Global Problems, Parochial Concerns: Urban Catholics, New Deal Politics, and the Crises of the 1930s

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, historians have increasingly paid attention to the importance of religious identity in twentieth-century American society and politics. This dissertation contributes to that growing body of work by studying the American Catholic response to the domestic and international upheavals of the 1930s. Fusing international, national, and local concerns with the Church’s teachings on the need for social justice, American Catholics promoted a complicated set of political ideas. In doing so, they helped to propel Franklin Roosevelt to four terms in the White House while simultaneously creating deep fissures within the New Deal coalition, invigorating isolationism, and laying the foundation for the postwar conservative revival. This study looks at Catholics in three major urban areas – Boston, Detroit, and San Francisco – during the 1930s. Arguing for a comprehensive approach to the study of politics, this dissertation demonstrates the ways in which religious identities shaped Americans’ understanding of international events and the ways in which developments abroad affected perceptions of local and national political developments. I attempted to recapture the pivotal debates of the era, Catholic reaction to and participation in those debates, and the discourse that developed in the Catholic communities of the three cities studied. The papers of prominent Catholics, politicians, and labor leaders from the period were consulted, as were newspapers, both Catholic and secular. The resulting study contributes to our
understanding of American Catholicism, twentieth-century American politics, and American foreign relations.
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INTRODUCTION

In nearly every national election of the past thirty years, working-class white Catholics have been one of the most hotly contested voting blocs. Since the 1970s, these so-called “Reagan Democrats” have tantalized both political parties with their odd mix of politics, at once liberal and conservative. Urban, white, ethnic voters were wedded to the Democratic Party until the 1970s and 1980s, when they began to vote for the GOP and triggered the fall of the New Deal Order.

The “New Deal coalition” is a vague term that attempts to encapsulate the broad swath of voters who Franklin Roosevelt was able to mobilize to win four consecutive elections and reshape the Democratic Party into the dominant political force in the nation. In addition to retaining traditional Democrats in the South and in the nation’s major cities, Roosevelt also managed to bring into the party some groups, including progressive reformers and African Americans, which had traditionally been wedded to the Republican Party. In doing so, Roosevelt created an alliance of middle-class and lower-class, black and white, ethnic and Southern voters. The Democratic Party he developed continued to support a liberal agenda of economic reform and individual rights through
the 1960s, only to give way to the Reagan Revolution of 1980 and the subsequent Republican dominance of American politics. At that point, historians began to analyze the “Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order” in order to understand the realignment that had occurred.¹

Over the past two decades, a number of scholars have put forth explanations as to how and why Roosevelt’s New Deal coalition collapsed. They have provided rich and nuanced studies of the development of grassroots conservatism in the West, of a racial backlash in the South, and of the development of populist conservatism. Historians such as Rick Perlstein and Lisa McGirr have provided wonderful studies of the role the Goldwater presidential campaign in 1964 played in stimulating the conservative revival in America, laying the groundwork for the Reagan Revolution sixteen years later. Similarly complex studies of white ethnics have not been as forthcoming.²

Most studies of Reagan Democrats assume the racial unrest of the 1960s and 1970s fueled their shift into the Republican orbit. Jonathan Rieder’s *Canarsie*, for instance, provides a fascinating and informative sociological study of one working-class neighborhood, from 1960 to 1980, when, he argues, white ethnics began to rebel against the perceived intrusion of blacks into their turf. Meanwhile, Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary Edsall, in *Chain Reaction*, argue that working-class voters in the North continued to believe in liberal economic programs in the 1960s but came to distrust the liberal

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Democrats who administered them. Those northern voters, the Edsalls argue, came to believe that the liberals would merely channel their tax money into programs for minorities, on whom it would be wasted. Both *Canarsie* and *Chain Reaction* provide important insights into America in the 1970s and 1980s, but they also reinforce the stereotype that a massive realignment occurred all of a sudden in the late 1960s.\(^3\)

Some historians, most notably Thomas Sugrue, have argued that the roots of the northern, ethnic backlash are deeper than the Edsalls and others acknowledge. The Edsalls, Sugrue argues, “correctly emphasize the importance of white discontent as a national political force, [but] err in their overemphasis on the role of the Great Society and the sixties rebellions in the rise of the “silent majority.”\(^4\) In “Crabgrass-Roots Politics” Sugrue argues that the period from 1945 laid the groundwork for the backlash in the city of Detroit. “Detroit whites fashioned a language of discontent directed toward public officials,” he argues, against “Blacks, and liberal reformers who supported public housing and open housing.”\(^5\) Although Sugrue thus pushes back the dates of the backlash, he maintains the current literature’s focus on race as the critical factor in undermining the liberal coalition. Perhaps the most astute analysis of working-class, ethnic conservatism so far has come from Jonathan Rieder in his essay, “The Rise of the Silent Majority.” Rieder argues in passing in that essay that even at “the height of the New Deal, the Democratic majority contained certain vulnerabilities,” including ethnic


\(^5\) Sugrue, “Crabgrass-Roots,” 578.
tensions and “alienation from Democratic liberal internationalism.” But, no one has ever elaborated on this insight, not even Rieder. The dissertation argues that the New Deal coalition was fragile from its beginnings and that tensions between constituent groups were obvious even at the height of Roosevelt’s popularity. There is no doubt that racial problems such as busing conflicts and urban riots had a powerful role in bringing about political realignment in the 1970s, but such events led to a massive realignment precisely because the pre-existing alignment was vulnerable. In “The Rise of the Silent Majority,” Rieder contends that during the 1970s “the Right gained [white ethnic] votes more than it gained their hearts,” but I would argue that the exact opposite was true, that liberal Democrats gained white ethnic votes during the New Deal Era more than they gained conservative hearts. I will argue that the fault lines of American politics developed decades earlier, during the 1930s. The ways Americans responded to the international turmoil of that era had much to do with Americans’ varied cultural, ethnic, and religious identities. The world views they developed would, in turn, shape their approach to domestic debates about culture, politics, race, and religion. Catholic ethnics were drawn to the inclusive rhetoric of Franklin Roosevelt and even more so to the jobs and economic security he promised, but they remained highly skeptical of many key aspects of New Deal liberalism.

This dissertation studies Catholics in three American cities: Boston, Detroit and San Francisco. All three cities loomed large in American society in the early part the

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twentieth century. Boston was one of the leading East Coast metropolises and one of the intellectual centers of the United States. Detroit was an industrial behemoth, which had grown to become the fourth largest city in America as the auto industry became the nation’s biggest industry. San Francisco, one of the largest West Coast ports, had long symbolized the West to many Americans. In addition to being important political, economic, and cultural centers, the cities in question were also important centers of the American Catholic Church. Each was home to large numbers of Catholics.

The cities had their differences, of course. Boston, much more so than even the other great immigrant cities on the East Coast like New York and Philadelphia, had an almost bipolar political system that had developed during the era of immigration. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, Irish Catholics and Anglo Protestants fought for control of the city and state governments. Even in the 1930s, the ethnic and religious wars that had shaped Boston made it a volatile political environment. Detroit had no such legacy of long-simmering ethnic conflict. Detroit was a boomtown, a city that experienced tremendous growth in the first decades of the twentieth century. The massive influx of migrants from all over the world created a unique situation in Detroit, as did the centrality of the auto industry and the power that auto executives held in the community. San Francisco, meanwhile, was a city in transition, in the process of losing its dominant status among the West Coast

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8 The lines between religion and ethnicity often seemed blurred in Boston. Paula Kane provides a quote from a journalist in the 1880s who, upon traveling to Boston, noted in her diary, “To a young journalist coming to the capital of New England from Western New York, it was like coming to another world….The whole aspect and outlook were radically different. There was a line of cleavage in Boston that she had not encountered before in the few cities in which she had dwelt. It was a frankly racial and religious line – a little more religious than racial.” Quoted in Paula Kane, Separatism and Subculture: Boston Catholicism, 1900-1920 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 1.
cities to Los Angeles. The ethnic composition of the city was in constant flux, as immigrants and migrants flowed into the Golden State during the Depression.

By analyzing three very different cities, I seek to reveal both the commonalities and the diversity that characterized the American Catholic community in the 1930s. While events unfolded differently in each city, the anti-liberal sentiment that I describe existed in each and therefore was not an isolated phenomenon attributable to New England, Midwestern, or West Coast cultures, but was a significant, national dynamic. In the chapters that follow, I analyze specific political touchstones such as education, labor relations, and immigration. On most such issues, the liberal position was obvious. Leading liberals believed in restricting child labor, defending academic freedom, encouraging the development of strong industrial unions, and providing an inclusive environment for the foreign-born. But the Democratic Party’s grassroots did not share those commitments. In each city, in each case, liberalism, as defined by leading New Dealers of the era, was often poorly received, even if Roosevelt and his economic programs were widely admired.

In each city, it is clear that national and international political concerns were never far from minds of politicians and activists as they struggled over local issues such as schools, labor strikes, and city council elections. What’s more, all sides constantly referenced international events. Ethnic and religious identities were the lenses through which Americans viewed the momentous events of the era such as the rise of Hitler, Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia, and the Spanish Civil War. As Americans in the cities mobilized to support one side in any given conflict, they often came into conflict with their neighbors. Not limited to mere hypothetical debates about foreign affairs, the
conflicts often influenced the ways in which Americans viewed the New Deal and even how they perceived local city council elections. In the explosive atmosphere of the 1930s, even a school board meeting could be seen to be a key battleground in a world at war.

In studying the connections between local, national, and international politics, this study seeks to make a contribution to our understanding of U.S. relations with the wider world. I argue that far from being isolated, many Americans were intimately involved with the rest of the world during the 1930s. In fact, Americans often shaped their identities and beliefs in large part upon their perceptions of global developments. At the same time, the Catholics whom this dissertation studies also sought to shape the globe, both by acting individually and in small non-government organizations and by lobbying the federal government. In a sense this study follows a path laid by scholars of African American history. Historians such as Brenda Gayle Plummer, Penny Von Eschen, James Meriwether, and William Scott have provided a multitude of recent studies analyzing the ways in which African Americans responded to events in Africa from 1930 to 1960. They have shown that foreign events helped to shape group identities and that they therefore had a tangible effect on shaping African American activism within the United States. But while those scholars have deepened our understanding of African American history, few studies have looked at other ethnic groups in such a way. Studies of Catholic activism during the 1930s generally focus on whether ethnic lobbying groups had an

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impact on policy formation. Some historians have argued that Catholics had little impact on shaping foreign policy, although other historians have put together a fairly convincing counterargument.  

