</sup> From 1900 to 1910 the city's population more than doubled, from 31,682 to 72,826.<sup>9</sup> This dramatic rise in population was the result of another major industry making Schenectady its home in 1901. The American Locomotive Company, coupled with the bustling General Electric, promised American-born citizens and immigrants alike the opportunity for a decent living. As historian Gerald Zahavi put it, "Englishmen and Scots, Germans, Italians, Irish, Canadians, Poles, Hungarians, Lithuanians, and smaller numbers of African Americans and east European Jews all came to share the bounty."<sup>10</sup>

Schenectady's motto became "the city that lights and hauls the world" and for good reason. The city quickly became incredibly prosperous and out of this prosperity its favorability towards the left was born. Unionism became a critical factor in the success of the city's industries. The first sit-down strike at Schenectady GE was staged by the Industrial Workers of the World in 1906.<sup>11</sup> Following the example of men like Eugene Debs, the Socialist movement in

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<sup>8</sup> Blackwelder, Julia, 2014. *Electric City: General Electric in Schenectady*. Texas A&M University Press. Pg. 186.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Zahavi, Gerald. 1996. "Passionate Commitments: Race, Sex, and Communism at Schenectady General Electric, 1932-1954." *The Journal of American History* 83, no. 2 (September): 514-548. Accessed May 1, 2017. Pg. 518.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Schenectady gained traction around this time. George Lunn was elected as the first Socialist Mayor in New York State in 1911 and would later serve as a Congressman and Lieutenant Governor. Many of the prominent figures in the story of UE Local 301 grew up in this environment of left-wing politics and strong industrial unionism. Many of the men and women making decisions for and running this union in the '40s and '50s had mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles who were a part of the radical turn of the century in Schenectady. The older generation of Schenectady's left had their momentum halted when the Great Depression hit. The city's population peaked at just over 95,000 in 1930, but the optimism for a New Deal alliance between labor and government meant that Schenectady left's second generation was to be taken seriously. Industrial unionism was reborn out of this rebirth of liberalism.

Many of the workers at the General Electric plant shared in the city's prosperity. A 1926 recruitment pamphlet published by GE describes just a few of the city's notable features. "Its water supply is second to none and equaled by that of few cities. Its health conditions are unusually good. Its schools are among the best in the state. Union College affords ample opportunities for special work. Its churches include nearly every denomination. Its residential sections are becoming increasingly beautiful and attractive."<sup>12</sup> The plant was just a few miles out of the capital of Albany at the end of Erie Boulevard. Historian Julia Blackwelder has described the scene of thousands of workers beginning their day here: "From the main gate men and women proceeded up Works Avenue. As the great parade moved forward, the crowds thinned as employees turned off at the buildings to which they had been assigned. At the end of the day shift the great parade occurred in reverse."<sup>13</sup> After their shifts, workers could enjoy catching a

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<sup>12</sup> Blackwelder, Julia, 2014. *Electric City: General Electric in Schenectady*. Pg. 185.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 169.

show at Proctors Theatre or take a walk through Central Park with their loved ones, a park built under the supervision of the Lunn mayoral administration. Regardless of how they spent their free time, Schenectady GE's workers knew their city was unique and worth fighting for. These employees were proud to be a part of Schenectady and were not going to allow themselves to be taken advantage of by GE's management or the government. UE Local 301 held out as long as it did because of this rich history of industrial unionism, left-wing politics, and Schenectady pride.

### **Labor's Role in Democracy**

The argument most central to the growing labor movement was that work and democracy were inextricably linked. For workers to have a voice in government, they had to be part of a labor organization, which would secure that voice. The relationship between labor and government changed immeasurably with the passage of the National Labor Relations Act, also known as the Wagner Act. Named after New York Senator Robert Wagner, it went into effect on July 6, 1935. It guaranteed the basic rights of workers, including the right to form labor unions and the right to bargain collectively with employers. Unions had been facing a perplexing situation since the stock market crash of 1929. They were aware that by sheer numbers alone they stood little chance at being able to fight back against employers. The rugged individualism of the 1920s created an atmosphere in which management was given considerable power over any bargaining unit labor organized around. Fortunately for the unions, the New Dealers, led by President Roosevelt, saw organized labor as vital to America's democracy. Therefore, when the labor movement reached out for help following the stock market crash, the New Dealers in the Roosevelt administration were quick to come to its aid. This came at a price, though. While the labor movement celebrated the passage of the Wagner Act, the unions, according to historian Christopher Tomlins, "were of necessity making themselves hostage to a power over which they

historically enjoyed little control.”<sup>14</sup> Labor and management relations, a hitherto private endeavor became fully entrenched within the regulatory orbit of the federal government. This was the beginning of the UE viewing the relationship between government, industry and labor as an extension of its argument that workers were a crucial part of democracy.

The Wagner Act heavily favored the worker in negotiations, and in response General Electric created the Workers Council in Schenectady. The Workers Council was a company union and did not last long. After enough cards had been signed by the plant’s workers a National Labor Relations Board election was called for and on December 15, 1936 UE Local 301 defeated the Workers Council by a vote of 5,111 to 4,033, becoming the bargaining agent for Schenectady GE workers.<sup>15</sup> As the country was recovering from the recession of 1937, New Deal liberalism began to shift toward the political center and the approach of the New Dealers moved away from regulation and reform. Shortly after its chartering the UE affiliated with the CIO and by membership numbers alone would become one of its most significant unions. At the first National CIO Convention held from November 14-18, 1938 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, President John Lewis was proud to report that the CIO then had 4,037,877 members being represented by 42 national and international unions.<sup>16</sup> Lewis praised the Wagner Act, which since its passage had handled 17,000 cases involving 24,000,000 workers, about half of all members of labor organizations. Thousands of workers had been reinstated after strikes and

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<sup>14</sup> Tomlins, Christopher. *The State and the Unions: Labor Relations Law and the Organized Labor Movement in America, 1880-1960*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Pg. 95.

<sup>15</sup> “Them and Us: Struggles of a Rank-and-file Union” by James Matles and James Higgins, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 2, Edward J. Bloch Papers, 1931-2001. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York. Hereafter referred to as Edward J. Bloch Papers.

<sup>16</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Annual CIO Constitutional Convention Proceedings, November 14-18, 1938. Pg. 36.

received back wages. Despite many calls within Congress to amend the act, Lewis explicitly stated, “There is no justification for any amendments to the National Labor Relations Act.”<sup>17</sup>

The sheer number of cases the Wagner Act oversaw reinforced for Lewis that the economy of the New Dealers was working in labor’s favor. It became clear to the CIO that if labor was to truly have representation in Washington, it had to work within the legislative apparatus of the government. The CIO was allowing the Wagner Act to guide relations between labor and management. In return, labor got a seat at the table alongside the government and management. The 1938 Convention was primarily concerned with domestic issues and praising the work of President Roosevelt in rebuilding the economy. The CIO did reach out briefly into the international sphere, but only so far as to condemn Nazi Germany and Fascism abroad and to extend solidarity to labor unions around the world. Labor unions at home were legitimizing their own claims and demands for better wages and working conditions by reaching out to international workers that were experiencing similar struggles. Nationalism was the rallying cry of the day. The importance of domestic affairs would be echoed a year later when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. The first edition of the UE Local 301 newspaper was published on September 19, 1939 and it states, “we are all workers, union brothers, and Americans, and therefore keep ourselves clear of all controversial arguments that might split the splendid unity that now exists among us.”<sup>18</sup> Local 301 mimicked the CIO’s foreign policy agenda throughout the entirety of World War 2 because during those transformative years, to be a loyal American meant to stand up against Fascism. That common enemy kept the labor movement united and in good standing with the government for several years.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Pg. 74.

<sup>18</sup> *UE Local 301 News*. September 19, 1939.

The spirit of internationalism had yet to make its way through the ranks of the CIO by the time the 2<sup>nd</sup> CIO Convention was held in October of 1939, even though most of the discussion between delegates was on the war raging in Europe. The CIO's officers stated, "organized labor is emphatically opposed to any involvement of the United States in the European War."<sup>19</sup> Not one delegate stood up and argued against that position. It was acceptable for labor unions to show solidarity to workers in Europe, but domestic economic issues had to be the priority. The CIO was placing itself firmly in the political arena, but they made it clear that "preoccupation with foreign affairs must not be allowed to detract attention from unemployment and other pressing problems of internal economic insecurity."<sup>20</sup> Embracing nationalism while working with the existing institutions was the path to influence for the CIO and its unions. Just like the year before, the resolutions passed were concerned primarily with domestic economic and legislative issues.

The CIO and its unions were levying a critique on capitalism and it was reinforced by nationalistic rhetoric. Unbridled capitalism had been detrimental to the working class of America and was a large factor in the collapse of the stock market. Now that the influence of workers on the process of government was being amplified, some wanted to go a step further. The Communist Party of the United States was advocating for a complete restructuring of the economic system and as the liberals within the labor movement quickly allied themselves with the Democratic Party, the Communist Party followed suit because they saw Roosevelt as their best shot at achieving economic reform. The Great Depression succeeded in marginalizing industrial workers who saw the system collapse with their own eyes. Political ideologies are not

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<sup>19</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual CIO Constitutional Convention Proceedings, October 10-13, 1939. Hereafter referred to as 1939 CIO Convention Proceedings. Pg. 5.

<sup>20</sup> 1939 CIO Convention Proceedings. Pg. 5.

innate, everyone comes to one on their own accord. Two of the UE's most influential leaders, James Matles and Julius Emspak were born at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and witnessed first-hand the progressive movements of the era. The allure of Communism lay not in its militancy but in its promise of a better future. That promised future would see workers sharing the means of production. Workers in the United States were reading about how Stalin was rapidly industrializing the Soviet Union and improving the lives of his citizens under the banner of Communism. Less hours of work and more hours of leisure drew many regular workers who had previously hesitated to take a strong stance on politics into the Communist camp. The effectiveness of Communism in the Soviet Union encouraged American workers to bolster the claims they were making on their own government. Workers covered under the UE quickly saw their wages go up, the safety of their workplace increase, and for the first time they had a hand on the wheel. New Deal liberalism was shifting towards the political center, however, and the Communists suddenly found themselves alienated on the fringe. Local 301 in Schenectady had been one of the UE's strongholds since its inception, making its members targets for red-baiting in the years during and immediately following the war. Because of the underground nature of the labor movement's Communist elements, the exact number of Communists within UE Local 301 is unknown, but in the rank-and-file there were probably few.

The CIO was fully aware that its influence within national politics was increasing and it was determined to reinforce its policy of America first, international second. The 3<sup>rd</sup> annual CIO Convention, which ran from November 18-22, 1940 in Atlantic City, opened with Chairman Goldsmith stating, "Our decisions here may well determine whether this nation remains at peace

or goes to war.”<sup>21</sup> Over the course of that year the CIO won tremendous victories because of its embrace of nationalism and championing of domestic economic issues. Lewis noted that since the 1939 Convention, the CIO won 60% of the representation elections in which they were on the ballot with 294,481 votes cast in the CIO’s favor.<sup>22</sup> As the economy shifted from one of peace to one of war, the leverage held by labor organizations increased rapidly as did their membership numbers. 1940’s Convention is evidence once again that the labor movement did not embrace internationalism until it became the loyal thing for every American to do. There is little mention of foreign policy within the proceedings, except to promise the CIO’s solidarity with the labor unions of Allied countries. Everyone was on board with the language of nationalism and the drive to support the Allied forces from afar. The delegates encouraged the growth of the economy by means of war production so long as it did not cause price increases that were not accompanied by wage increases. The labor movement was growing stronger, but so were its opponents.