This study does not settle such debates, nor does it attempt to. Although analyzing policy formation is undeniably important, there are other ways of thinking about American history in an international context. This study attempts to follow the path of diplomatic historians like Plummer and Von Eschen in order to study the ways in which American Catholics interacted with the wider world, how they struggled with national and transnational identities, and how they both shaped and were shaped by international developments.

In doing so, this study also sheds light on the role of Catholics in the isolationist movement. In recent decades, scholars have begun to make clear just how complex the non-interventionist movement was in the 1930s. While there were clearly some dedicated isolationists who wanted to insulate the United States from the world entirely, the fierce political debates that developed on issues of foreign policy during the 1930s clearly demonstrate that many Americans wanted to engage in the world in some capacity. Many so-called isolationists, who obstinately opposed the prospect of American involvement in the League of Nations or the World Court, were more than willing to see the United States take unilateral action to advance American interests and values. Many of the Catholics in my study, while they were classified as isolationists in the past, were among those pushing for the United States to take unilateral action in

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places like Mexico. Furthermore, their positions on neutrality and isolationism consistently shifted during the crises of the 1930s. While they resisted intervention in Europe in 1940, they were hardly isolationists.

Is it even possible to talk about “American Catholics” or a “Catholic perspective” given the size and ethnic diversity of the Catholic Church in the United States? Indeed, for decades, Catholic historians went out of their way to disprove stereotypes of the Catholic Church as a monolithic bloc.\textsuperscript{11} It is important to remember that the American Catholic Church was an immigrant church made up of approximately twenty million people, speaking many different languages and sometimes practicing their faith in very different ways.\textsuperscript{12} Yet, while acknowledging such diversity, it is still possible to speak of a coherent Catholic community in the United States, probably even a shared Catholic perspective, given that the Catholic Church was a highly-structured, hierarchical organization that insisted on obedience among the faithful.

At the core of the Church, of course, was a shared belief structure. While ethnic parishes existed in most American cities, which allowed priests to speak Polish or Lithuanian or Italian to their flock and to deliver the homily in that language, the mass itself was said in Latin. A single, shared liturgy united all Catholics throughout the world. The sacraments and other church rituals and devotions created a strong bond

\textsuperscript{11} One example of such work, in a study relevant to this dissertation, can be seen in Cronon’s “American Catholics and Mexican Anticlericalism.” Cronon’s primary argument seems to be “that Catholics in the United States were by no means in agreement” in regards to Mexico. Cronon, “American Catholics and Mexican Anticlericalism,” 225-6.  

among Catholics. Beyond that, there were shared values that emerged from the Catholic religion. Historian Jay Dolan argues that the Catholic approach to “authority, sin, ritual, and the miraculous….set Catholics apart from other people in the United States.”

In addition, Catholics, particularly during hard times like the Great Depression and World War II, were united in very powerful ways by their shared devotion to patron saints like Our Lady of Sorrow and Saint Jude.

In his influential and highly-respected study *American Catholics and Social Reform*, historian David O’Brien asserted that one could speak of distinct Catholic perspective because “Catholics are part of an international hierarchical organization designed to make them aware of the Church’s teachings and to enforce its religious and moral discipline.” Dolan, another leading scholar on the history of the American Catholic Church, argues that “Catholicism was clearly a religion of authority, and people learned not only to pray, but also to obey.” While it is doubtful that there was ever a time when all Catholics “obeyed” the hierarchy, respect for Church authority was a strong component of American Catholicism in the early part of the twentieth century.

The Pope was perhaps more powerful and influential, within the Catholic community,

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17 Historian Leslie Tentler, among others, has argued that Pope Paul VI’s encyclical on birth control, *Humanae Vitae*, in 1968 was a major turning point when Catholics began to openly question Church teachings and challenge the authority of both the local parish priest and the Church hierarchy. Leslie Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).
than at any time since the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{18} Local bishops also had extraordinary influence on their parishioners, at least by modern standards.\textsuperscript{19} While bishops traditionally operated independently of each other, American bishops also joined together during World War I to form the National Catholic War Council in order to coordinate American Catholics’ contributions to aid the war effort. At war’s end, the bishops preserved the organization, renaming it the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) and rededicating it to the “social reconstruction” of America after the war.\textsuperscript{20}

Just as important as the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church was the grassroots organization of the Church in American cities. Locally, dioceses and parishes created an incredibly elaborate social system for American Catholics. Historian Charles Morris argues that even as late as 1950s, the Catholic Church constituted “a virtual state-within-a-state so Catholics could live almost their entire lives within a thick cocoon of Catholic institutions.”\textsuperscript{21} The Catholic Church created its own network of parochial schools throughout the nation, allowing Catholic children, in theory if not always in

\textsuperscript{18} Historian James O’Toole explains that the pope had little influence among American Catholics in the early 1800s. The efforts of mid-19th century governments in Germany and Italy to constrain the Church, however, led to the Pope Pius IX dramatically reasserting papal authority in a variety of ways, including the assertion of papal infallibility. By the early 20th century, therefore, the pope was a figure in American Catholicism. O’Toole says that such “direct involvement of the pope in the prayer life of ordinary Americans had been unknown in earlier ages.” Meanwhile, Pope Pius XI utilize the radio in 1931 to directly broadcast a message to American Catholics for the first time, thus opening a new line of direct communication between the distant pope and the American Catholics. James O’Toole, \textit{The Faithful: A History of the Catholics in America} (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, 2008), 129-137, 191.

\textsuperscript{19} For example, see James O’Toole’s biography of Cardinal William O’Connell, \textit{Militant and Triumphant} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

\textsuperscript{20} O’Toole, \textit{Faithful}, 161.

practice, to attend parochial schools all the way from first grade through college.\textsuperscript{22} There were countless Catholic social clubs: fraternal organizations like the Knights of Columbus; ethnic organizations such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America, and the St. Jean Baptiste Society; and local social groups like Catholic readings circles and prayer groups. The Holy Name Society alone had more than a half a million members, organized in thousands of parish branches throughout the nation.\textsuperscript{23} Youth groups such as the Catholic Youth Organization were also created nationally, uniting Catholic children and providing a Catholic alternative to Protestant organizations like the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA).\textsuperscript{24}

Catholics made extensive use of the media during the 1930s in order to disseminate their beliefs. Hundreds of local Catholic newspapers, with circulation numbers totaling in the millions, thrived in the United States. While many of the papers had been run by laypeople in the nineteenth century, by the twentieth century most had been taken over by local dioceses.\textsuperscript{25} In this way, the papers were made available through the churches, while local bishops reserved editorial control. As the Church hierarchy took a greater interest in media issues, they also created the Catholic News Service (CNS), a sort of Catholic version of the Associated Press. The CNS provided stories about national and international events to local Catholic newspapers, which often relied upon the CNS for a large percentage of their content. National periodicals, most

\textsuperscript{22} There were around 70 Catholics colleges and universities by the 1930s. O’Toole, \textit{Faithful}, 160.

\textsuperscript{23} Dolan, \textit{Catholic Experience}, 233-257.

\textsuperscript{24} Dolan, \textit{Catholic Experience}, 392.

\textsuperscript{25} Dolan, \textit{Catholic Experience}, 394. Dolan states that in 1959, 580 Catholic periodicals existed, with a combined 24,273,972 subscribers.
prominently *Commonweal*, thrived during the 1930s as well. Launched by Catholic laypeople in 1924, *Commonweal* was phenomenally popular among middle and upper-class Catholics in the 1930s. Father Charles Coughlin’s paper, *Social Justice*, was even more popular among working-class Catholics. Each Sunday, hundreds of thousands of copies of *Social Justice* were sold on sidewalks outside of churches.26 Such numbers paled in comparison to Coughlin’s radio audience, however, as Coughlin spoke to tens of millions of listeners each week for much of the 1930s. No other Catholic radio personality rivaled Coughlin’s popularity, but Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen had substantial radio audience of his own, topping seven million listeners.27 This mass network of Catholic media outlets did much to foster a coherent Catholic culture in the United States during the 1930s.

Just as important in shaping a Catholic identity was the international nature of the Catholic Church. While historians have done considerable work on international, non-governmental organizations and transnational identities in the past few decades, the Catholic Church has received scant attention. While considering themselves patriotic Americans, American Catholics were quite conscious, and proud, of the fact that they were part of a global community of Catholics. This study attempts to ground the experience of American Catholics in a global context and show how they simultaneously

26 Father Coughlin claimed the paper had a circulation of more than a million at its peak and government officials found that there were still 200,000 registered subscribers in 1941, when the paper was shut down for violating the wartime Espionage Act. Donald Warren, *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, the Father of Hate Radio* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 110, 258.

27 Dolan, *Catholic Experience*, 393, 403-4; Morris, *American Catholics*, 147. Coughlin’s audience in the subject of controversy with estimates ranging from ten million to forty million. Either way, it was a very large audience at a time when only about half of Americans had a radio set. As Morris puts it, “Coughlin commanded up to twice the number of listeners as today’s immensely popular Rush Limbaugh show, in a country half the size, without portable radios.”
juggled their identities as Bostonians or Detroiters or San Franciscans with their identities as Americans and as members of that global Catholic community. In her study of Boston Catholics during the first two decades of the twentieth century, historian Paula Kane noted that Catholic officials in Boston encouraged Catholic immigrants to think of “themselves as loyal Americans, albeit with a universal religious and cultural heritage.”

Such an understanding predominated in the 1930s, as American Catholics asserted themselves in order to shape local, national, and international policy.

But the 1930s were also a period of transition for American Catholics. Catholics who had been outsiders, facing persecution and prejudice, institutional and otherwise, throughout much of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century, suddenly found themselves on the threshold of mainstream acceptance in American society and American politics. Whereas Al Smith had faced tremendous anti-Catholic prejudice in his presidential campaign of 1928, American Catholics found the American political system increasingly open to them during the 1930s. Franklin Roosevelt made a great effort to include Catholics in his administration, more so than any previous president. Prominent Catholics were named Attorney General, Postmaster General, Supreme Court Justice, Governor-General of the Philippines, Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, ambassadors, National Labor Board and National Labor Relations Board members, and

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assorted other position of influence in the federal government. Additionally, more than one in four judicial appointments under Roosevelt went to a Catholic.

Even as Roosevelt opened the doors of power to Catholics, though, Catholic anticommunists also began to make common cause with conservative anticommunists, including former enemies such as nativists and Southern Fundamentalists. Anticommunism became a tool by which American Catholics could assert their patriotism and their religion, while at times turning the tables on some of the very groups that had once excluded them. Outsiders increasingly became insiders. By the early days of the Cold War, Catholics had gained new acceptance in both political parties. Oddly enough, it may have been at this moment of acceptance that the political polarization of American Catholics began. This dissertation shows that even as some became die-hard New Dealers, others began to be drawn into a conservative coalition based upon anticommunism.

The focus of this study is the political discourse the developed among American Catholics during the 1930s, a discourse which stressed both anticommunism and social justice, which sounded internationalist even as it was used to support isolationism. Although this study does also delved into debates about ethnic and religious identities, domestic politics, and foreign policy, it is the political discourse that united such concerns. In order to capture that discourse, I consulted copious amounts of Catholic sources, including the papers of relevant Archbishops, the National Catholic Welfare

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31 Flynn, Catholics and Carey, Roman Catholics, 86.

Conference, and Catholic organizations such as the Knights of Columbus. The focus on this study is not the Catholic hierarchy or institutions, however, but rather working-class and middle-class Catholic voters and Catholic politicians. Accordingly, I also consulted the papers of numerous politicians, state and national, with an eye for evidence of pressure emanating from Catholic voters. In addition, I consulted the records of government bodies such as the State Department, the Roosevelt White House, state legislatures, and city governments in order to study the impact on policy. Newspapers, both the Catholic press and the mainstream media, were also consulted to illuminate the public discourse that developed in both individual cities and the nation as a whole.

Chapter one provides context for the rest of the dissertation. It lays out the positive and negative reaction of Catholics to the Great Depression and the New Deal. Catholics found Roosevelt’s emphasis on a planned economy and social responsibility appealing, since those policies were in line with Church teachings on social matters, as laid out in two highly influential papal encyclicals widely cited by Catholic leaders during the 1930s. Father Charles Coughlin, the famous radio personality, threw his weight behind Roosevelt in the early days of the New Deal, as did most other Catholic leaders. But Catholic elites and even many working-class Catholics soon found themselves disillusioned with New Dealers in the administration and many policies of the administration itself. Meddlesome progressive reformers, former Klansmen such as Hugo Black, and Roosevelt’s famed Brain Trust all drew scorn from working-class Catholics who viewed them as threatening forces in Roosevelt’s inner circle. Even more threatening was the growing federal bureaucracy which held out the promise of relief while also seemingly threatening repression in the future. Roosevelt remained
consistently popular, even as his administration came under fire. Gary Gerstle explains that Roosevelt “seemed not to be touched by the policies that failed and advisers that erred….That many Americans hung a picture of him in their homes, often alongside one of the Madonna, further suggests that he had transcended the realm of the political.”

Yet while Roosevelt remained personally popular, the New Deal system that he put together and the New Deal liberalism that emerged from the administration came under increasing strain.

The first chapter also discusses the American Catholic response to international events. Catholics warned of a Church under siege, threatened by increasingly powerful, secular governments throughout the world. The Mexican government’s attempts to suppress Church activities in the 1920s and early 1930s, including parochial schools, were met with outrage by American Catholics who viewed it as a sign of spreading worldwide anti-Catholicism. Those fears were stoked by developments in Spain, where priests and nuns were killed and churches burned as that nation spiraled into civil war. Although most such events occurred prior to or at the beginning of the civil war, the stories trickled into America slowly throughout the 1930s, further inflaming fears of a Church under siege. Eventually, the fears of communist and socialist governments merged with fears of Nazism and Fascism as threatening to religious society because of their strong centralized governments and atheism. Catholics continued to be appalled throughout the decade by liberal apologists for the Mexican regime, for the Soviet

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government, and for Loyalists in Spain, all of whom Catholics considered to be at least as bad as Hitler and Mussolini.

The second chapter focuses on social conflicts in Boston during the 1930s. For a variety of reasons, Boston’s Catholics perceived the growth of state power as a threat to Catholic families and Catholic children. As a result, Boston’s Irish Democrats consistently thwarted liberal reformers’ efforts to ratify the Child Labor Amendment to the Constitution. Catholic leaders, politicians, and the press all warned that the measure would grant the government control over children and might lead to the closure of parochial schools, as was being done in Mexico, or the regimentation of children, as was being done in Germany. At the same time, local politicians took the lead in pushing for Congressional investigations of events in Mexico and for punitive actions against the Mexican government. In the mid-1930s, the debates became even more heated when Democrats attempted to institute a loyalty oath for teachers, both public and private, so as to protect the state’s children from subversive teachers who might be teaching atheism and radicalism. The proposed oath led to years of conflict between ethnic Democrats and the state’s intellectual elites, including the presidents of Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The third chapter focuses on labor issues in Detroit. In the early part of the decade, there was a broad consensus among Detroit’s Catholics about the role that unions could play in bringing about social justice. As the Congress of Industrial Organizations developed into a powerful presence in Detroit’s factories, however, unions, their leadership, and their allies came under intense scrutiny for their ties to radicals. Local labor leaders’ decision to run their own candidates for the city council led to one of the
most intense elections in the city’s history. Coinciding with the Spanish Civil War and Hitler’s expansion through Eastern Europe, the CIO’s efforts were rhetorically tied to fifth column subversion and the threat of dictatorship. That such events also coincided with Roosevelt’s efforts to rearrange the Supreme Court fueled charges of dictatorship. A year later, Michigan Governor Frank Murphy, a friend of both labor and the president, found his reelection campaign seriously injured by charges of subversion and dictatorship. Murphy became of the first major target of Congressman Martin Dies and the House Un-American Activities Committee. National politics suddenly influenced local debates. Dies’ accusations against Murphy led to open conflict between the congressman and the president of his party, when Roosevelt openly denounced the Dies Committee for smearing Murphy. In Detroit, local, national, and international politics became nearly inseparable. Detroit’s Catholic community became polarized, with many adopting a reactionary posture towards the labor movement.

The fourth chapter also analyzes issues emanating for labor, but from a different perspective. Local labor leader Harry Bridges became the leader of the longshoremen’s union in San Francisco, the leading figure on the entire West Coast as a result of his hard fought battle with ship owners in 1934, a battle which culminated in a general strike which paralyzed San Francisco. Given his Australian birth and alleged communist ties, conservative businessmen repeatedly tried to deport him. Again, the national government became a major player in local debates, with both Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Dies Committee playing feature roles in the local drama. Coming at a time when full-scale war was breaking out in Europe, the Bridges deportation hearing was steeped in international controversy and fostered a discourse which focused on
“alien” threats to the city and the nation. Yet even as the Bridges case exploded into a highly-charged national controversy, local Catholic leaders attempted to present a moderate alternative to radicals on the right and left.

The fifth chapter analyzes the non-interventionist movement in the United States in the years leading up to World War II. The non-interventionist movement appealed to many Irish Catholics who despised the British Empire and Italian and German Americans who had some sympathy for their ancestral lands, but the appeal of the movement went far beyond ethnic identification. Non-interventionists warned of the growing power of centralized government and feared that war would lead to an omnipotent national government which might threaten personal and religious liberties like the totalitarian governments abroad. These warnings came not merely from Republicans; many Democrats who presumably voted for Roosevelt also voiced them. In many ways, the non-interventionist movement united skeptics and critics of the administration, bringing together urban Catholics, Southern Democrats, and traditional Republicans in common causes against the perceived threat of a growing liberal government.

After Pearl Harbor, such fears and skepticism of liberalism did not subside. Even at the height of the war in 1942 and 1943, many Catholics warned about America’s Soviet allies and the threatening power of the national government. In the immediate post-war period, these fears would subside somewhat as a result of the government’s vigorous prosecution of the Cold War at home and abroad. Many of the Catholics in my study, however, were strong supporters of Joseph McCarthy in his crusade against liberal elites and subversive elements in government. Their skepticism of liberal culture, bureaucrats, intellectuals, and multilateral international organizations continued for
decades. The social and racial conflicts of the 1960s magnified and inflamed these schisms and, in the end, eventually shattered the alliance that Roosevelt had formed.
CHAPTER ONE: DISCOURSE OF DISTRUST

In January 1935, President Franklin Roosevelt took the seemingly innocuous step of seeking Senate approval for American entrance into the World Court. Since the United States Senate had refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, which created the World Court, the United States had never become a member of the organization. Roosevelt asked the Senate to address this fifteen-year-old omission. Given that Democrats were in firm control of the Senate and that his own popularity was high, Roosevelt did not expect any roadblocks to ratification. But serious obstacles soon emerged.