### **Nationalism for Internationalism’s Sake**

Fascism became an easy way for the CIO to frame its claims about domestic economics and CIO President Murray was signaling a change in the way the organization would conduct its affairs. The 1941 CIO Convention was the beginning of the labor movement taking nationalistic themes and engaging within the international political arena. This served two functions. First, it helped legitimize the claims the union was making about labor and democracy. Second, it allowed the labor movement, even its Communists, to fall under the definition of loyal

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<sup>21</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual CIO Convention Proceedings, November 18-22, 1940. Hereafter referred to as 1940 CIO Convention Proceedings. Pg. 5.

<sup>22</sup> 1940 CIO Convention Proceedings.



Americans, which it hoped would earn it the good graces of the government and management for the duration of the war and in the years to follow. The CIO had previously been maintaining a position that was strongly against United States intervention in Europe, but now, just a few weeks before Pearl Harbor, war fever was heating up across the country and many of the delegates recognized it would be impossible for the country to remain simply a supplier of arms and munitions for the Allied powers. Delegate McDonald, representing the steelworkers, stated, "I say these workers do not want to die but at the same time they are not cowards. They must be given a chance to defend themselves against those people who want to rip at their bowels and shoot off their heads."<sup>23</sup> Delegate Reuther of the United Automobile Workers (UAW) spoke just as strongly, stating, "Hitler is not fearful of resolutions. We have got to speak, not through microphones but through assembly lines. That is the language Hitler will understand."<sup>24</sup> At this time the CIO had over 5 million members, so fighting Fascism through production was not a far-fetched idea. While previous CIO conventions hardly scratched the surface of international politics, 1941's proceedings made it clear that the CIO was committed to using the international crisis of Fascism to critique capitalism at home. A main component of the CIO's stance was that labor and democracy could not exist without one another. This allowed the CIO to point to Nazi Germany as an example of how a strong connection between government and industry, unchecked by a vital labor movement, could be detrimental. The CIO was handed an opportunity with the breakout of war in Europe, and it took advantage. One of the most telling statements of the convention came from President Murray, who explicitly stated, "Today labor has become more deeply appreciative of the dangers to democracy through Hitler's aim of world conquest. It

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<sup>23</sup> 1941 CIO Convention Proceedings. Pg. 148.

<sup>24</sup> 1941 CIO Convention Proceedings. Pg. 146.

is clear to labor that a single task looms ahead – the defeat of this menace to humanity.”<sup>25</sup>

Democracy was in danger, and the CIO strategy adapted to the global events that were unfolding.

The war lent credibility and legitimacy to the nationalistic claims the CIO and UE were making at home because the workers were so crucial to the production of war materiel. The war essentially forced the country to pull itself out of the Great Depression and for the first time since the 1920s, domestic economic issues were set aside, even for the labor unions. Hitler became the focus of foreign and domestic policy dialogue. Every Allied country was devoting its resources to preventing German conquest. The relatively recent strategy of working with the existing institutions, most notable the government becomes an important factor. The war years were hardly idle times for the UE. It had been cultivating a strategy to legitimize the claims it was making on the federal government for years. Historian James Sparrow, while not specifically discussing the role of the federal government on the labor movement, has defined this strategy nonetheless as the “national community.”<sup>26</sup> This “national community” was essentially a shared nationalism that those who sacrificed for the sake of the war were using to give credibility to their claims. This gave workers the feeling that they were not just grasping at thin air. They grounded themselves in their sacrifice for the war in the name of democracy. Sparrow argues that citizens invested themselves in the power of the government, which on an international level expanded exponentially during the war, on a material and ideological level.<sup>27</sup> The ideology of course being nationalism, with the material investment coming in the form of the purchase of war bonds, producing something tangible to be shipped overseas for the war, or military service

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<sup>25</sup> 1941 CIO Convention Proceedings. Pg. 40.

<sup>26</sup> Sparrow, James. *Warfare State: World War 2 Americans and the Age of Big Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg. 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

itself. Whether affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) or the CIO the argument was the same. In Schenectady, a worker spending 40 hours a week making radar and radio equipment for the Allies felt the government owed them some. We are helping you, now you have to pay your dues. This would become the cornerstone of the UE's post-war argument that the government should step in and take the side of the worker in disputes between labor and management. The CIO and UE developed this strategy of rooting claims in international events to gain broad support at home and it worked. Labor committed to the no-strike pledge for the duration of the war and adopted nationalistic rhetoric. This showed the government and the public that labor was lending all of its resources to fighting Hitler.

The budding military-industrial complex, the unspoken relationship between the defense industry, the nation's military, and the government, played a significant role in the argument the UE was developing. General Electric was hardly a bystander in the equation that was producing for the war effort. GE had contracts with the federal government to produce the aforementioned radio equipment that would be used in Allied planes as well as radar equipment for submarines. The link between GE and the government to produce for the war could have been viewed as worrisome, but industry and labor were working so well together. The Nazi war machine was built from the ground up by a government which greatly invested in its military industries. A similar situation was happening right at home, but because the UE was guaranteeing that democracy's backbone was an organized labor force, there was nothing to be worried about. The UE was winning strong contracts for its workers, GE was making considerable profits and the government was gaining power and influence abroad while remaining out of the war. Every side benefitted, and thus there was no cause for concern. Fascism would remain an issue at arm's length, not one which would be cause for domestic fear and hysteria.

The labor movement wanted to be a part of the rebirth of internationalism caused by World War 2 to legitimize its domestic claims about democracy and the working class. The national community was not enough. It was time for the CIO and its unions to go big. They had been hinting at it since the first CIO convention when solidarity with international labor unions was written into the resolutions. Now, the CIO strategy was coming full-circle and the stakes could not go higher than the international. Over the next three years, the UE gained significant ground in the electrical industry. From 1941-1945 the UE won 831 representation elections in plants employing over 335,000 workers. At the height of wartime production, the UE represented workers in more than 1,300 plants and their contracts covered 600,000 workers. The UE was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest CIO union as early as 1943.<sup>28</sup> During the war the UE and its locals kept in line with the CIO and its foreign policy. The CIO was advocating for adherence to President Roosevelt's foreign policy plan that was centered on cooperation between the Big Three: the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States. The Soviet Union was playing a critical role in the fight against Fascism and so long as Stalin was committed to defeating Hitler, Communists within the United States held a degree of credibility. This allowed the Communists within the labor movement to be swept under the rug while the government focused on the bigger issue of the survival of international democracy. As the American people cast off their isolationism, labor unions followed suit. Historian Daniel Yergin has argued that by 1943 the American people were in an "internationalist phase, a fervent rebirth of Wilsonianism" that stemmed partly from feelings of guilt at not having properly policed world peace in the interwar years. A Gallup poll conducted in May of 1943 showed that 74% of Americans surveyed supported the participation of the United States in some form of international organization committed to maintaining world

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<sup>28</sup> "Them and Us", Edward J. Bloch Papers.

peace.<sup>29</sup> The position of the CIO and UE coincides with the findings of that poll. Isolationism did not work. For the United States to shape the world in its vision it had to be internationalist and that was unavoidable.

### **The Tactic Succeeds**

While the labor unions were finding their place within this revitalization of internationalism, the situation in Schenectady was becoming gloomier despite high wartime profits for General Electric. The economy was booming and production for the war was generating countless jobs, but in Schenectady the jobs were leaving. UE Local 301 Business Agent Leo Jandreau spoke before the Congressional Military Affairs Committee at the beginning of 1945 and made it explicitly clear that while the nation was prospering, Schenectady's situation was much bleaker. Between January of 1944 and January of 1945 Schenectady GE laid off about 8,000 employees.<sup>30</sup> Schenectady employees were repeatedly winning strong contracts through their bargaining agent, the UE, and GE tried to combat this by implementing a decentralization plan. This decentralization plan consisted of taking workers out of higher wage areas like Schenectady and transferring them to new plants in low wage areas such as Waterford, New York. In fighting back against layoffs and the rising cost of living, the UE extended its efforts to get a wage increase for their workers. Fortunately for the union, its cooperation with the government and management during the past 4 years of war earned it the goodwill of the public. In March of 1945 the Board of Supervisors of Schenectady County recognized the union's cooperation and went on record to support its fight for a 17 cent per hour wage increase, a

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<sup>29</sup> Yergin, Daniel. *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977. Pg. 46.

<sup>30</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. January 27, 1945.

demand consistent with other CIO unions across the country.<sup>31</sup> This support of the public would prove vital in the coming months.

The strategy of the CIO and UE to cooperate with the government to produce for the war while critiquing capitalism at the same time was about to pay dividends. With the death of President Roosevelt on April 12, 1945, labor lost its most important ally. Roosevelt's successor Harry Truman was prepared to respond to the demands of the unions. Less than a month later, the war in Europe would be over and while the war in Japan would rage on for a few more months, it was time for domestic production to begin the difficult process of reconverting to civilian manufacturing. Throughout the summer of 1945 Local 301 members were writing personal letters to War Labor Board Chairman Dr. George Taylor urging him to implement the CIO's reconversion plan, which included providing at least \$25 per week for 26 weeks for war workers who lost their jobs during the reconversion period.<sup>32</sup> Letters were also sent to Washington urging a review and potential overhaul of the national wage policy. The unions had a legitimate claim here, as they cooperated over the course of the war to keep production at its peak and keep the war machine going, but now, as soldiers were returning home from war, there were few jobs for them to return to. Workers at Schenectady GE were seeing their hours cut and their overtime disappear with nothing to make up for that lost time. Alan Brinkley has argued that by 1945 the larger labor movement was already well on its way to becoming a politicized interest group, one whose goals had become increasingly narrow and "committed mainly to its own institutional survival."<sup>33</sup> It seems odd to think of the labor movement as struggling for

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<sup>31</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. March 24, 1945.

<sup>32</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. July 21, 1945.

<sup>33</sup> Brinkley, Alan. *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995. Pg. 224.

survival in 1945, the year in which they celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Wagner Act and showed genuine unity and strength. However, Japan's surrender in August took caused domestic economic issues to come to the forefront once again.

With the war now over, Truman was determined to show that labor's role in the conversation about democracy and economics was still large. Truman validated clearly the claims of the union. Embracing nationalism did not just come in the form of producing for the country, but also in consuming the goods produced. The labor movement argued that if more money was put in the pockets of the average worker, that money would be spent on products, ultimately keeping the economy running. In the eyes of the unions, this was the ultimate show of loyalty. The CIO and the UE had earned the legitimacy and voice they were searching for and on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 3 days after Japan announced its surrender, President Truman signed Executive Order 9599. The order was concerned with the reconversion of industry in the country back to civilian manufacturing. Truman walked the tightrope between labor and management in this order, attempting to be fair to both sides by putting the responsibility for reconversion in the hands of the government.<sup>34</sup> Truman was hesitant to anger either the labor unions or the large corporations but knew he had to step up and intercede on behalf of the government. A few months later, on October 30<sup>th</sup>, President Truman reemphasized the importance of Executive Order 9599 by giving the layman's version of it in a radio address to the public. In his address, Truman again tried to walk the line between labor and management by emphasizing the need for "the good sense, the reasonableness, the consideration for the position of the other fellow, the

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<sup>34</sup> Truman, Harry S. "Executive Order 9599 – Providing for Assistance to Expanded Production and Continued Stabilization of the National Economy During the Transition from War to Peace, and for the Orderly Modification of Wartime Controls Over Prices, Wages, Materials and Facilities." August 18, 1945.

teamwork which we had during the war.”<sup>35</sup> He went on to call for a wage increase and listed his reasons as to why industry could afford to give wages. Naturally a speech such as this gave the labor movement pride and a sense of legitimacy, but the President went on to say how industry had many risks and problems which they were facing as well. He stated, “Labor is the best customer management has; and management is the source of labor’s livelihood. Both are wholly dependent on each other; and the country in turn is dependent upon both of them.”<sup>36</sup> The labor movement rejoiced at the President’s speech. The military-industrial complex, which had developed extensively during the war, was going to continue but not at the expense of the UE.