A number of prominent figures who had been strong supporters of President Roosevelt’s New Deal emerged as implacable opponents of the proposal. Father Charles Coughlin was the most vocal in his denunciation of the proposal. The famous “Radio Priest” had supported the New Deal in the past; Coughlin campaigned for Roosevelt in 1932 by stating that the choice was “Roosevelt or ruin.”¹ In 1935, however, Coughlin

¹ The size of Coughlin’s audience, and therefore the extent of his influence, is a matter of some controversy. Estimates range from 10 million to 45 million, with no real evidence substantiating any of the estimates. Coughlin and his contemporaries promoted the forty million figure, but contemporary historians like Alan Brinkley suggest 10-15 million was probably more accurate. According to Marshall William Fishwick, Great Awakenings: Popular Religion and Popular Culture (New York: Haworth Press, 1995), 123, Coughlin had received monetary contributions from more than 2 million followers by 1934, which seems to indicate a strong, dedicated group of followers.
emerged as Roosevelt’s strongest opponent on the World Court issue. He delivered an impassioned speech to his listeners, denouncing the World Court as a bastion of “plutocrats” and communists, and calling for his listeners to make their opposition known.² Coughlin’s listeners responded by writing to the President and the Senate, expressing their displeasure with the World Court proposal. A flood of letters and telegrams, with estimates ranging from fifty thousand to two hundred thousand, poured into Washington within days of Coughlin’s broadcast. Roosevelt’s proposal subsequently fell seven votes short of the two-thirds majority required for ratification by the Senate. Coughlin’s speech was credited by many as being the major reason for the failure.³

The vote on the World Court was seen by observers at the time, and historians since have seen the world court vote, as a turning point. The defeat was a blow to Roosevelt’s prestige, arguably the first time a major administration proposal had been defeated. In fact, the World Court debate simply exposed developing cracks in the New Deal coalition that Roosevelt had stitched together; Catholic supporters of Coughlin, progressive Republicans like Hiram Johnson and William Borah, and conservative Democrats all deserted the President on the issue. Roosevelt faced more opposition in the years after the World Court fiasco, much of it centered on foreign policy.⁴ A key part of this new opposition came from Catholics, many of whom, like Coughlin, had once

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⁴ Dallek, *Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 96.
supported the President, but became increasingly distrustful of the Roosevelt administration as the decade developed.

**Catholics and the New Deal**

The early years of the New Deal were a honeymoon for American Catholics and Franklin Roosevelt. Catholics have often been portrayed as prototypical members of the New Deal coalition – and for good reason. Although modern, scientific political polls had not yet been created, by all accounts Catholics voted for Roosevelt in overwhelming numbers in the 1932 election. Once he was elected, Roosevelt’s promise to reform society and provide social justice found an enthusiastic reception among American Catholics, as it did among countless Americans who were suffering the effects of the Great Depression. Catholics also had unique reasons to support the New Deal in the early years of the Roosevelt presidency.

The similarities between the first New Deal and papal teachings were particularly exciting to many American Catholics. In 1891 Pope Leo XIII, responding to labor chaos in the industrializing world, issued *Rerum Novarum* in which he critiqued the capitalist socio-economic order and called for reform, including labor unions. In 1931, on the 40th anniversary of Leo’s encyclical, Pope Pius XI issued *Quadagesimo Anno* which reiterated Leo’s critique while advancing corporatist proposals for vocational groups that could provide order to the economy. According to Catholic social teachings, as evinced in these two highly influential encyclicals, individuals had the right to property but also had the responsibility to administer that property in the interest of society. Rugged

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individualism had no place in Catholic teachings; the Catholic Church instead promulgated the idea of social justice.⁶

One might wonder whether such encyclicals had any relevance to ordinary Catholics. When opponents quoted encyclicals to him in 1927 to prove his subservience to the Pope, Al Smith famously declared, “I never heard of these bulls and encyclicals and books.”⁷ While Smith could plausibly claim to have been a “devout Catholic since childhood” while never hearing of the encyclicals that his opponents cited, such was not the case with the labor encyclicals in the 1930s.⁸ American Catholic leaders spoke enthusiastically of the encyclicals during the Great Depression and their message was widely disseminated in Catholic communities. Priests, intellectuals, social activists, labor leaders, and Catholic media personalities spoke of them frequently. Catholics across America mobilized to bring Catholic social teachings to bear on the problems that the United States faced during the Great Depression.⁹

Catholic intellectuals, led by Monsignor John J. Ryan, and the American Catholic hierarchy also developed elaborate plans for action based on these encyclicals. The Bishops’ Program of Social Reconstruction made ambitious proposals for reforming the American economy in the 1920s, many of which foreshadowed New Deal era reforms. Ryan, a professor at the Catholic University of America, was a dominant Catholic voice

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⁷ Quoted in McGreevy, Catholicism and American Freedom, 149.
on socio-economic matters for decades before Roosevelt became president, but he became even more prominent as a Catholic supporter of Roosevelt. He and other leading Catholic officials repeatedly asserted that the New Deal was perfectly in line with papal pronouncements on the economy. Roosevelt himself further spurred such thinking when he quoted from *Quadragesimo Anno* at a campaign event in Detroit in 1932. The President called it "just as radical as I am" and declared it "one of the greatest documents of modern times."  

As a result of these perceived similarities Catholic leaders were vocal in their support for Roosevelt and the New Deal. Archbishop Edward Hanna of San Francisco, speaking as the representative of a National Council of Bishops, spoke in support of Roosevelt’s recovery plans. Even conservative prelates, such as Cardinal William Henry O’Connell in Boston, praised the President and called him a godsend during the national crisis. Perhaps even more influential than the Catholic hierarchy, however, was Father Charles Coughlin, who also endorsed the President in 1932.  

According to the legend, Father Coughlin began his radio career in the 1920s, after a burning cross was left on the yard of his parish in suburban Detroit. In outrage, Coughlin went on a local radio station to denounce the Ku Klux Klan. Encouraged by the enthusiastic support he received after that inaugural address, Coughlin began a series

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of radio broadcasts that evolved from homilies to broader calls for political and social reform. By the early 1930s, Coughlin was broadcasting nationally on CBS and tens of millions of listeners tuned in to hear his weekly sermons condemning internationalism and money-changers, preaching his own interpretation of the papal encyclicals, and generally arguing in favor of social justice. Coughlin’s support for the New Deal continued throughout the early days of the administration, as Roosevelt set about implementing a series of dramatic reforms.14

Catholics were encouraged by Roosevelt’s early efforts, particularly the National Recovery Administration (NRA), and even later initiatives, such as Social Security and the Wagner Act, which they believed to be in line with papal pronouncements on the need to curtail the economic system and provide protections for workers. The NRA was particularly well received by many Catholics, who saw it as similar to Pius XI’s call for a corporatist system and a planned economy. For this reason, historian John McGreevy refers to the early 1930s as the “high point for the Catholic-Liberal alliance.”15 During the early part of the decade, Catholic leaders, Progressive Republicans, New Dealers, and intellectuals all seemed to share a common vision of a more structured and planned economy which could provide stability and social justice. Around the time of the World Court battle, however, the Catholic-liberal alliance became strained and many Catholics became increasingly distrustful of liberalism.

14 See Brinkley, Voices of Protest; Warren, Radio Priest; Charles J. Tull, Father Coughlin and the New Deal (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1965).

15 McGreevy, Catholicism and American Freedom, 153.
The Catholic response to events of the 1930s was conditioned by a number of historical factors, including anti-Catholicism. American Catholics had long been the target of prejudice dating back to the influx of Catholic immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century. The Ku Klux Klan’s rebirth in the 1920s and Alfred Smith’s devastating defeat in the 1928 presidential election demonstrated the continued power of anti-Catholicism. In the early 1920s, the Klan dominated several state governments, controlled countless local governments, and claimed an estimated two million members. One of the most obvious manifestations of the Klan’s anti-Catholicism came in its proposals to curtail or prohibit parochial schools. In Oregon, a state law passed in 1922 required children to attend public schools, where ethnic and religious minorities could be properly Americanized. Similar statutes made headway in Michigan and other states. The Supreme Court eventually struck down the Oregon law, but Catholics remained on guard. The 1924 Immigration Restriction Act sought to exclude Catholics immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, instead privileging immigrants from predominately Protestant, Northern European nations.

Anti-Catholicism continued to thrive even after the Klan collapsed in the mid-1920s. After being denied the Democratic nomination in 1924 because of anti-Catholic prejudice, Al Smith succeeded in gaining the nomination in 1928. His campaign brought anti-Catholic prejudice to the forefront of national politics. Protestant ministers openly campaigned against the Catholic candidate from the pulpit and several Southern states.

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voted for the Republican candidate for the first time. Even some of those who supported Smith did so in a backhanded way, arguing that he was fit to lead because he was not a typical Catholic.\footnote{McGreevy, \textit{Catholicism and American Freedom}, 148.} While some scholars in the years since have argued that Prohibition and other cultural matters played a bigger role in shaping the election than did religion, statistical and anecdotal evidence suggest that anti-Catholicism played a major role in 1928.\footnote{For statistical evidence, see Allan Lichtman, \textit{Prejudice and the Old Politics: the Presidential Election of 1928} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). For fascinating anecdotal evidence of prejudice in the 1928 campaign, see Robert A. Slayton, \textit{Empire Statesman} (New York: Free Press, 2001), 302-324.} In the aftermath of the campaign, few Catholics had any doubt that anti-Catholicism was alive and well in the United States.

Another factor shaping the attitude of American Catholics in the inter-war years was the post-World War I backlash against Wilsonian internationalism. Many American Catholics were skeptical of Wilson’s form of internationalism, which was characterized by an emphasis on multilateralism, international law, and collective security.\footnote{Internationalism is complicated word, one that has never been definitively defined. Historians now generally accept that the United States was never truly isolationist, as it was consistently involved in the world economy. Furthermore, historians such as Stephen Ambrose have coined the term “globalism” in order to describe America’s military involvement in, and to a certain extent domination of, the rest of the world during and after the Cold War. That Cold War-era hegemonic role for the United States had little in common with the internationalism of Wilson, as Thomas Knock has pointed out. Still, definitions of internationalism abound. Complicating matters is the fact that during the Treat Battle, both Wilson and critics defined their position in opposition to their opponent. Wilson cast it as a question of internationalism or isolationism, Republicans as a choice between internationalism and Americanism. Meanwhile, historians have come up with new labels. Thomas Knock differentiates between progressive internationalism and conservative internationalism. Stephen Ambrosius proposes universalism and unilateralism. For my purposes, I define Wilsonian internationalism (a.k.a. liberal internationalism) as a system which revolved around multilateral institutions like the League of Nations, international laws with international courts to enforce such laws, and collective security. For more on Wilson and these debates, see: Thomas Bailey, \textit{Woodrow Wilson and the Lost Peace} (Chicago: Quadrangle Press, 1963); Thomas Bailey, \textit{Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal} (New York: Macmillan Company, 1945); Thomas Knock, \textit{To End All Wars} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); and Lloyd Ambrosius, \textit{Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For an interesting new study of FDR’s internationalism, see Elizabeth Borgwardt, \textit{A New Deal for the World} (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, 2005).}
Treaty of Versailles alienated Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, German-Americans, and a host of other ethnic groups. They argued that Wilson had betrayed their interests for the benefit of the British Empire. These ethnic groups fiercely resisted Wilson’s attempts to tie the United States to the British Empire through the League of Nations and to commit the nation to preserving the post-war status quo. Their anger did not fade in the fifteen years between the end of World War I and the World Court battle.

Anticommunism was another factor that shaped Catholic attitudes towards politics and foreign policy. The Catholic Church considered itself to be the most implacable opponent of communism worldwide. As early as the 1840s, the Church denounced communism as an ideology which valued scientific materialism over faith and morals, an ideology which was hostile to religion, organized churches, and traditional family values. In 1937, Pope Pius XI issued an encyclical entitled *On Atheistic Communism*, which warned of the “imminent danger” that “Bolshevistic and atheistic Communism” posed to “the very foundation of Christian civilization.” The Pope warned that “the Communist takes advantage of the present world-wide economic crisis” and specifically pointed to “the persecutions unleashed in Russia, in Mexico and now in Spain.” He made it clear that the battle against Communism was a “struggle between good and evil.” While Catholics remained watchful for signs of Communism

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21 *Divini Redemptoris*
anywhere they might be present, the Soviet Union, as the center of the Communist world, served as the focal point for Catholic anticommunism during the interwar years.

From the earliest days of the Russian Revolution, American Catholics generally opposed the prospect of American recognition of the Soviet government. Far from seeking to isolate the United States, American opponents of recognition tried to use the denial of diplomatic recognition as a weapon, hoping to weaken and punish the Soviet government for its denial of religion and other basic human freedoms. When he took office in 1933, Franklin Roosevelt’s many advisors told him that recognition of, and trade with, the Soviets would help the American economic recovery. Roosevelt faced intense counter-pressure from American Catholics, however, who urged him not to recognize a government that hated God. Roosevelt responded by boasting that he was a good horse trader and promising that he would extort guarantees of religious freedom from the Soviet government. Roosevelt tried to live up to his promises. When it came time for negotiations, Soviet Minister Maxim Litvinov complained that while he was trying to hammer out serious economic treaties, the President kept harping on religious issues. Eventually the Soviet government issued vague promises of religious freedom. ‘I can’t understand the President; he hasn’t talked about anything but religious freedom with me,’” Litvinov complained, “and I want to discuss important things like trade relations, etc. What is the idea?’”

While American Catholics were thwarted in their efforts to block recognition, they continued to be driven by a deep-seated hatred of communism.22

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23 For more on Catholic attitudes towards Soviet recognition, see Flynn, *American Catholics*, chapter 7, “Ill Feeling over Russia”; Kanawada, *Franklin D. Roosevelt's Diplomacy*, chapter 1, “Russia and Recognition.”
Although Americans on all sides of foreign policy debates often based their decisions on ethno-cultural factors, almost every issue was pitched in a manner which stressed “Americanism” and downplayed hyphenated loyalties. As historian Gary Gerstle has pointed out, Americanism so dominated the American discourse in the interwar years that virtually everyone involved in political debates could and did use the language of Americanism for their own purposes. Catholic Americans frequently utilized the language of Americanism and the American political tradition in their arguments, citing the Pilgrims when talking about religious freedom and referencing Abraham Lincoln when talking about combating groups like the KKK. In tapping into the American past, Catholics found countless examples of American fears of the corrupting influence of foreign alliances, which served as powerful ammunition in their struggle to influence foreign policy. Rather than cite papal encyclicals on atheistic communism, American Catholics would cite George Washington’s farewell address when warning of the dangers of collaborating with the Spanish Loyalists or the Red Army.

As a result of these factors, American Catholics remained deeply skeptical of liberal internationalism in the 1930s. Many Catholics believed that the United States should be a powerful influence in the world, but resisted liberal internationalism, with its emphasis on the League of Nations and multilateral alliances. For those who fervently believed in their nation’s exceptionalism, the relativism imbedded in organizations like the League of Nations was abhorrent. Furthermore, there was also a fear that

involvement in such organizations might corrupt the United States. Instead, they proposed unilateral actions in order to advance American values. If the United States was to become involved in international affairs, it would have to be from a position of strength. For many Catholics, Mexico was the perfect example.

**Mexico**

Developments in Mexico during the Depression decade probably received as much attention from American Catholics as events anywhere in the world. By definition American Catholics were linked through the church to their brethren abroad in a very powerful way, which perhaps explains why American Catholics took such an intense interest in developments south of the border. In addition, American Catholics who considered themselves a besieged minority during the 1920s saw in Mexico their worst fears come true.

Mexican anti-clericalism had been an issue for American Catholics for nearly two decades before it reached fever pitch in the 1930s. From the earliest days of the revolution in the 1900s, some of the leading Mexican revolutionaries had sought to constrain the power of the Catholic Church, which had traditionally held great wealth and political power, and to institute a series of constitutional reforms which would restrict the Church’s influence in politics. Francisco Madero’s government gave tacit approval to these revolutionaries during its short time in power. When Madero was overthrown by Victoriano Huerta in 1913, the Catholic Church in Mexico breathed a sigh of relief as Huerta was widely considered to be friendlier to the Church. Woodrow Wilson, however, viewed Huerta with suspicion and refused to recognize his government. Moreover,
Wilson actively sought to aid those forces opposed to Huerta, even sending in American military forces to seize control of the Mexican port of Veracruz in 1914. With American support, a coalition of forces led by Venustiano Carranza took power in Mexico.\(^{25}\)

Carranza came to power promising religious freedom, but shortly after he took power the Mexican constitution was rewritten. The new constitution radically affected the Catholic Church in a number of ways. First, the Mexican government set out to create public schools throughout the country, even in the most rural areas, and required Mexican students to attend those schools. The measure thus directly challenged the Mexican Catholic education system. Furthermore, the 1917 constitution limited Catholic culture to the private sphere; religious ceremonies in the streets and other public places were banned. Perhaps worst of all, as far as Church officials were concerned, the new laws placed dramatic constraints on how the Catholic Church could run its affairs: priests were required to be native Mexicans and had to register with the proper authorities; all oaths were prohibited including those of religious significance; and church property, as indeed all property in Mexico, was made liable to confiscation. What is more, priests were banned from voting or publicly participating in the political process in any way. Although Carranza’s government made no move to enforce these provisions, Catholic officials in Mexico, the United States, and the Vatican were horrified.\(^{26}\)

Upon becoming president in 1924, General Plutarco Elías Calles enforced the constitution’s anticlerical provisions. His government expelled foreign priests,


nationalized Church properties, and closed Catholic schools. The Archbishop of Mexico publicly protested and flouted the laws, further provoking the revolutionary government. The Mexican hierarchy also arranged a clerical strike, during which priests throughout the country abstained from providing the sacraments, thus putting pressure on the Calles regime. In some parts of the country, violent rebellion developed among Mexican Catholics dubbed “Cristeros” because of their rallying cry of “Viva Cristo Rey!”

Mexican Catholics also appealed to their brethren. North American Catholics protested the Mexican government’s actions throughout the late 1920s. Finally, in 1929, a modus vivendi, negotiated in large part by two American priests, Edmund A. Walsh SJ, and John J. Burke CSP, helped ease the violent clash and normalize relations between Catholics and the revolutionary party.  

The peace was short lived. In 1931 the Governor of Veracruz, who was convinced that Mexican Catholics had been behind a recent attempt on his life, began to use the constitutional powers to limit the number of priests in his state. In response, Pope Pius XI issued an encyclical on the situation in Mexico, attacking the Mexican Government for failing to live up to its promises and for once again persecuting Catholics. The Mexican government responded by expelling the Mexican hierarchy, most of whom went into exile in the United States.  

Into the controversy stepped Josephus Daniels, the newly appointed American Ambassador to Mexico. Daniels was a longtime friend of the President, their relationship


28 Redinger, Catholics and the Mexican Revolution, 9.
dating back to the days when Daniels had been Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of the Navy and Roosevelt his Assistant Secretary. Daniels’s association with Wilson’s policies in Mexico immediately rendered him suspect in the eyes of many Catholics. His remarks upon taking over as ambassador exacerbated those concerns. In an attempt to serve as a “Good Neighbor,” Daniels lauded the Mexican government and its system of public education. He compared General Calles to Thomas Jefferson and fondly quoted one of Calles’s own speeches in which the General had said, “We must enter and take possession of the mind of childhood, the mind of youth.”

Daniels’s words shot through the Catholic media, which pointed out that the speech from which Daniels quoted from had been one of Calles’s speeches about suppressing the Catholic Church. American Catholics were horrified, concerned that the ambassador’s statement had provided an official, American seal of approval on the Mexican policies. American Catholics, from the hierarchy to individual citizens, called for the President to recall Daniels as ambassador and issue a statement publicly condemning Mexican government’s policies. No longer were Calles and the Mexican government the only target of Catholic protests. Now Catholics began criticizing Calles, Daniels, and even Roosevelt, blaming them all for the problems in Mexico.

The hierarchy directly protested to President Roosevelt about the Ambassador’s behavior and about the broader issue of American policy towards Mexico. Father Burke, the General Secretary of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), served as

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29 Redinger, Catholics and the Mexican Revolution, 17; Flynn, American Catholics, 155; Kanawada, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Diplomacy, 23; Cronon, “American Catholics and Mexican Anticlericalism,” 204.