The strategy of the CIO and the UE was coming full-circle. They had demonstrated their loyalty to the country by producing for the war and continuing consumption after the fact, and now, if they did not get the wage increase they demanded they were going to tip the scale by striking. A strike would put a halt to one of the hallmarks of labor’s loyalty, production. This strategy could work, however, as the threat of a strike is a powerful bargaining chip. Democracy beat Fascism and labor could proudly point to its contribution as a show of increased leverage. The government was on board with labor’s argument, as evident by Truman’s Executive Order and subsequent speech but the corporations were still going to put up a fight. The formula in which labor is on a level playing field with management put companies like General Electric at a severe disadvantage, regardless of the claims labor was making about its role in a healthy, democratic economy. The headline of the November 10, 1945 Local 301 newspaper read “GE Company Strike Ignores Truman Plea.”<sup>37</sup> Representatives from UE Local 301 and Schenectady

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<sup>35</sup> Truman, Harry S. “Radio Address to the American People on Wages and Prices in the Reconversion Period.” Speech, October 30, 1945.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. November 10, 1945.



GE met for the first time since the President's wage-price address and amidst Local 301's demands for a \$2 a day wage increase GE was not budging. The union's position was that the cost of living had remained at wartime levels despite wages not increasing and it believed GE more than capable of meeting its wage demands. Rumors of a nationwide strike began circulating around the plants in Schenectady accompanied by petitions calling for a strike. Over 90% of Schenectady GE employees signed in favor of the strike.<sup>38</sup> The union made sure to post GE's profit figures for its members and the public to see, to add legitimacy to its wage demands. For 1944, GE's after-tax profits were \$62 million, up from \$43 million in 1939. The push for a strike gained so much traction that the NLRB stepped in and held a vote in Schenectady, one in which Local 301 members overwhelmingly voted "yes".<sup>39</sup> This yes vote gave the union authorization to call a strike if it was deemed the last resort. In the face of an imminent strike, GE countered the UE's demand of a \$2 a day raise with the offer of a 10% wage increase.<sup>40</sup>

The CIO continued its strategy of entrenching itself in the international by looking abroad for allies. A delegation was sent to the Soviet Union to learn about the country's labor-management relations. The delegation's chairman was James Carey, former UE President and virulent anti-Communist. The delegates arrived in Moscow on October 11<sup>th</sup> and were quickly taken to see an exhibition of Soviet war trophies captured from the Nazis.<sup>41</sup> The delegation was shown one of Stalin's automobile plants on the outskirts of Moscow and took note of how half of the plant's employees were women and how each worker received at least 2 weeks of paid

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<sup>38</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. November 17, 1945.

<sup>39</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. December 15, 1945.

<sup>40</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. December 29, 1945.

<sup>41</sup> "Report of the CIO Delegation to the Soviet Union", Series 2, Box 2, Folder 1, Helen Quirini Papers, 1898-2010. M. E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York. Hereafter referred to as Helen Quirini Papers.

vacation. The delegates were shown the architecture of the city and received warm ovations after being announced as guests at a ballet at the Filial Theater. After more tours of plants by day and ballets at night, the delegates boarded their flight home on the morning of October 19<sup>th</sup>, but their time spent in the Soviet Union left an indelible impression on those who attended. In his report on the experience, James Carey wrote, “While there are many obvious differences in the systems and governments of the United States and the Soviet Union, we found parallels in the functioning of labor unions in both countries, as indeed throughout the world.”<sup>42</sup> The CIO Executive Board had recently approved and established a Soviet-American Trade Union Committee to foster more exchanges of ideas between the two nations. This was a crucial moment for the CIO as it was another strategic move, a gesture towards internationalism that would once again validate and legitimize the claims the CIO was making at home. By allying with the Soviet Union, which had a strong industrial labor force, the CIO was firmly situating itself within an ongoing conversation about nationalism and internationalism. Part of what made the Soviet war machine so strong in the fight against Hitler was the enormity of production undertaken by its workforce. Immediately after the war, the Soviet workers were given better wages and saw their working conditions improve. While the United States did not need to rebuild itself after the war, it left the battlefield stronger than it entered. The CIO was pointing to the Soviet Union as an example of how nationalistic claims made by a domestic workforce were validated by the value of their production.

The CIO saw value in the critique of capitalism that the Soviet Union represented. Allying itself with such a force gave the CIO the legitimacy and credibility it desired. The UE also took advantage of its new alliance. Local UE unions around the country were preparing to

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

attack capitalism at one of its strongest points, its large corporations. In Schenectady, the visit to the Soviet Union reverberated through Local 301 as the workers were preparing to engage in their first massive strike. The vision the CIO and the UE had of embracing internationalism, in this case the Soviet Union, in order to levy a critique of capitalism domestically was coming to fruition. Workers in Schenectady, as in the rest of the country, saw massive flaws in the way capitalism was operating. Companies like GE and Westinghouse were raking in massive profits at the expense of the workers who were struggling to put food on the tables for their families, even after they had just sacrificed for years to help their country win a global war to save democracy. Striking was the path to success and a powerful ally such as the Soviet Union gave the labor movement the momentum it needed.

### **Same Strategy, Different Outcomes**

The powder keg in Schenectady finally exploded on January 15, 1946 as workers began to walk the picket line in protest of the company's refusal to yield to the union's wage demands. GE made the claim that the public did not want a strike but Local 301 countered with the argument that if GE cared so much about the public then they would not have laid off over 16,000 workers over the past few years.<sup>43</sup> The strike was a major turning point for UE Local 301. The UE's strategy of basing domestic claims in international events earned Local 301 important support from the Schenectady community, forcing GE's hand. Maintenance workers and executives had to apply to the strike committee for passes to get into the gates of the plants. Over 1,000 local merchants placed placards in their store windows pledging their support to UE Local 301. Citizens donated wood for burn barrels and the Schoharie County Farmers Union donated

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<sup>43</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. January 14, 1946.

an 800-pound heifer and truckloads of food to the strikers and their families. Even the police refused to enforce GE's injunction limiting strikers at the plant.<sup>44</sup> As the rank-and-file workers were banding together they were printing appeals in the Local 301 newspapers to the office and salaried GE workers urging them not to cross the picket lines. Office and salaried workers were not organized, and Local 301 feared GE would use them as "guinea pigs." "If one sinks, all sink. Don't let GE use you as scabs and strike-breakers," the paper read.<sup>45</sup> The Albany Central Federation of Labor, an affiliate of the rival AFL, even voted unanimously in favor of the Local 301 strikers.<sup>46</sup> With spring just around the corner, March of 1946 saw new frustrations and impatience at GE's lack of flexibility on the wage demands of Local 301. A special Bi-Partisan Committee made up of six members of the Schenectady County Board released a resolution calling for a settlement between the union and management along the lines of an 18.5 cent per hour wage increase, a raise that would be reflective of those won by strikers in other industries.<sup>47</sup> Finally, with enough pressure levied on them from the strikers and the community, GE agreed on March 13<sup>th</sup> to raising all Schenectady workers' wages 18.5 cents an hour, an increase of \$1.48 a day. While this was not everything the union had hoped for, its show of strength and the solidarity it received from the community saw many workers returning to work the following Monday with hopeful hearts. In announcing the victory to his fellow workers, Business Agent Leo Jandreau proudly declared, "You have already recognized it as a victory not only for the strikers, but for the whole community and for the preservation of democracy in our land. You, by

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<sup>44</sup> Kannenberg, Lisa. "Putting the "I" before "UE": Labor's Cold War in Schenectady-GE." In *Labor's Cold War: Local Politics in a Global Context*, edited by Shelton Stromquist, 137-162. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

<sup>45</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. January 26, 1945.

<sup>46</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. February 8, 1946.

<sup>47</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. March 1, 1946.

your unity and determination, won the fight.”<sup>48</sup> The democracy that won World War 2 was one in which labor held a powerful voice in government and in relations with management. The strike was vital to the preservation of that vision of democracy.

The UE’s opponents then changed the conversation about capitalism and democracy by making the issue primarily about Communism. International events made headlines again, giving the right-wing of the CIO an opportunity to take advantage of the hysteria. In Czechoslovakia, Communists won the Parliamentary elections of May 1946 by almost a million votes. The United States and Great Britain attempted to reshape and rebuild Europe based around their own principles of democracy, but the Czechoslovakian election showed that Communism would not be contained just to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had a stake in the game too, and it was also trying to reshape Europe in its own image, starting with Czechoslovakia. The situation among the Big Three grew tense and relations quickly broke down, only amplifying the fear of Communism within the American public and government that had been muted for the duration of the war. At this time, a Gallup poll was conducted that found 48% of those surveyed believed the Communist Party of the United States was more loyal to the Soviet Union than to the United States.<sup>49</sup> The public’s perception of international events served the agenda of the UE’s opponents by giving them a tool with which to criticize the UE’s position in the conversation about capitalism and the role of labor in democracy.

Riding on the momentum of the strike victory, Local 301 used its leverage to combat the rising prices of consumer goods. The relaxing of price controls over the summer of 1946 forced Local 301 to turn its attention away from larger national domestic issues. Schenectady GE tried

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<sup>48</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. March 15, 1946.

<sup>49</sup> Levenstein, Harvey. *Communism, Anticommunism, and the CIO*. Pg. 234.

to raise the price of pints of milk in the cafeteria and Local 301 members lost their minds, so much so that the battle over cafeteria milk was covered in 3 consecutive Local 301 newspapers. Local 301, the same union which gathered unanimous community support to earn an 18.5 cent per hour raise for its workers just a few months earlier was now unable to stop GE from raising the price of a pint of milk in its cafeterias from 9 cents to 12 cents.<sup>50</sup> This was the beginning of a tactical shift by the UE.

The UE's attachment to the Soviet Union forced its strategy to shift from offensive to defensive. A small but growing group within Local 301 began circulating petitions at several Schenectady GE buildings in September of 1946. These petitions were in protest of Communist influence within the UE and of the more than 10,000 employees at the Schenectady GE works, only 166 signed the petition.<sup>51</sup> The rank-and-file did not pay much attention to the issue of Communism within the union and few of them cared whether the organization's leaders, notably James Matles and Julius Emspak, were Communist. So long as they were getting a paycheck and the union was continuously fighting for better wages and working conditions the rank-and-file were content. Pasquale Vottis, Local 301 member recalled, "No more than 4 percent of any people at any time in the shop" had knowledge of the UE's stance on foreign and domestic affairs.<sup>52</sup> In fact, union meetings rarely ever had more than the quorum of 75 members in attendance. Men often had to be brought upstairs from the bar below to vote on resolutions.<sup>53</sup> The anti-Communists were gaining momentum in Schenectady and they gained an ally on November 5<sup>th</sup> when Republicans won both houses of Congress for the first time since 1930. The

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<sup>50</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. July 11, 1946.

<sup>51</sup> Kannenberg, Lisa. "Putting the "I" before "UE": Labor's Cold War in Schenectady-GE."