30 Cronon, “American Catholics and Mexican Anticlericalism,” 207; Flynn, American Catholics, 154-157; American Catholic Opinions, 236-245; Kanawada, Franklin D. Roosevelt's Diplomacy, 23; Redinger, Catholics and the Mexican Revolution, 43.
the point man on these efforts. The NCWC was a voluntary association of American bishops through which they could coordinate national efforts. Burke had frequent meetings with Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles and personally met with the President on multiple occasions. In addition, several leaders in the American hierarchy, most notably Bishop Francis Kelley of Oklahoma City and Archbishop Michael Curley of Baltimore, denounced the Mexican government and Roosevelt’s attitude towards the regime.31

Roosevelt had to deal with pressure coming from the grassroots as well. The largest and most prominent lay organization in the country, the Knights of Columbus, launched a massive campaign to pressure the President to recall Daniels. The Knights had a reported 800,000 members and did not hesitate to flex their considerable political muscle.32 Martin Carmody, the Supreme Knight, met Secretary of State Cordell Hull and issued countless public statements against the government’s Mexican policy. Carmody’s actions were sometimes seen as a tainted since Carmody was himself a longtime Republican. However it seems doubtful that partisan politics were driving Carmody’s actions since he was only promulgating the Knights’ traditional position in opposition to Mexico’s revolutionary regime of Mexico. Carmody’s statements found an enthusiastically receptive audience in chapters of the Knights across the country.33

31 Redinger, Catholics and the Mexican Revolution, chapters 2-4.

32 The Knights of Columbus was formed in 1882 and grew rapidly. By the early twentieth century, the organization had 300,000 members, including branches in every state in the United States and some foreign nations. The Knights developed a woman’s auxiliary, the Daughters of Isabella, and expanded their educational and civic efforts. Jay Dolan, The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 257-8.

33 Redinger. Catholics and the Mexican Revolution, chapter 6, particularly pp. 130-6.
Although the Knights received the most attention in Washington, many other lay organizations, ranging from large, formal organizations to informal college associations, also mobilized to pressure the administration. The National Council of Catholic Women, for instance, passed a resolution at their convention denouncing “active persecution born of religious intolerance in Mexico.” The NCCW resolution also condemned the actions of Daniels who “publicly approved a system of education that is positively anti-religious and supported the words of ex-President Calles that the child is first and foremost the property of the state.”

At Fordham University, a Jesuit institution in New York, fifteen hundred students signed a petition protesting the Mexican government’s insistence that “atheism and revolutionary Socialism must be taught” and called upon “all true Americans whose position in American government…entitles them to a respectful hearing” to join in protest. Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, served as chair of a protest movement which mobilized hundreds of Catholics to picket outside the Mexican consulate and then march through the streets of New York to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. The picket signs included a variety of demands: “We demand justice in Mexico;” “Recall Ambassador Daniels;” and “Save Mexico’s Children from an Atheist Education.” Day declared that the protest was meant to draw attention to

34 “Resolution Adopted by the National Council of Catholic Women,” October 3, 1934, “Mexico and Church.” 812.404. National Archive and Records Administration. Washington, D.C. The National Council of Catholic Women was formed by the National Catholic Welfare Conference in 1919. The NCCW supported women’s suffrage and pushed for some liberal reforms, such as the child labor amendment and liberal immigration laws, but also spoke out in opposition to feminists and vehemently opposed the Equal Rights Amendment. Social workers and educators occupied many of the prominent positions in the organization and it was led from its inception through the 1930s by Agnes G. Regan, a former teacher from San Francisco. James Kenneally, “A Question of Equality,” in American Catholic Women, ed. Karen Kennelly (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 140-1.

35 “Protest against Persecution in Mexico,” 31 October 1934, 812.404, National Archives and Record Administration (NARA).
the fact “that the 20,000,000 Catholics of the United States are opposed to the tyranny of
the whole Calles government in Mexico.”

Local Catholic organizations took a more political tack. The Catholic Daughters
of America in Michigan sent a resolution to Congressman Roy Woodruff demanding that
Daniels protest the Mexican government’s anti-Catholicism, a resolution that Woodruff
passed along to Secretary Hull. St. Ann’s Holy Name Society in New Jersey sent a
letter to Congressman William Sutphin expressing annoyance “with the way this
Ambassador Daniels has misrepresented the United States in Mexico” and by his support
of “a small group of God-haters ruling a country intensely religious.” St. Anthony’s
Holy Name Society in Oakland sent a letter to Congressman Albert Carter condemning
the religious persecution in Mexico, the Mexican “program of education that is
abhorrent,” and Ambassador Daniels’s statement of “approval to policies of the Mexican
government.” The Third Order of St. Francis at St. Bonaface Church in San Francisco
sent a resolution to both Congressman Richard Welch and Congresswoman Florence
Kahn expressing their “sympathy of the treatment and bitter persecution of our fellow
Catholics in Mexico” and calling upon Welch to use his “good offices to secure for the
suffering Mexican that right to religious liberty of which we are so proud here in the
United States.” Both Welch and Kahn forwarded their letters to Secretary Hull. Ethnic

37 Woodruff to Hull, 1 December 1934, 812.404, NARA.
38 St. Ann’s Holy Name Society to William Sutphin, 31 January 1935, 812.404, NARA.
39 St. Anthony’s Holy Name Society to Albert E. Carter, 17 January 1935, 812.404, NARA.
40 Third Order of St. Francis to Richard J. Welch, 13 April 1935, 812.404, NARA.
organizations, such as the Ancient Order of the Hibernians in Springfield, Massachusetts, produced resolutions condemning the Mexican government and demanding that Ambassador Daniels “conduct himself in a manner which will conform to the articles of the Constitution.”

Individual Catholics also put pressure on the administration through their political representatives. Representative Thomas O’Malley from Milwaukee wrote to Secretary Hull stating that he had petitions from “hundreds of constituents” demanding a response to Daniels’s “failings” and calling for the administration to take a hard line with Mexico. Most petitions followed the pattern used by Michael Moran of Lynn, Massachusetts, who wrote to Congressman William Connery condemning Calles for turning Mexico into a “country like Russia” and urging Connery “to have our President intervene.” Maurice Donaghue wrote to Rep. Allen Treadway of Massachusetts urging him to help recall Ambassador Daniels and “do all in your power to end the atheistic policies, which smack so much of Soviet Russia, in force below our southern borders.”

Countless other Catholics sent along less personal, yet more extensive, petitions which they pulled out of Catholic periodicals. The Lamp, a Catholic magazine, provided its readers with a ready-made petition which protested the religious persecution occurring in Mexico and demanded the recall of Ambassador Daniels. Readers sent such petitions,

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41 “Resolution Adopted by the Ancient Order of Hibernians of Hampden County at County Board Meeting Held March 31, 1935, In Springfield, Massachusetts,” 812.404, NARA.

42 Thomas O’Malley to Cordell Hull, 20 April 1935, 812.404, NARA.

43 Michel Leo Moran to Hon. William Connery, 2 January 1935, 812.404, NARA.

44 Maurice Donoghue to Allen Treadway, 10 December 1934, 812.404, NARA.
with signatures from their neighbors and friends, to Congressmen such as Albert Engel of Michigan, who then forwarded the petitions to the State Department.\footnote{Albert Engel to Cordell Hull, 25 January 1935, 812.404, NARA.}

The department developed a form letter responding to the outpouring of complaints, while Secretary Hull tried to write personally to Congressmen sending along complaints, pleading that the United States should not interfere in the internal affairs of other nations. Department officials kept a running tally of protests; by late March Foggy Bottom had received more than six thousand petitions, totaling roughly twenty thousand signatures, demanding that Daniels be recalled.\footnote{Edward L. Reed to Mr. Welles, 27 March 1935, 812.404, NARA.} That figure did not even include the petitions which called for action in Mexico but did not specifically demand that the Ambassador be recalled. The figure continued to rise throughout the spring, eventually reaching more than 10,000 petitions.\footnote{Kanawada, \textit{Franklin D. Roosevelt's Diplomacy}, 23; Cronon, “American Catholics and Mexican Anticlericalism,” 211.}

State legislatures, feeling the pressure from their irate constituents, also passed resolutions which condemned the Mexican government and the country’s lack of freedom of religion. The resolution from the Senate of New York, the most populous state in the union, received significant attention from government officials in both America and Mexico. The State Senate urged the Roosevelt administration to “take appropriate action in condemning the tactics of such officials of the Mexican government.”\footnote{New York Senate Resolution No.22, 15 January 1935, 812.404, NARA.} The Mexican Ambassador admitted to Secretary of State Hull that the Mexican government had taken
note of the protest resolutions that had been passed by the Illinois and New York state
governments and that they were “giving his Government concern.”

Congress also got involved when Senator William Borah (R-ID) introduced a
resolution calling for an investigation of the Mexican government’s persecution of
Christian churches. Many Americans found it odd that Borah would sponsor the
resolution since he had generally been considered a leading isolationist. The New York
Times noted that Borah had refused to support the World Court because it would amount
to interference in the affairs of foreign nations but had suddenly become “a screaming
eagle of interventionism in the domestic affairs” of Mexico. But Borah’s position, and
indeed that of many of those protesting, was perfectly consistent with the trends that
existed among anticommunist anti-internationalists. They were not isolationists. In fact,
they mocked Hull’s ideas of national sovereignty and non-intervention.

President Roosevelt stood his ground for months, refusing to cave in to demands
to recall Daniels, declining opportunities to make any public statements which might
embarrass the Mexican government, and privately throwing his weight against the Borah
resolution. But the pressure proved too great. On March 5, 1935 Secretary Hull bluntly
explained to the Mexican ambassador the pressure the administration was under. Hull


51 The Mexican government expressed bitter opposition to the Borah resolution. Ambassador Daniels sent
back frequent reports from Mexico City about editorials and government statements condemning the
resolution and the arrogance of American politicians who wished to dictate policy to the Mexican
government. Catholic newspapers and the Catholic hierarchy in Mexico also spoke out against the
resolution and warned that it would simply inflame the situation. The American Catholic hierarchy, fearful
of provoking the Mexican revolutionary forces, also came out against the Borah resolution. At the same
time, though, Catholic politicians continued to push for action. Flynn, American Catholics, 158-9.
said that the administration was the “the target of terrific denunciations on the part of Catholics” in America and that he hoped the Mexican government “would in every way consistent with the normal and natural course of its domestic programs and policies give thought and attention to the question of avoiding or minimizing any utterances or actions” which might inflame Catholic activists. Mexican Ambassador Francisco Castillo Najera replied that he was confident a solution to the problems could be found within a couple of months.\textsuperscript{52} Shortly thereafter he revealed a plan to alleviate the situation. He would personally meet with Archbishop Diaz and urge him to petition the Mexican Supreme Court for redress from the oppression in some Mexican states. The Mexican government would then pressure the Court for a ruling favorable to the Church.\textsuperscript{53} The revolutionaries could save face while allowing Mexican Catholics the freedom that they sought. American Catholics, however, continued to pressure the President and refused to accept his vague assurances.

In response, the President called the Mexican Ambassador to the oval office for a meeting. Roosevelt insisted that the Mexican government, not just the Supreme Court, alleviate the oppression Mexican Catholics were experiencing. Roosevelt further insisted that Mexico accept a papal delegate and restore relations with the Vatican.\textsuperscript{54} Ambassador Najera traveled to Mexico and met with his superior, Foreign Minister and former president Portas Gil. Najera told Gil of the pressure coming from the White House, and Gil passed the information on to the Mexican president. Together, Gil and Cardenas

\textsuperscript{52} Memo of conversation between Hull and Najera, 5 March 1935, roll 31, Hull Papers, LOC.

\textsuperscript{53} Kanawada, \textit{Franklin D. Roosevelt's Diplomacy}, 30

\textsuperscript{54} Kanawada, \textit{Franklin D. Roosevelt's Diplomacy}, 32.
almost immediately reorganized the entire cabinet. Supporters of Calles and the ultra-revolutionary factions were removed from power and moderates who were friendly towards the Mexican church were installed in their place. Historian Leo Kanawada has argued that this reorganization of the Mexican government was a direct result of Roosevelt’s pressure on Najera.\footnote{Kanawada relies upon somewhat circumstantial evidence, but he makes a compelling case that American pressure facilitated the shake-up that occurred in the Mexican government. Kanawada, \textit{Franklin D. Roosevelt's Diplomacy}, 33-5. Kanawada’s argument counters that of other scholars, who had traditionally argued that Roosevelt did little in regards to Mexico. See Flynn, \textit{American Catholics}, 194.}

On June 20\textsuperscript{th}, the Mexican Charge D’Affaires, Pablo Campos Ortis, informed Secretary Hull that the government in Mexico was shifting to the right and that the “religious controversy would be almost entirely quiescent in the future.” Hull expressed “extreme gratification at this” because of the “very violent and widespread feeling on the part of our twenty million Catholic friends in this country against his Government on account of the church controversy in Mexico.”\footnote{Memo of conversation between Hull and Ortis, 20 June 1935, roll 31, Hull papers, LOC.} According to Kanawada, Roosevelt was also relieved because he feared losing the Catholic vote in the 1936 election and had wanted “to render the Mexican religious controversy a dead issue well before the election of 1936.”\footnote{Kanawada, \textit{Franklin D. Roosevelt's Diplomacy}, 36.}

Even though the Mexican government made a number of immediate changes, the issue did not entirely fade as Roosevelt had hoped. Although restrictions on churches were relaxed, many states still placed limits on the number of priests who could work in their regions. President Cardenas also authorized a new law nationalizing church property, although he did not enforce it. And the Mexican government still refused to
have an Apostolic delegate who was non-Mexican. All of these issues continued to be raised by American Catholics, but the primary demand of American Catholic activists continued to be that President Roosevelt issue a clear statement about religious freedom for Catholics in Mexico. Far from advocating an isolationist posture, many American Catholics seemed to advocate a policy by which the United States would impose American rights and values, such as freedom of religion and freedom of the press, on Mexico.

Martin Carmody led the campaign. In July 1935, Roosevelt hosted a contentious meeting with leaders of the Knights. When the President tried to assure them that conditions in Mexico were improving, Carmody said that he had heard otherwise. As Roosevelt talked about the Good Neighbor Policy and his policy of non-intervention, Carmody listed a century’s worth of examples of the United States intervening in foreign affairs in order to protect “oppressed peoples.” Roosevelt responded that such interventions had a bad track record of success, but Carmody pointed to Ireland as a success story. Roosevelt seemed cool to Carmody, but agreed to make a statement of some kind in an upcoming speech. Skeptical that the president would follow through, Carmody called upon Knights throughout the country to petition the President to make such a statement. In October, Roosevelt delivered an address in San Diego in which he declared his strong support for the principle of freedom of religion. Even that address was not enough for the Knights, who continued to criticize Roosevelt for not specifically mentioning Mexico.58

58 Kanawada, Franklin D. Roosevelt's Diplomacy, 41; Redinger, Catholics and the Mexican Revolution, chapter 6; Quigley, American Catholic Opinions, chapter IX.
Throughout the summer and the fall, Roosevelt tried to placate irate American Catholics while avoiding any overtly pro-Catholic statement which might anger Mexican officials and American Protestants. Notre Dame University’s invitation for the President to give the commencement address helped, as did the glowing testimonial that Cardinal George Mundelein of Chicago gave the President while introducing him at that event. Mundelein, the highly esteemed Cardinal of the Chicago Archdiocese, became a friend and ally of Roosevelt, defending him on a wide range of social, political, and diplomatic issues and publicly praising the President’s “indomitable persevering courage.”59

Mundelein’s support combined with the visible relaxation of tensions in Mexico to ease the crisis. The Mexican situation, however, continued to serve as a reference point for American Catholics for years to come. Again and again, American Catholics would compare what they perceived as the Mexican government’s reign of terror to Nazi and Soviet atrocities as examples of what happens when the state declares war on religion. A slew of such comparisons popped up after Kristallnacht. Speaking at an anti-German protest in November 1938, Rev. Edward J. Hickey, chancellor or the Detroit archdiocese, declared, “I feel that this thing may be traced back to the spread of Soviet Communism in Russia, when members of the Greek Orthodox Church were persecuted. It spread from Russia into the American continent, into Mexico. Then it spread across the ocean into Spain…and now it is prevalent in Germany. A totalitarian State means the end of all rights, all liberties.”60


Neutrality

While American Catholics were focused on developments in Mexico, other Americans were riveted by the “Merchants of Death” hearings in the U.S. Senate. In the years after World War I, many Americans came to believe that the nation had been duped into war. Gerald Nye led Senate hearings during the 1930s which seemingly provided evidence to support that belief. The Nye Committee suggested that American arms manufacturers and bankers had drawn the United States into the war in Europe to protect their investment and assure repayment of the debts that Allied governments had amassed during The Great War. The “Merchants of Death” hypothesis gained wide acceptance in isolationist circles and was repeatedly cited by non-interventionists in the years prior to Pearl Harbor. In the aftermath of the Nye Committee, some members of Congress talked about introducing a bill which would mandate American neutrality in future conflicts. Nye was shocked to find that President Roosevelt was receptive to such a bill and thereafter took a leading role in advocating neutrality legislation. Problems arose, however, over certain clauses of the proposed act.

Key members of Congress wanted any neutrality act to be nondiscriminatory, limiting American business with all nations at war. The President, hesitant to relinquish diplomatic power, wanted to be able to designate aggressors. For proponents of neutrality, especially those who believed that biased trade policies had led the nation into World War I, such wiggle-room undermined the very purpose of the legislation. Ultimately, Roosevelt agreed to the Neutrality Act of 1935, with its nondiscriminatory

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clauses, believing the discretionary question could be addressed when the bill came up for renewal.

At the time, Benito Mussolini was embarking on his crusade to recreate a Roman empire. While Mussolini’s attempts at expansion are now seen as part of the Fascist aggression of the 1930s, at the time Mussolini had significant popular support in America. Historians have described support for Mussolini among all sorts of Americans, ranging from old-fashioned progressives to Catholic conservatives.\textsuperscript{62} Large numbers of Italian Americans took undeniable pride in the way Mussolini had turned Italy into a growing international power. Historian Charles Trout has documented a spike in Italian-American civic organizations such as the Sons of Italy and newer, more pro-fascist organizations. Trout argues that through these organizations “Boston's Italian-Americans converted into pro-Mussolini chauvinism the many frustrations which they had been experiencing.”\textsuperscript{63} Many non-Italian ethnics, meanwhile, showed a soft spot for anyone who stood up to the British and shook up the balance of power in Europe. Though Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia caused many of his American supporters to turn away, many American ethnics remained strong supporters. Thousands of Italian-Americans participated in rallies to raise money for the Italian war effort. Italian-American women even donated their wedding rings and received steel rings instead from the Italian consulate.\textsuperscript{64} When the Italian invasion succeeded, an estimated “50,000


\textsuperscript{63} Charles Trout, \textit{Boston, the Great Depression, and the New Deal} (NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), 258.

\textsuperscript{64} Kanawada, \textit{Franklin D. Roosevelt's Diplomacy}, 78. See also Diggins, \textit{Mussolini and Fascism}. 48
paraded through the streets of East Boston chanting 'Il Duce, Il Duce, Il Duce," and a dummy of Haile Selassie was carried at the head of the procession."65

Roosevelt was appalled by Mussolini’s actions, but hesitated to take any strong actions to stop him. Like British and French leaders, he was unwilling to take any measures which might lead to a larger war in 1935. Roosevelt was also well aware of the potential political consequences of an aggressive policy and sought to avoid taking any action that might alienate Catholic voters in the 1936 election.66 Still, he believed that Mussolini’s actions warranted some sort of punishment. While the Neutrality Act prohibited the sale of weapons and other instruments of war, Mussolini did not need Americans arms and therefore the Neutrality Act had little effect on the Italian war effort. But the Italian economy, including the war industries, did rely upon imports of raw materials, particularly American oil. Roosevelt took the unusual step, therefore, of publicly suggesting a “moral embargo.” Roosevelt called on American firms to cut off all trade with the belligerents and for Americans to stop traveling on ships registered with nations at war. If American companies ceased trading with Italy, the embargo would have deprived Italy of one of its primary sources of oil.67 Roosevelt could plausibly claim that such an action was in keeping with the spirit of neutrality, even if it was intended as a punishment.