<sup>52</sup> Zahavi, Gerald. "Passionate Commitments: Race, Sex, and Communism at Schenectady General Electric, 1932-1954." Pg. 521.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

incoming 80<sup>th</sup> Congress was quick to attack labor in its first sessions as 21 anti-labor bills were introduced in the Senate and 37 in the House within its first two weeks.<sup>54</sup> It was time for the CIO and its affiliated unions to go on the defensive. The debate between left and right had previously been about the role labor had in a democracy. The strength of labor's voice in government was one of the main issues the labor movement championed over the past decade. World War 2 changed the conversation about domestic economics by giving the CIO and the UE an opportunity to utilize the fight against Fascism to strengthen their critique of corporate capitalism. This time, conservatives in the government and the labor movement were forcing the conversational change by utilizing the domestic and international hysteria about Communism to their advantage. The debate was no longer about the validity of labor's claims. The debate was about to be dictated by the UE's alliance with the Soviet Union and the right's opposition to that.

The anti-Communist faction of the CIO adopted the strategy of the rest of the UE of using the international to bolster national claims and criticisms. The UE proved that strategy was effective. CIO President Murray attempted to hide the growing internal divisions of his organization and feigned unity. At the 8<sup>th</sup> annual CIO Convention President Murray was quick to condemn the "wild and wholly irrational statements" that have been "contained in newspapers and disseminated throughout the land that this organization of yours and mine, this great big mighty trade union movement, was Communistically dominated. As I have stated before, the Congress of Industrial Organizations was not and must never be Communistically controlled or inspired."<sup>55</sup> Murray was trying to show the public that the CIO was unified, but his statement was not entirely true. At least 15 CIO unions making up 20% of the CIO's total membership had

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<sup>54</sup> Kannenberg, Lisa. "Putting the "I" before "UE": Labor's Cold War in Schenectady-GE."

<sup>55</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> Annual CIO Convention Proceedings, November 18-22, 1946. Pg. 111.

Communists within their leadership and could be classified as Communist-led.<sup>56</sup> The showdown between the anti-Communists, led by Walter Reuther and James Carey, and the Communists, led by James Matles and Julius Emspak, had been in motion for some time but now the forces that sought to hinder labor's influence were growing stronger.

Controversial UE National Organizer James Matles paid a visit to Schenectady in January 1947 to speak to Local 301 members. Matles, a member of the Communist Party, warned the workers of efforts by GE to stall collective bargaining.<sup>57</sup> Support from the public, which was such a critical element of the strike victory the year before, now was waning, and a known Communist like James Matles visiting the area did not help the situation. Local 301's newspaper complained that the Schenectady Gazette and the Union Star deliberately ignored statements made by Leo Jandreau and President Andrew Peterson, although the papers "always have room for statements by Wilson [GE President] and other GE officials attacking labor."<sup>58</sup> The following week, both of Schenectady's daily papers attacked a film put out by the UE for supposedly promoting Communism.<sup>59</sup> Within the CIO, relations between the top leadership were tenser than ever. At a meeting of Vice Presidents on February 1<sup>st</sup>, Albert Fitzgerald accused James Carey, both members of the UE, of giving aid to "insurgents" within the union.<sup>60</sup> These insurgents were the United Electrical Members for Democratic Action (UEMDA), the anti-Communist faction

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<sup>56</sup> Oshinsky, David. *Senator Joseph McCarthy and the American Labor Movement*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1976.

<sup>57</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. January 9, 1947.

<sup>58</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. January 23, 1947.

<sup>59</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. January 30, 1947.

<sup>60</sup> Filippelli, Ronald and McColloch, Mark. *Cold War in the Working Class: The Rise and Decline of the United Electrical Workers*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.



within the UE. Now the divisions within the CIO were more obvious than ever. The UE began to split away from the CIO, just as Local 301 was beginning to feel alienated in Schenectady.

The role of the federal government in the strategy of both the UE and its opponents was critical. Late President Roosevelt was labor's greatest ally, giving credibility to the CIO and UE's argument that labor plays a vital role in democracy. President Truman took a more centrist position, and his own embrace of Communism as a crucial international and domestic issue served the agenda of the UE's opponents. On March 12, 1947 the Truman Doctrine was announced, with the goal of containing Communism around the world. One of the consequences of this announcement was that it forced the hand of the Communists within the UE, as they had been keeping their differing foreign policy advocacy quiet. Naturally, because the Truman Doctrine was a bane to the Soviet Union's hopes of geopolitical expansion, the UE took a stance that was firmly against it. Shortly after the UE came out against the Truman Doctrine, the Chamber of Commerce printed a booklet to serve as a handbook for members of labor management, giving them guidance for dealing with Communists on their shop floors. The booklet states, "Communism is a secret conspiratorial movement in the interests of a foreign power."<sup>61</sup> The main point of the booklet was that Communists were planted by the Soviet Union in the industrial labor movement to sabotage potential war materiel and within office and professional unions to act as spy agents for the Soviets. Communism was compared to a disease and that for the disease to stop spreading, it had to be wiped out where it was strongest, the labor movement.<sup>62</sup> The definition of a loyal American was once again changing. Whereas a few years earlier, being a loyal American meant fighting Fascism, it now meant fighting Communism. The

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<sup>61</sup> United States Chamber of Commerce, "Communists within the Labor Movement: the Facts and Countermeasures", 1947.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

argument that loyalty was rooted in production and consumption was losing traction. Loyalty and ideology had always been intertwined but now that was glaring. The UE found itself on the wrong side of the argument for the first time. Previously the union had bought into the winning formula of nationalism plus production equals loyalty and dues from the government. Now, the ideology it embraced, an internationalism with strong ties to Communism became, according to those on the right, equated with disloyalty and subversion. Anyone who was critical of the Truman administration's foreign policy was seen as suspicious. On March 21<sup>st</sup>, Truman signed Executive Order 9835 requiring loyalty checks for all federal employees and by the end of the year the Attorney General had published a list of subversive organizations, a list that rose from 82 groups in 1948 to 197 in 1950.<sup>63</sup> The hunt for Communists was on, driving the organization further underground than it already was. The UE and its locals knew it needed to organize more workers to gain all the support it could get. Local 301 organized a drive to unionize the remaining 3,600 workers at Schenectady and bring them into the UE for just such a purpose.<sup>64</sup>

President Truman announced the Marshall Plan on June 5, 1947 and the UE criticized it as an extension of a growing Fascism right at home. The UE criticized Truman's foreign policy because it was fostering domestic arms production. This domestic arms production was less about rebuilding Europe's economy and more about guaranteeing that companies like GE would be able to keep making profits on par with their wartime levels. The plan was not rejected by the UE right away, in fact it was not until the Cominform was created and denounced it in October of 1947 that the UE came out against it.<sup>65</sup> This position of the UE was not surprising, as it was

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<sup>63</sup> Sexton, Patricia. *The War on Labor and the Left: Understanding America's Unique Conservatism*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1991.

<sup>64</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. March 21, 1947.

<sup>65</sup> "10 Years of Communist Control of UE", Helen Quirini Papers, Series 2, Box 3, Folder 36.

another example of how the UE was following the Soviet line, and its denunciation of the plan only further alienated the organization from the rest of the labor movement which wholeheartedly supported it. The CIO's affiliated unions that did not have Communist leadership saw the plan as crucial to maintaining democracy abroad which would in turn help trade and increase production domestically, allowing the labor movement to continue flourishing at home. Most importantly, the elements of the CIO and the government that stood against the UE changed their strategy. The UE's opponents adopted the UE's own strategy of using international events to bolster domestic claims. The UE found itself in a corner as its own tactic, which had proved so successful, was now being used against it. Relations between the Big Three broke down and the UE's enemies took advantage of that in order to erode the support base of the labor movement's left-wing.

### **Taft-Hartley and Diverting Foreign Policy**

The UE continued to criticize GE and the capitalism it represented while the right was strengthening its own argument. 1947 proved to be a crucial year for the UE. Republicans in Congress were seeking to weaken the influence of unions because of their antagonism to unchecked capitalism. President Truman's veto of the Taft-Hartley Act was overridden, making it law on June 23, 1947. Just as Fascism was a rallying cry for the labor movement in the early 1940s, Taft-Hartley had the potential to be unifying but the UE's insistence on breaking from the CIO on foreign policy issues caused Communism to take center stage, placing a red target on the backs of UE locals. Even though they did not share the same foreign policy ideas, the UE and the CIO briefly came together in an attempt to get Taft-Hartley repealed, but the issue of Communism became too strong for the rest of the CIO to ignore. Throughout the summer, UE Local 301 organized with the National UE to try and get Taft-Hartley repealed. They announced

that they had their own blacklist of every Congressman who voted for the Taft-Hartley Bill, including 106 Democrats and 225 Republicans in the House and 20 Democrats and 48 Republicans in the Senate.<sup>66</sup> The UE was trying to organize a united effort to defeat Taft-Hartley, but its Communist ties made it vulnerable to the House Un-American Activities Committee, which sped up its efforts to purge Communist influence within the labor movement by conducting hearings throughout the summer. Taft-Hartley was universally condemned by the labor movement, but the UE considered its most egregious part, section 9(h) worthy of its repeal alone. Section 9(h) required union leaders to sign an affidavit swearing that they were not nor had ever been a member of the Communist Party. Any union with officers who refused to sign could not use the privileges of the NLRB for elections or settling grievances. This placed unions like the UE at a severe disadvantage and it gave HUAC something tangible which it could use to call the loyalty of union leaders into question. After the Communist Party announced its support of Henry Wallace and third parties in July of 1947, Philip Murray told CIO Executive Board members, "It is high time the CIO leaders stopped apologizing for Communism. If Communism is an issue in any of your unions, throw it the hell out, and throw out its advocates along with it."<sup>67</sup> Murray was a strong supporter of the Marshall Plan and Truman's bid for reelection and by this point he was getting fed up with his organization being defined by the Communist minority within its ranks. Essentially, the downfall of the UE in 1947 can be summed up as the one-two punch of Taft-Hartley domestically and the Marshall Plan internationally.

The speakers of the National UE Convention and the CIO Convention of 1947 showed how far apart the two organizations were growing. At the National UE Convention, Henry

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<sup>66</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. July 25, 1947.

<sup>67</sup> Oshinsky, David. *Senator Joseph McCarthy and the American Labor Movement*. Pg. 96.

Wallace spoke on the first night, criticizing the Truman administration and calling for a return to the foreign policy of the late FDR.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, CIO President Murray invited Secretary of State George Marshall to be a guest speaker. One of the key architects and namesake of the Marshall Plan, the Secretary of State spoke in praise of the CIO and its support of President Truman, by this time a polarizing figure among labor leaders. While Murray and the CIO bought Truman's promise to repeal Taft-Hartley, the UE saw the future of the labor movement in Henry Wallace, the man who would incidentally end up splitting the CIO in two. By choosing George Marshall to speak at its convention, the CIO was proving its loyalty to a new brand of American nationalism and exceptionalism. Immediately following the war, the United States was the most important player at the table of international politics. Before the war, American nationalism made domestic issues primary and foreign issues secondary. Now, there was a balance between using America-first rhetoric for issues at home and for issues abroad. It was not so one-sided anymore. The United States not only bore the weight of its own citizenry, but it was beginning to play a major role in reshaping the lives of millions of people in Europe. The responsibility of that legitimized the claims the CIO was making about its own domestic economic security. The UE, on the other hand, effectively removed itself from the equation. There was an abundance of wealth to be found in the rebuilding of Europe, but the UE wanted no part of it. The UE agenda had always championed spreading democracy but encouraged self-determination at the same time. Following the CIO's lead in supporting the Marshall Plan and backing President Truman would have gone against what the UE believed in. For that reason, the UE advocated returning to a foreign policy that worked when the United States had the same level of influence as the likes of Great Britain. According to those in President Truman's administration, that foreign policy

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<sup>68</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. September 26, 1947.

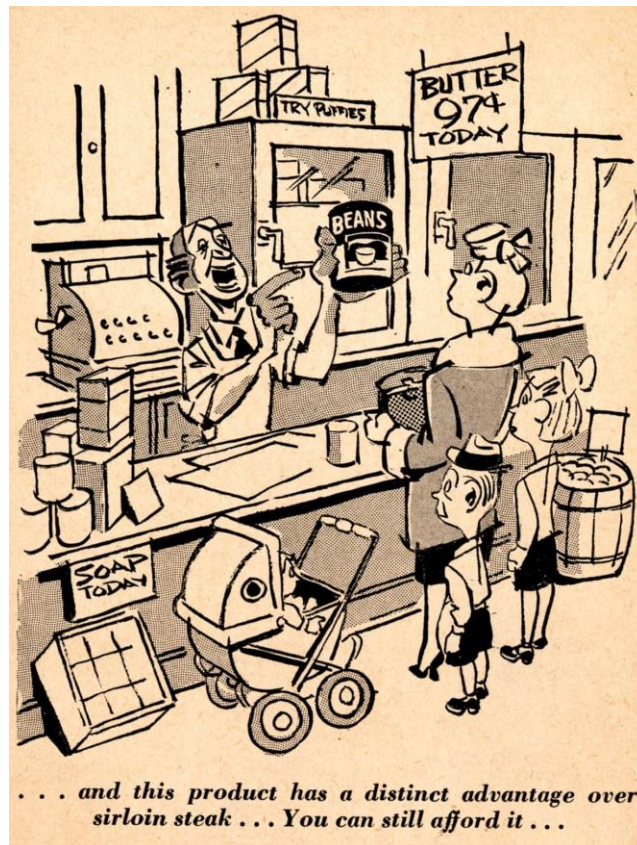
could no longer work because of the way the Soviet Union had sought to spread Communism to Eastern Europe. The prospect of an interunion civil war was looming heavily over the CIO.

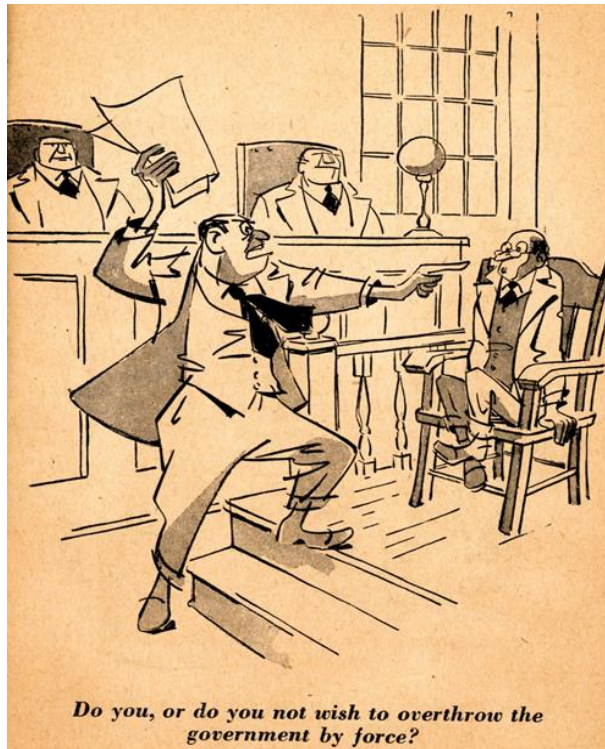
The repeal of Taft-Hartley was an ongoing battle, but the growing hysteria over Communism and sharp foreign policy disagreements put the UE at a disadvantage. The Electrical Union News, the UE's newspaper, began publishing polarizing cartoons by Fred Wright. Wright's cartoons would be published in June of 1948 by the UE in a collection titled, "Frankly, Sir, I need more money!". The cartoons show the growing disillusionment and discontent of the rank-and-file GE workers. One of the cartoons depicts a woman with three kids at a store, with the clerk trying to sell her a can of beans. The clerk says to the woman, "...and this product has a distinct advantage over sirloin steak...you can still afford it."<sup>69</sup> While that cartoon is a blatant jab at the rising prices and continued low wages of workers, other cartoons take a more political stance. One depicts a tiny man with glasses being berated by a large man. The angry man asks, "Do you or do you not wish to overthrow the government by force?". That cartoon was making light of the situation many union members found themselves in when they were brought before Congressional Committees and questioned about any past or present Communist sympathies. Other cartoons in the publication clearly expressed the UE's foreign policy beliefs. One depicts a group of generals gathered around a desk with one of them remarking, "Of course I'm in favor of peace...just so long as it is an ARMED peace." Another shows a group of men sitting at a table in a diner reading a newspaper with the headline "US to AID Greece". The man holding the newspaper comments, "Do you think those Greeks can be hungry enough to eat the guns we're going to send 'em?". The Fred Wright cartoons are an encapsulation of the UE's position on international affairs. The UE was for global disarmament and they saw financial aid to Greece as

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<sup>69</sup> "Frankly, Sir, I need more money!", Helen Quirini Papers, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 43.

a coverup for rebuilding Europe around American guns and ammunition. The UE stood against the European Recovery Program, giving it the appearance of being a puppet of the Soviet Union, advocating for a foreign policy that benefitted the Soviet plan for rebuilding Europe as opposed to the American plan. This put the UE at sharp odds with the CIO. As the definition of American loyalty changed so did the CIO's foreign policy advocacy but the UE remained steadfastly loyal to the ideals it held in the late 1930s and early 1940s, ideals which now made the organization vulnerable to persecution because of its association with Communism.





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<sup>70</sup> Fred Wright Cartoons courtesy of ME Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, Helen Quirini Papers, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 43.



The Fred Wright cartoon which criticizes United States diplomacy with Greece was again, in a subtle way, a criticism of domestic economics as much as it was a criticism of foreign policy. There is a big difference between pointing to Fascism abroad as the enemy and pointing to Fascism domestically as the enemy, but that is the line the UE crossed. Cartoons such as this were published weekly in local UE plants across the country and they carried with them a strong message about the state of the national economy. The UE supported the link between government and industry when labor was an equal part of the equation, but now the UE felt that the government and companies like GE were running off with massive profits while leaving workers behind. To the UE, the growth of GE and other companies with numerous defense contracts was beginning to look Fascist. The UE succeeded when it was broadly critical of capitalism at home, but by bringing the argument about Fascism home it lost its credibility. The global context had changed. Fascism was no longer the enemy and the traction of that argument was halted.

The UE's opponents added a tactic to their strategy by beginning to base their criticism of the UE in a political debate about the upcoming presidential election. The UE then found itself the victim of raiding at the hands of the UAW<sup>71</sup>. The national office of the UE sent a letter to President Murray on March 16<sup>th</sup> complaining of the UAW starting secession movements within UE locals, but Murray dragged his feet.<sup>72</sup> Murray knew that the UE was alienating itself from the rest of the CIO. Historian Max Kampelman claims that the CIO spent just as much time attacking Henry Wallace's campaign, which the UE endorsed, as they did the campaign of Thomas Dewey, the Republican candidate. This was because "Murray considered the support of

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<sup>71</sup> United Auto Workers, led by anti-Communist Walter Reuther.

<sup>72</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. March 26, 1948.

Henry Wallace irreconcilable with loyalty to the CIO.”<sup>73</sup> Murray pretended to be upset at the raiding of the UE locals but ended up doing nothing to prevent them from happening. As early as March of 1948 he was openly supportive of forcing out regional council members who supported the efforts of third parties or condemned the Marshall Plan. The first to go was Harry Bridges, CIO Regional Director of Northern California.<sup>74</sup> Bridges stated that he would only support Truman if it was determined that a majority of the CIO’s rank-and-file supported Truman but since Wallace and other third-party candidates were not given a platform within the CIO, Truman was the automatically endorsed candidate, deemed at giving the labor movement the best chance at a repeal of Taft-Hartley.

The right of the labor movement allied itself with GE to bolster its criticism of the UE, just as the UE had allied itself with the Soviet Union a few years before. GE tried to convince the public and the workers that the Taft-Hartley Law was good for labor and that wage increases had a negative impact on the economy. A propaganda campaign began, spearheaded by Lemuel Boulware, GE Vice President of Labor Relations, whose aggressive style of bargaining became known as “Boulwarism”.<sup>75</sup> GE Executives like Boulware formed a tacit relationship with the government that the labor movement believed was formed with the purpose of breaking up the labor movement. When Local 301 President Andrew Peterson was called before Republican Representative Kersten at a subcommittee hearing in Schenectady, Peterson told Kersten, “You’re in Schenectady to bust up this union and you know it.”<sup>76</sup> The Taft-Hartley Law spawned the Taft-Hartley Board, which ruled unanimously on September 1, 1948 that workers on strike

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<sup>73</sup> Kampelman, Max. *The Communist Party vs. The C.I.O.: A Study in Power Politics*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957. Pg. 146.

<sup>74</sup> Oshinsky, David. *Senator Joseph McCarthy and the American Labor Movement*.

<sup>75</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. August 20, 1948.

<sup>76</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. October 1, 1948.

for higher wages couldn't vote in a collective bargaining election if their jobs had been filled. However, the strikebreakers could vote in that election. This reversed a decision made by the NLRB under the Wagner Act 10 years earlier.<sup>77</sup> In an attempt to show unity and strength amidst the partnership between GE and the government, the UE adopted a resolution at its National Convention condemning anti-Communist member James Carey. Carey, Secretary-Treasurer of the CIO, had recently testified before a House Labor Subcommittee in Washington that the UE officers, staff, and newspapers were practically agents of the Soviet Union.<sup>78</sup> Formally condemning a CIO officer for leveling a charge of Communist-domination at it did not sit well with any of the UE's opponents.

The UE's opponents found itself another ally with which it could further erode the credibility and legitimacy of the UE. The Atomic Energy Commission barred Schenectady GE from allowing the UE to represent workers at the new Knolls 2 Laboratory, even if Local 301 won a representation election.<sup>79</sup> The link between government, industry and the UE which had been so pronounced during the war was now working against the UE. By distancing itself from the rest of the labor movement, the UE made itself vulnerable. The federal government and industry removed the UE from the equation of success, despite the gains the UE had made over the past decade. Those gains were no longer relevant. GE and the government were prepared to use the tool of anti-Communism to undermine Local 301. Even though a \$1 million damage suit was filed in Federal Court against members of the Atomic Energy Commission and GE, Local 301 was unsuccessful and was not allowed to represent Knolls Lab workers because of the

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<sup>77</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. September 10, 1948.

<sup>78</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. September 17, 1948.

<sup>79</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. October 8, 1948.

union's associations with the Communist Party and the Soviet Union.<sup>80</sup> The aims of anti-UE forces culminated at the CIO Convention in November. Rejoicing over the victory of Truman over Dewey and Wallace, the CIO no longer had any reason to hide its anger at the way in which the UE went astray. At the convention Walter Reuther of the UAW declared, "They [Communists] are not trade unionists. They are colonial agents of a foreign government using the trade unions as an operating base."<sup>81</sup> Resolutions were passed reaffirming the beliefs of the CIO, including one of praise for President Murray. While CIO Conventions of the past pussyfooted around the issue of the Soviet Union and the Marshall Plan, 1948's proceedings openly condemned the Soviet blockade of Berlin and pledged support for the European Recovery Program.<sup>82</sup> Secretary of Labor Maurice Tobin was invited to be a guest speaker and his short speech was filled with praise for President Truman. This was a blatant message to the UE and the other left-wing unions of the CIO. Either they were to get in line or they would be stripped of their platform for dissension and they would be cast to the fringe of the labor movement.

### **Expulsion**

The UE realized that its support was waning across all sectors and despite its best efforts to organize more workers under the UE, the CIO was "establishing a basis for the final elimination of Communist influence within the CIO."<sup>83</sup> The groundwork had already been laid for this purge of Communist influence by the UE's decision to advocate for the Wallace campaign and by speaking out against the Marshall Plan. The UE still adhered to its strategy of

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<sup>80</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. October 29, 1948.

<sup>81</sup> Zieger, Robert. *The CIO 1935-1955*. Pg. 292.

<sup>82</sup> "Daily Proceedings of the 10<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Convention of the CIO" Helen Quirini Papers, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 44.

<sup>83</sup> Kampelman, Max. *The Communist Party vs. The C.I.O.: A Study in Power Politics*. Pg. 159.

basing domestic claims in the international, but it was on the wrong side of the argument this time. Now, the CIO's top leadership saw its task as articulating and justifying the expulsion of the UE from its ranks, a union which had a membership of over half a million workers. In April, WB Merihue, GE's Manager of Employee and Community Relations told the Pittsburgh Personnel Association, "Our fight to get out from under the domination of the left-wing UE, we expect to consummate this year."<sup>84</sup> That was one of the rare moments when the interests of the CIO ran parallel to that of GE but in the name of democracy and protecting the country from subversion the two would come together to break up the UE. While most everyone else saw Communism as the crux of the labor movement's problems, the UE still believed Taft-Hartley to be the most egregious hindrance to organized labor's potential. Local 301 tried to rally workers in Schenectady around a repeal of Taft-Hartley but even the Schenectady City Council, which had lent its full support to the union during its 1946 strike against GE, was now hesitant to stand behind Local 301. At a council meeting in April it was unanimously decided that nothing would be done about Taft-Hartley. Majority Leader Clarence Bradshaw stated that the Republican councilmen "don't feel it is our prerogative to voice the sentiment of any particular group of citizens on a national issue."<sup>85</sup> Stripped of its support from the public and the CIO, Local 301 spent the summer of 1949 continuing to fight against Taft-Hartley, poor wages, and unemployment as a result of layoffs.

Rather than acquiesce to the wishes of the CIO, the UE held its ground, believing that it was still on the right side of the argument. As preparations began for the National CIO Convention, the National UE held its own annual convention and adopted a resolution calling on

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<sup>84</sup> Caute, David. *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979. Pg. 379.

<sup>85</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. April 22, 1949.

the CIO to return to its original purposes of organizing the unorganized and working for the economic interests of its members. The delegates declared that certain CIO leaders, “have sought to transform CIO from an instrumentality and servant of the unions and their membership to a dictatorship over unions and members alike.”<sup>86</sup> The UE stood firmly behind its argument that the CIO was punishing it for having a different political agenda. The CIO and President Murray were still stalling on the issue of raiding and in response to that, the UE announced it was no longer going to pay its per capita dues.<sup>87</sup> The UE was so dissatisfied with the lack of help it was getting from the CIO that it decided it was not even going to bother sending delegates to the National CIO Convention, to be held in Cleveland from October 31-November 4.

The 1949 CIO Convention was the most important turning point in the history of the UE. A decade’s worth of red-baiting, foreign policy disagreements and divisions over political endorsements came to a head there and the UE was not even in attendance to witness its own undoing. As in year’s prior, the CIO invited guest speakers who would sing the praise of the CIO’s loyalty to America. That year, one of the guest speakers was Secretary of State Dean Acheson who remarked that organizations like the CIO were making great contributions to the foreign policy of the Truman administration. Acheson thanked the CIO for supplying “able personnel from your ranks to assist the Government.”<sup>88</sup> Without the UE in attendance the delegates had nothing stopping them from relentlessly attacking the organization. In his opening report, President Murray explicitly criticized the UE and the other left-wing unions for “look[ing] upon their affiliation with CIO as a matter for their personal exploitation. They reject

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<sup>86</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. September 29, 1949.

<sup>87</sup> “Them and Us: Struggles of a Rank-and-file Union”, Edward Bloch papers, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 2.

<sup>88</sup> 11<sup>th</sup> Annual CIO Convention Proceedings, October 31-November 4, 1949. Pg. 44.

our basic principles. They obstruct our economic and legislative programs. No self-respecting organization can tolerate this dangerous division.”<sup>89</sup> After rejoicing over their own solidarity and commitment to democratic principles, the CIO delegates finally expelled the UE from their ranks, a move that seemed inevitable to most. The resolution expelling the UE began with a line that summed up everything the UE had been fighting against. The resolution reads, “We can no longer tolerate within the family of CIO the Communist Party masquerading as a labor union. The time has come when the CIO must strip the mask from these false leaders whose only purpose is to deceive and betray the workers.”<sup>90</sup>

In listing the reasons for expulsion, the CIO stated that the UE refused to support the Marshall Plan, had vilified the CIO, and had neglected to join the fight to save international democracy. The UE’s decision to take those stances be traced back to the death of President Roosevelt. Until that point the differences between the UE and its parent organization were negligible. As soon as the Truman administration took over and the war neared its end, America’s power allowed it to rebuild the world in its own image. Spreading democracy, the American way, did not sit right with the UE which did not subscribe to that type of exceptionalism. Throwing its weight behind Henry Wallace allowed the UE to hold on to its core principles which were far more liberal than that of the rest of the CIO. Wallace, a New Deal veteran who strongly supported labor unions and women’s equality while also opposing an arms race with the Soviet Union most closely embodied the UE’s agenda. There is no mention of any economic reason to kick out the UE. The resolution mentions nothing about the organizational ability of the UE and its leaders, nothing about the contracts that had been won by the UE and its

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid. Pg. 54.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. Pg. 302.

locals, because based on economic criteria the UE was a functional and effective labor organization. The CIO felt that to survive the continued onslaught against organized labor by the government and the large corporations, it had to purge itself of any factions that would place the credibility of the entire labor movement into question. The UE had few friends left within the CIO and the only delegate who rose to its defense was Harry Bridges of the Longshoremen's Union. Bridges was not pleased with the "hysterical language" used to justify the expulsion of the third largest union within the CIO and he remarked, "So now we have reached the point where a trade union, because it disagrees on political matters with the National CIO can be expelled."<sup>91</sup> The resolution was discussed for some time and the following day famed General Omar Bradley was brought on stage to speak about what makes America so great, a furtherance of the image the CIO was creating for itself as an organization firmly embedded in democratic principles. Now the strategy of the CIO was coming full-circle once again. Previously, the CIO had used the international crisis of Fascism to strengthen its argument that labor should have a greater role in democracy and broaden its support base. Now, the CIO was using the international issue of Communism as a tool with which it could erode the support base of the UE and other left-wing labor unions.

### **Propaganda and Schenectady GE Elections**

The UE's expulsion from the CIO delegitimized the left on a national level, but the real challenge for the CIO came in continuing its strategy on the local level. The next tactic in the strategy of the CIO was the creation of an anti-Communist electrical union to rival the UE. The 1949 CIO Convention ended with the chartering of the all-new electrical union, the International

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 306.



Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (IUE), which was to be led by none other than James Carey, the fiercest red-baiter and anti-Communist of the UE. Reporting on the Convention for the CIO News, Arthur Riordan wrote, “In Cleveland’s huge public auditorium, a lot of people cried for joy, hundreds were on their feet cheering and shouting in glee, scores pounded tables happily and a small band of diehards remained in their seats glowering.”<sup>92</sup> The CIO was proud that it had finally rid itself of the backbone of its left-wing and it was looking forward to putting aside factionalism. For the UE, the convention was the beginning of the end. Shortly after, the CIO sent a telegram to every company that had a contract with the UE urging them to cease recognition of the UE and cancel their contracts with it.<sup>93</sup> The plan was for the newly formed IUE to file for representation elections in locals organized around the UE. The NLRB and Taft-Hartley Board would comply and hold an election but during the campaigning for the election companies like GE would support the IUE while hindering the UE’s efforts. As exhausted as the UE’s leaders were, nationally and locally, they still had tremendous loyalty from tens of thousands of workers across the country, particularly in Schenectady, where Local 301 proved to be a UE stronghold. Even though the more conservative faction of the CIO had the momentum, Lisa Kannenberg has argued that the forming of the IUE in conjunction with the expulsion of the UE did more harm than good as it created a “shadow organization without an organized political base in the shop and without access to the levers of real influence.”<sup>94</sup> The challenge for the IUE then became figuring out how to organize a secession movement of Local 301 workers. The odds were stacked in the favor of the IUE, which had the funding and support of the CIO while Local

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<sup>92</sup> “CIO News November 7, 1949”, Edward Bloch papers, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 10.

<sup>93</sup> “Them and Us: Struggles of a Rank-and-file Union”, Edward Bloch papers, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 2.

<sup>94</sup> Kannenberg, Lisa. “Putting the “I” before “UE”: Labor’s Cold War in Schenectady-GE.” Pg. 154.

301 was essentially left to fend for itself against the same coagulation of forces which was trying to crumble the UE's national influence.

The IUE's strategy became synonymous with that of the CIO, but because that strategy was better suited to delegitimize the left's argument, finding a support base at the local level was a struggle for the IUE. In Schenectady, that struggle caused representation elections at GE to keep getting postponed, much to the dismay of Local 301's leadership. Local 301 believed that had a representation election been held in the first few months after the expulsion of the UE from the CIO, Local 301 would have easily won over the IUE, but the IUE kept stalling. Local 301 still had the rights to represent the workers at Schenectady GE, the only difference now being that the UE was no longer affiliated with the CIO, losing critical funding and legal support. Local 301 did not just lose its funding from the CIO. The IUE worked steadfastly to get the UE's dues money tied up in courts as well. The IUE put the legitimacy of Local 301's representation claims into question and received a court order from Federal Judge Irving Kaufman forbidding GE to turn check-off money over to UE, meaning that the money workers authorized to be sent directly from their paychecks to the union would be placed in purgatory.<sup>95</sup> That money was desperately needed by Local 301 to keep up with the propaganda and election campaigning of James Carey and the IUE. The current contract GE workers were under was set to expire on April 1<sup>st</sup> and there was still no word on when an election was to be held in Schenectady.

GE could have stood behind Local 301 and not let the IUE question the union's legitimacy, but its complacency in working with the IUE is telling. The tacit relationship between GE and the IUE stretched back to the UE's inception, when James Carey and his fellow

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<sup>95</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. February 3, 1950.

anti-Communists were a mere minority within the organization. Following the war, the CIO and IUE were willing to take the bargain that the military-industrial complex presented. Labor could still be a hallmark of American democracy, but the connection between industry and government was to be prioritized. The UE was hesitant to take that deal because it was reminiscent of the fight against Fascism and unbridled capitalism that had been the base of its agenda for over a decade. Industry and government, without an equal part of labor, was moving in the direction of Fascism that the UE so staunchly opposed. The CIO and IUE did not see it in that light. For them, the military-industrial complex had the potential to be benevolent, serving each side with something it desired. The UE broke from the CIO and IUE in a way that it thought was uniquely American at heart, but it only served to cast a shadow of suspicion over the organization and its intentions.

The IUE planned to use its biggest ally, the CIO, to develop its propaganda campaign but success was difficult to come by. Local 301's newspaper warned members, "The membership had better get set for the wildest campaign of pressure and confusion that this city has ever seen, and an invasion by hordes of CIO payrollers, who never saw Schenectady before and will leave it after the vote."<sup>96</sup> The election was held on May 25<sup>th</sup> and the UE won by a vote of 7,761 to 5,847.<sup>97</sup> While the IUE lost handily in Schenectady, it did win most of the elections in which it was on the ballot at Westinghouse, GM, Sylvania, and RCA plants. Overall, the UE lost over 150,000 members in the wave of elections and despite still maintaining a membership of over 300,000 workers, the loss of the elections was one that would be hard to recover from. The IUE in Schenectady was undoubtedly discouraged, as its dues paying members peaked at 133 and

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<sup>96</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. April 28, 1950.

<sup>97</sup> Kannenberg, Lisa. "Putting the "I" before "UE": Labor's Cold War in Schenectady-GE."

after months of stalling and campaigning they still fell short of the UE in the election.<sup>98</sup> The course of action the IUE took was simple. It filed protests of the election results with the NLRB, allowing the NLRB to delay certification of the UE for several weeks just as Local 301 was set to begin negotiations for a new contract with GE.<sup>99</sup> GE, however, still recognized the UE's right to negotiate, and was meeting with Local 301 leaders to discuss the contract.

War broke out in Korea in the summer of 1950 and in an unusual move the National UE and Local 301 announced support of the United States government and the United Nations. The intervention of the United States and the United Nations in Korea in the name of democracy over Communism directly contradicted the UE's previous stance. Before this, the UE stood against foreign policy decisions that would hinder Soviet interests around the world. The UE's vision for the post-war world was centered around cooperation between the war's victorious countries. Antagonism toward the Soviet Union was deemed irresponsible because that was a hindrance to a post-war world of peace and prosperity. The UE was trying to regain the credibility it had lost as a loyal American organization committed to promoting international democracy. Historian John Fousek has argued that by 1950, national loyalty was equal to global anti-Communism.<sup>100</sup> This allowed pro-Soviet beliefs to be marginalized throughout the country, and having learned its lesson from the past several years, the UE was trying to join the growing wave of American globalism and nationalism by lending support to the United Nations in its efforts to halt Communism in Korea, not because of the Communism itself, but in the name of maintaining democracy and the self-determination of free peoples.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. June 9, 1950.

<sup>100</sup> Fousek, John. *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Even though the UE was trying to draw suspicion away from itself, Senator McCarthy had already set his sights on the labor movement. In September of 1950 he made the claim that several officers of the UE working out of defense plants had filed false affidavits with the NLRB under Section 9(h) of the Taft-Hartley Law. He was quoted in the New York Times on September 29, 1950 as stating, “American industry is being forced to produce vital war materials under the complete domination of Communists.”<sup>101</sup> A crusade was underway, but the UE was maintaining a fair level of strength, continuing to win some representation elections. Rank-and-file workers in most UE-represented plants simply disregarded the propaganda aimed at painting the union red. Despite having its back to the wall and flipping on its foreign policy stance, the UE was not going to let its years of dedication to hard-working Americans be delegitimized because of a mostly imagined association with Communists. The government was continuing to enact legislation to root out Communist influence in the country while the CIO was pouring more money into the IUE’s efforts to overthrow the UE on a national scale. In just a year since the IUE was chartered, the CIO donated over \$800,000 to the union, paid for the publication of its newspaper and provided it with any legal support it required.<sup>102</sup> The loyalty shown by rank-and-file workers who continued to vote UE in national elections convinced the IUE that it would need to extend its propaganda campaign if it stood any chance of breaking the UE once and for all.

Another election in Schenectady was on the horizon and in preparation, the IUE newspaper, funded by the CIO, continued its propaganda efforts to try and sway disillusioned UE members into voting IUE. The IUE made the claim that in just a year and a half, the IUE had

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<sup>101</sup> Oshinsky, David. *Senator Joseph McCarthy and the American Labor Movement*. Pg. 172.

<sup>102</sup> Filippelli, Ronald and McColloch, Mark. *Cold War in the Working Class: The Rise and Decline of the United Electrical Workers*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

done “a more militant job of negotiating than UE ever did.”<sup>103</sup> Both IUE and UE papers believed the other to be in collusion with GE to improve its chances of winning. The reality was that the IUE had more support from the government, the support of the CIO, and support from the Schenectady branch of the NAACP, even though the UE had championed the rights of its black members since the late 1930s.<sup>104</sup> Despite the odds being in its favor, the IUE lacked the confidence to rush into another election. The UE was willing to participate in an election, and offered it to be held on September 6, 7, 11, or the 13<sup>th</sup>, all dates that would be rejected by the IUE.<sup>105</sup> It was decided the election would be held on September 14<sup>th</sup>, the day before national negotiations with GE were set to begin. In a last-minute effort to sway voters, the IUE-CIO News published, the night before the election, a story claiming that dues funds of the UE were going to the Communist Civil Rights Congress, an organization on the Attorney General’s list of subversive groups.<sup>106</sup> The workers were not convinced. 16,733 total votes were cast and once again the UE won by a large margin, even larger than the margin of the May 1950 election. The UE received 11,542 votes and the IUE received just 4,851, a loss that was sure to anger IUE leaders who had been fiercely campaigning in Schenectady for almost 2 years.<sup>107</sup>

The plant’s workers made the statement to the IUE that they would not be used as pawns in a game of divisive rhetoric and scare tactics. The rank-and-file knew that the UE had been fighting for them since the days of the Great Depression. The loyalty shown to the UE went beyond just supporting a bargaining agent. These workers were fighting for their hometown. They were fighting for the days when the American spirit could be summed up by President

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<sup>103</sup> *IUE-CIO News*. July 19, 1951.

<sup>104</sup> *IUE-CIO News*. August 2, 1951.

<sup>105</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. August 24, 1951.

<sup>106</sup> “IUE-CIO News, September 13, 1951”, Helen Quirini Papers, Series 2, Box 3, Folder 36.

<sup>107</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. September 28, 1951.

Roosevelt's four freedoms: freedom of speech, of worship, from want, from fear. Those freedoms, which seemed so basic and fundamental a decade earlier, were now in serious jeopardy. The UE and the larger labor movement had been such a critical part of the New Deal coalition of the left. The survival of the New Deal hinged on local elections such as this one. UE Local 301 once again received certification to act as the bargaining agent for Schenectady GE workers and was reinvigorated by the victory. The UE began aggressively demanding a 15 cent per hour general wage increase, with a special increase for day workers and women workers.<sup>108</sup> With a new-found strength and confidence Local 301 workers walked off the job in droves to protest GE's counter-offer of a 2.5% wage increase. Local 301's paper wrote that, "the sudden stoppage of work was an eloquent reminder to the largest electrical corporation in America that its fabulous profits come from the hands, skill and brains of its employees who rightly consider themselves seriously under-paid."<sup>109</sup> The UE's confidence was sure to fuel an even fiercer campaign of red-baiting on the part of the IUE.

The UE and its locals were never going to be able to shake off their association with Communism. In Schenectady, Local 301 members saw a conspicuous coalition of forces aimed at weakening their influence. The government, GE, and the IUE all had something to gain from a disappearance of the UE. With the UE out of the way, the government's crusade against Communism would gain credibility and legitimacy. With the UE out of the way, GE would have an easier time subduing its rank-and-file workers to poor contracts. With the UE out of the way, the IUE had a clear path to dominance in the electrical industry. The fight of these three forces against the UE is best summed up by a document released by the National Industrial Conference

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<sup>108</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. October 19, 1951.

<sup>109</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. October 26, 1951.

Board in October of 1952 that read, “The spies, traitors, and the misguided fools who promote Communism constitute our number one industrial security problem today.”<sup>110</sup>

The labor movement unexpectedly underwent significant changes in November of 1952. First, the election of Dwight Eisenhower as President, a man far more conservative than Harry Truman, ensured that the government’s campaign against Communists would not be put to rest. Second, the almost simultaneous deaths of both Philip Murray, CIO President, and William Green, AFL President, created a void in power. That void could be filled by men less corrupted by union rivalry and more focused on unity.<sup>111</sup> The CIO chose Walter Reuther of the UAW to succeed Murray and the AFL chose George Meany to succeed Green. The death of these men created an opportunity for unity between the two organizations that had been discussed and attempted for over 15 years. This new-found optimism at the potential for labor movement unity did not include the UE, which found itself hurting for resources and struggling for support.

The UE and its locals turned their attention solely to the issue of red-baiting, which Senator McCarthy continued to exacerbate. In the fall of 1953 the UE General Officers released their annual report, the main conclusion of which was that McCarthyism was threatening jobs. The report read, “McCarthyism means policies and actions that lead to loss of jobs, low wages, no civil rights, concentration camps, and war. We must dedicate ourselves to working with every force for the defeat of McCarthyism, for the unity of the labor movement and for peace in the world.”<sup>112</sup> Just as the labor movement failed to unite around the repeal of Taft-Hartley, it failed

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<sup>110</sup> Caute, David. *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*. Pg. 369.

<sup>111</sup> Dray, Philip. *There is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America*. New York: Doubleday, 2010.

<sup>112</sup> “1953 UE Report of General Officers”, Helen Quirini Papers, Series 2, Box 8, Folder 6.



to unite around a blanket condemnation of McCarthyism as well. The UE did have an ally in its battle against McCarthy, however. Former President Harry Truman issued a nationwide radio and television broadcast calling on the American people to fight McCarthy at every level possible.<sup>113</sup>

McCarthy made his first of two trips to Albany to investigate Communism at Schenectady GE in November of 1953. McCarthy interrogated suspected GE Communists for two whole days and made little progress. Most of the witnesses were either hostile to McCarthy or flatly refused to point fingers and most cited the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment in their refusal to answer questions. Local 301's newspaper summed up the hearings by stating, "He keeps the public barred from the hearings; he sits as judge and jury and then gives his version of what took place behind closed doors to the press. His press releases distort the facts and are definitely slanted to do the kind of job he sets out to do and that is to make ordinary people cringe with fear."<sup>114</sup> The 1951 Supreme Court decision in *Rogers v. United States* was coming back to haunt Local 301 members. One of the workers brought before McCarthy in Albany was Sidney Friedlander. Friedlander stated that he never engaged in espionage or sabotage and the waiver doctrine expanded under the *Rogers* decision gave McCarthy the leverage to pressure Friedlander into answering further questions about espionage and sabotage. The principle of the waiver doctrine was that once a witness stated they never engaged in espionage, or that they never were a Communist party member, all questions about espionage and Communism became fair game, and a witness had no choice but to answer them because they already implied that there would be nothing self-incriminating in answering such questions. McCarthy firmly told Friedlander, "You

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<sup>113</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. November 20, 1953.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

will be ordered to answer the question. Since you have waived your privilege under the Fifth Amendment when you told me you never engaged in espionage or sabotage, you are ordered to answer the question.”<sup>115</sup> Friedlander still did not give in and his testimony ended with a frustrated McCarthy sending him home. On December 9, 1953, less than a month after McCarthy left Albany, GE announced its new policy of firing Communists and indefinitely suspending those who refused to testify at their hearings.<sup>116</sup> GE ended up suspending and terminating 7 of its employees by the end of McCarthy’s second visit to Albany in February of 1954. The 7 men were Sidney Friedlander, Arthur Owens, Manuel Fernandez, Dewey Brashear, Gordon Belgrave, Joseph Gebhardt, and Robert Northrup.<sup>117</sup> Leo Jandreau issued a strong condemnation in a letter to GE President Ralph Cordiner on December 10<sup>th</sup>. Jandreau wrote, “Your one-man order aims to scrap the Constitution and the Bill of Rights as well as the company’s obligations under the contract between GE and this union. You well know that GE employees do not engage in espionage or sabotage.”<sup>118</sup> McCarthy’s first visit signaled the end for Local 301. The coordinated attack on the local by GE and McCarthy all but sealed the fate of the union, placing doubt in the minds of many rank-and-file workers and laying the groundwork for a successful secession movement within the UE.

### **Jandreau and the Switch**

If one man had the power to decide which union represented Schenectady GE workers, it was Leo Jandreau. Jandreau had been the Business Agent of Local 301 since its inception in

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<sup>115</sup> “Subversion and Espionage in Defense Establishments and Industry”, Testimony of Sidney Friedlander, November 12, 1953. U.S Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations.

<sup>116</sup> “UE Organizer’s Bulletin”, Helen Quirini Papers, Series 2, Box 4, Folder 26.

<sup>117</sup> Helen Quirini Papers, Series 2, Box 4, Folder 29.

<sup>118</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. December 11, 1953.

1936 and was one of the most popular and respected men in the organization. He also had a cloudy past associated with Communism that IUE leaders like James Carey sought to take full advantage of. As more workers were being laid off in Schenectady every month, 400 in January of 1954 alone, the UE and IUE engaged in a propaganda campaign filled with mud-slinging and accusations.<sup>119</sup> This campaign was exacerbated by the announcement that Senator McCarthy would be coming back to Albany to purge the Communists from Local 301. In preparation, Local 301 held one of its most-attended membership meetings to condemn GE and McCarthy's attacks on the local. Motions were unanimously adopted condemning the red-baiting. GE claimed to be remaining neutral but Jandreau told the members that the company was "lying like hell."<sup>120</sup> Jandreau argued that the company was selecting the union members who advocated for the most gains and gave their names to McCarthy so that it could have just cause to fire them. McCarthy's treatment of Local 301 members like Northrup and Friedlander at their hearings made it clear that he was not going to be holding anything back the second time around. This was going to be the end of the influence of this Communist-led union regardless of how much push McCarthy was going to get back. Local 301 embraced McCarthy's tactics of turning a complex issue into a simple, black and white one, trying to equate the union with pure Americanism. The union took out a full-page piece in the Schenectady Union Star titled "Lincoln or McCarthy."<sup>121</sup> The labor movement had frequently linked McCarthy to Hitler, and now, by equating itself with one of the most revered Presidents in the history of the country, Local 301 was trying to show the public that its interests and agenda was that of the American people first. The piece reads, "We deplore Communism and equally deplore those who use their hate for

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<sup>119</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. February 5, 1954.

<sup>120</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. February 19, 1954.

<sup>121</sup> *Schenectady Union Star*, February 17, 1954, Helen Quirini Papers, Series 2, Box 4, Folder 26.

Communism to cover up their real objective of destroying unions and scrapping the Constitution and the Bill of Rights guaranteeing Americans their freedoms.”<sup>122</sup> Attempting to reaffirm its Americanism had been a move the UE frequently embraced when its loyalty came under fire. But this time, McCarthy’s arrival made even bigger headlines. McCarthy called the most influential Local 301 members to testify, but surprisingly enough Leo Jandreau was not one of those. The suspicion of Local 301’s support base was confirmed when, just shortly after McCarthy left Albany, Leo Jandreau announced that he was defecting to the IUE and he urged the rest of Local 301 to do the same. The reasons behind Jandreau’s decision have been the cause of much speculation. Lisa Kannenberg argued that the decision was purely a practical one.<sup>123</sup> The UE was weak, nationally and locally. Electrical workers were weak across the country. It had been several years since the UE organized the workers of a new plant. Jandreau’s decision echoed the sentiment of many other labor leaders who believed it was time to unite under a single, powerful labor movement. Jandreau told his loyal friends and coworkers that they would simply be “putting the “I” before UE”<sup>124</sup> but many of them were not convinced.

Jandreau joining the side led by James Carey, the man who painted him as a Communist, caused several questions to run through the heads of Local 301’s loyal rank-and-file workers. Had Jandreau given up on Local 301? Did he make a deal so that he would not be called to testify before McCarthy? What were his motivations? The anger felt by those who stuck by Jandreau’s side for years manifested itself in more propaganda and more newspaper articles aimed at maintaining Local 301 loyalty, but the simultaneous blows of McCarthy’s hearings and Jandreau’s defection were too much for the union to bear. As the road drew nearer to another

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Kannenberg, Lisa. “Putting the “I” before “UE”: Labor’s Cold War in Schenectady-GE.”

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

representation election, the UE posted bulletins around the plant making the claim to its workers that James Carey had the right to order strikes, make settlements and sign contracts without the approval of the membership because of a clause he negotiated for in the IUE-CIO Constitution.<sup>125</sup> This bulletin also contained the UE's argument that the IUE had copied UE contracts verbatim because the IUE knew its contracts were inferior and far weaker than the UE's.<sup>126</sup> There was little truth in Local 301's claims, but it was desperate and resorting to the dirty tactics of its rival union seemed to be the only feasible option. The UE took it a step further and published propaganda personally attacking Leo Jandreau, much of which contained the idea that Jandreau had made a deal with McCarthy to get himself a free pass in the Albany hearings. A shop steward of building 269, Andrew Hmura, was quoted in the *Union Star* calling Jandreau's decision "bulldozing tactics."<sup>127</sup> Hmura criticized Jandreau's sudden announcement of defection and the way in which he called for a vote to be held on the proposition the day after, allowing the workers no time to think for themselves. Local 301's newspaper frequently published cartoons depicting Jandreau with a sad face and long, droopy eyes, treating him with the same lack of respect they afforded to men like McCarthy. Local 301's loyalist UE supporters may not have believed it, but the reality was there were no sinister intentions behind Jandreau's decision. Reflecting on the events, Jandreau's step-daughter Karen Clark offered a defense of the switch in an oral interview. Clark's mother was Ruth Young, at one time a UE officer and Communist organizer who married Jandreau in 1950. Clark gave a threefold explanation as to why Jandreau would have decided to switch sides. "The primary reason would have been because he thought it was best for the union, and for the workers, because he took his position

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<sup>125</sup> "Local 301 Campaign Bulletin", Helen Quirini Papers, Series 2, Box 3, Folder 39.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Schenectady Union Star*, March 11, 1954, Helen Quirini Papers, Series 2, Box 3, Folder 34.

and his responsibility seriously. That would be number one. Number two would be to protect my mother. That wouldn't have been his first reason. And number three would have been to sort of make a stand against the far left.”<sup>128</sup> Jandreau indeed took his position with the union seriously, and perhaps a deal was cut with McCarthy and Carey, not in the name of subverting and betraying his friends, but in the name of keeping his wife's past out of the public record which could have destroyed his family. Regardless of the reasoning, Jandreau's decision carried significant influence, making it the final turning point in Local 301's story, as its demise was coming into view.

The propaganda campaign continued on both sides through the spring of 1954. Unemployment was on the rise in Schenectady and GE continued to move work into lower wage areas. The situation grew so bad in Schenectady that the city was placed on the Department of Labor's list of cities in distress because of its rising unemployment.<sup>129</sup> The future of the city was looking grim, and so was the future of Local 301 but the union was walking into its final representation election with an unprecedented amount of confidence. Local 301 proudly reported in its newspaper that the union “now has a clear and growing majority throughout the Schenectady Works.”<sup>130</sup> The same paper carried an editorial which read, “There can be no mistake about it. The defeat that Schenectady GE workers will hand to the raiders will be the “Waterloo” of the raiding and disruption, not only in Schenectady, but throughout the country.”<sup>131</sup> That optimism was sorely misplaced. The NLRB election was held on June 30, 1954

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<sup>128</sup> Zahavi, Gerald. “Uncivil War: An Oral History of Labor, Communism, and Community in Schenectady, New York, 1944-1954.” In *American Labor and the Cold War: Grassroots Politics and Postwar Political Culture*, edited by Robert W. Cherny, William Issel, and Kiernan Walsh Taylor, 25-57. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004. Pgs. 51-52.

<sup>129</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. June 10, 1954.

<sup>130</sup> *Electrical Union News, Local 301*. June 17, 1954.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

and for the first time since its chartering in 1949, the IUE won in Schenectady. The IUE received 9,005 votes and the UE received 5,179 votes.<sup>132</sup> Local 301 receiving over 5,000 votes is a testament to the lengthy list of accomplishments and hard-earned loyalty the union had in Schenectady, but its downfall at the hands of the IUE meant that the last remaining stronghold of the UE was gone. Jobs would continue to steadily leave Schenectady, McCarthy lost all his credibility and influence and the CIO and AFL finally merged in 1955, completing the vision labor leaders had several decades earlier of a unified labor movement. All of this was at the expense of the left-wing unions, including the UE, which never again would be a significant voice in American labor.

### **Conclusion**

The story of UE Local 301 reflects labor's larger story through the early Cold War years. When the Soviet Union and United States were allies during World War 2, the left-wing of America's labor movement gained incredible influence and strength as unions like the UE firmly situated themselves within the new brand of Americanism and definition of loyalty that grew out of the Great Depression. Committed to defeating Fascism abroad and spreading international democracy, the labor movement had leverage, having earned the respect and support of the Roosevelt administration and a majority of the public. In its early years the UE embraced international events through nationalist rhetoric to strengthen the claims it was making about domestic economic issues. This led to widespread support for the UE, but World War 2 changed the conversation. The UE suddenly found itself with its back against the wall. The UE's adversaries, such as the IUE, adopted the UE's strategy for its own gain. The unions with traces

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<sup>132</sup> *IUE-CIO News*, July 2, 1954.

of Communism in its leadership quickly became vulnerable to attack after the war as relations between the United States and the Soviet Union broke down. Growing hostility toward the spread of Communism on the part of the Truman administration put a target on the back of left-wing unions like the UE, allowing the anti-Communists within the labor movement to take hold, gain support, and eventually take over the shops dominated by left-wing unions after they were cast out by the CIO in 1949. Local 301, like the National UE, never brazenly bragged about the Communists within its ranks, but it did not stand quietly by while its members were dragged through the mud. Red-baiters were encouraged and aided largely by anti-union and anti-Communist legislation while the Supreme Court dealt severe blows to the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the main defense mechanism of those called to testify at Congressional hearings. The antagonism that grew throughout the United States for left-wing unions was not simply about Communism, as Senator McCarthy tried to make it. These unions ultimately failed because their strategy failed. They failed to walk the line between nationalism and internationalism and even as CIO conventions signaled the changes to be made, left-wing unions failed to adjust. McCarthy would disagree, but anti-Communism did not start at the top of the government and trickle down to the mindsets of ordinary Americans. Rather, the Cold War as an imaginary atmosphere with strong anti-Communist sentiment began at the grassroots level and made its way up to men like McCarthy. These local, ordinary conservatives who exacerbated the fear and suspicion of Communists took advantage of hysteria to break open ideological differences. Ideological differences that manifested in pro-Soviet foreign policy advocacy and support of third party presidential candidates served as the justification for casting left-wing unions to the fringe. Unions like the UE continued to embrace the Communist Party line, even though it was not always explicit. The UE had the chance to reject Stalin and the Soviet Union, an opportunity the



CIO was quick to capitalize on, but it failed to do so. Rather than concentrating on bread-and-butter union issues and trying to unite with the rest of labor around a repeal of Taft-Hartley, the UE got itself tangled up in political endorsements and foreign policy, even though it was acutely aware that its strongest years of organizing came during the years in which it embraced American exceptionalism and nationalism. It was the ultimate embodiment of nationalism, Senator McCarthy, who ended up sealing the fate for the UE and Local 301. Years of exhaustively playing the underdog diluted the UE's original agenda so much that it could not escape its association with Communism. It took years to manifest itself into actual election defeats, but the UE and Local 301 were destined to fail as soon as they abandoned nationalism and shop-floor politics and broke from the CIO on international issues. The labor movement of the United States never recovered from its purge of the left-wing.

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