Italian-American leaders and ethnic newspapers vigorously criticized the President’s position. Prominent Catholic politicians, or those with large Catholic

65 Trout, *Boston, the Great Depression*, 258.


67 Kanawada, *Franklin D. Roosevelt's Diplomacy*, 76.
constituencies such as Congressman John Higgins of Boston, strongly opposed the
President’s actions. Even Democrats who claimed to be sympathetic to the Ethiopians,
such as Congressman John McCormack (D-MA), broke with the President and called for
unrestrained trade with Italy. To Italian Americans, and many Catholics in general,
Roosevelt’s position seemed unreasonably biased. American companies, meanwhile,
ignored the “moral embargo” and kept trading with Italy.

After the moral embargo failed, Roosevelt looked for ways to strengthen his hand
for the future. In early 1936, when the Neutrality Act was up for renewal, Roosevelt
sought to alter the language, so as to give him greater leeway in formulating foreign
policy. While accepting the mandatory embargo on weapons to belligerent nations,
Roosevelt sought to amend the law so that the president would have the power to
embargo raw materials, such as oil and iron, when he saw fit. In response to the
suggested revisions, Italian-Americans and their allies launched a massive pressure
campaign to thwart Roosevelt. By all accounts, they were extraordinarily successful.
Historian Leo Kanawada has called the campaign the “best example of organized
political pressure by an ethnic minority during the entire” Roosevelt administration.70
State Department official Joseph Green reportedly said that congressmen from heavily
Catholic districts “trembled openly in their boots” in the face of the protests.71 In the face
of Catholic resistance, efforts to strengthen neutrality laws failed.

Department, 1976, 202.
70 Kanawada, Franklin D. Roosevelt's Diplomacy, 88.
71 Kanawada, Franklin D. Roosevelt's Diplomacy. 88.
But while Catholic politicians spent months calling for loose trade laws when it came to Italy, they took a different position during the Spanish Civil War. In 1931, after three decades of political chaos, the King of Spain abdicated and left Spain in exile. For five years liberals, radicals, conservatives and Catholics struggled to gain control of the nation. According to one count, there were twelve political crises between June 1933 and December 1935 alone. During this period, radicals engaged in many acts of overt violence towards the Catholic Church, which they believed was representative of an oppressive ancien régime. Churches and convents were burned and priests and nuns attacked. Stories of such events were not nearly as widely publicized in the United States as were similar events in Mexico. Only when the Civil War began were stories of these Spanish church burnings published in American newspapers.

Spain descended into civil war in the summer of 1936 when elements of the army, led by Generals Emilio Mola and Francisco Franco, mobilized to overthrow the newly-formed Azaña government. Disappointed at the lackluster support they received from the populace in key parts of Spain, the generals desperately turned to Germany and Italy for aid in transporting Spanish army units from North Africa. The Azaña government, left exposed by the defection of much of the military, turned to the French for military assistance. England and France, afraid the Spanish conflict would develop into a larger European war, refused to intervene. They instead attempted to arrange a non-

74 Traina, American Diplomacy, 34; Dallek, Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 127. For more on the British perspective, see Douglas Little, Malevolent Neutrality: The United States, Great Britain, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Paul Preston, The Spanish Civil
intervention agreement according to which the major powers would agree to stop the sale of arms to both sides of the conflict. The Soviets, fearful of injuring relations with the Western powers by appearing to spread communism, supported the non-intervention agreement.  

Azaña’s government protested that the agreement was giving moral equivalency to a democratically elected government and a military coup. Even worse, the agreement denied the elected government the opportunity to arm and defend itself. Meanwhile, the fascist powers continued to increase aid to the Spanish rebels and even began to send military units to aid in the fighting.

Spurred by aid from Germany and Italy, the rebels won a string of victories against the weak Loyalist forces. Facing a seemingly imminent Fascist victory, the Soviets finally stepped up their contributions to the Loyalist forces. With large amounts of Soviet weapons, advisors, and volunteers flowing into Spain, the Loyalists became increasingly associated with the radical left, just as Franco’s forces became increasingly linked with the Fascists.

American policy towards Spain proved bitterly divisive among Democrats. Assistant Secretary Jay Moffat noted, “Few if any documents are politically as dangerous for the bitterness inspired by this Spanish strife among the Left Wingers on the one hand

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Preston, The Spanish Civil War, 149-151.

Traina, American Diplomacy, 39-40.

and the Catholic conservative elements on the other.” The situation, Moffat continued, “surpasses anything I have seen for years.”

78 Italian and German support for the Spanish rebels provoked a strong backlash among liberals who believed that fascism was going to spread to Spain. Historian Richard Pells even argued that “the Spanish Civil War came as a welcome relief from the controversies and disappointments that afflicted the Left in the late 1930s” in that “Spain provided the last occasion in the 1930s when liberals and radicals could unite in defense of their most precious ideals.”

American Catholics, meanwhile, were appalled by Soviet support for the Republican government. The Catholic media was flooded with reports of anti-clerical violence, killings of priests and nuns and churches being burned to the ground. Although most of those events had occurred before civil war broke out, the Catholic media reported them as if they were current events, largely because that is how the Catholic wire service presented them. American Catholics were therefore convinced that anti-clerical violence was epidemic, coming as it did on the heels of similar events in Mexico. Catholics were particularly offended that many Americans were supporting the Loyalist regime. Historian David O’Brien explains, “Catholics reacted defensively, charging their critics with bigotry, denouncing intellectuals and teachers who manned the numerous antifascist and communist-front organizations as ‘parlor Bolshevists’ and the ‘pink intelligentsia.’” Many felt that the liberals were in fact intolerant, that they ‘hated the Church just as bitterly, just as ignorantly and just as unfairly as any Klansman,’ a fact proved by their

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78 Moffat Diaries, 10 May 1938.

sympathy with the enemies of the Church in Russia, Mexico, and Spain.” Another leading historian on the Catholic response to the Spanish Civil War argues, “In official Catholic eyes, to be pro-Loyalist was to be anti-Catholic, so it almost seemed.”

The civil war did not create but rather exacerbated differences between Catholics and liberals. Catholics often viewed liberal support for the Loyalist regime as proof of Communist sympathy and anti-Catholic bigotry. *The Michigan Catholic*, for instance, declared it “funny as well as inconsistent – if not hypocritical” that “certain radicals and would-be liberals [were] raising a clamor in the press. They justly denounce Nazi atrocities but at the same time they praise the Russian Soviet or seek to change the American neutrality law to benefit the Spanish Leftist – Communist tyranny, which slaughtered tens of thousands of Catholics because of their faith and opposition to Communism.”

Many liberals, meanwhile, viewed Catholic support for Franco’s regime as indicative of an authoritarian temperament among Catholics. Several prominent intellectuals theorized that the culture of American Catholics was fundamentally undemocratic.

Although there were undoubtedly some American Catholics who supported the Spanish Republic, few Catholics did so publicly. Catholic liberals like John J. Ryan voiced their disapproval of the Spanish Republicans and even left-wing Catholics like

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Dorothy Day refused to endorse the Loyalist regime. Catholic politicians, meanwhile, tripped over themselves to get on the “right side” of the issue. When Father Coughlin mistakenly accused Rep. John McCormack of supporting neutrality revision, McCormack reacted quickly and vocally, complaining to everyone who would listen that Coughlin had slandered him. McCormack even wrote to Coughlin’s bishop pleading his case:

This is absolutely a false statement. It is unfair and unfair is a mild word to use….I opposed the efforts last year to amend the Neutrality law and personally contacted the chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the house to have no hearings. No hearings were held. I am opposed to lifting the embargo now. For a number of weeks I have been receiving letters from persons interested on both sides of this question and I have frankly answered all letters the same way, that I am opposed to lifting the embargo. I cannot understand why Father Coughlin should print anything of that kind. It is beyond my power of comprehension. …The National Catholic Welfare Conference has known of my position and of many other things I have been able to accomplish which cannot be made public.

McCormack believed that to be seen as supporting the Republican regime in Spain would be the kiss of death in his predominantly Catholic district. His fears were not necessarily unwarranted. When the Catholic periodical *Commonweal* shifted from a pro-Franco position its circulation dropped by a third.

Advocates of the Neutrality Acts had made no provisions for civil wars. Eager to curtail a wider war, Roosevelt discouraged arms deals with either side of the Spanish conflict. His policy found wide political support. Those concerned about the “merchants of death” supported it, as did many internationalists, who viewed it as in keeping with

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86 O’Brien, *Social Reform*, 88
England’s non-intervention policy. Pro-rebel advocates also supported the neutrality proposal, seeing it gave advantage to Franco’s forces. In January 1937, Washington extended the neutrality policy to the Spanish Civil War.  

As Franco’s forces gained strength and Germany and Japan accelerated their own campaigns of aggression, however, some Americans began to have second thoughts about the embargo. Gerald Nye himself introduced legislation in May 1938 to lift the embargo towards Republican Spain. Roosevelt made no effort to support Nye’s proposal, which the Senate Foreign Relations Committee rejected 17-1. In January 1939, when the fascist tide was swelling, Roosevelt and Congress began to reconsider their policy in hopes of staving off a Fascist victory. When Senator Key Pittman announced that the Foreign Relations Committee would be considering bills, they were flooded with protests by Americans on both sides of the issue. Assistant Secretary of State Moffat noted in his diary, “The morning was given over almost entirely to Spain. This is the first day of the ‘Lift the Embargo Week’ with enthusiasts pouring into Washington from all over the country. The Catholics and others opposed have organized a counter ‘Keep the Embargo Week’ and they are vying with each other in meetings, [putting] pressure on

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88 Historians have argued about what motivated Roosevelt to avoid taking a stand in support of Nye’s proposal, which Eleanor Roosevelt, Harold Ickes, and several prominent members of the state department supported. Historians have argued that Roosevelt was concerned about alienating Catholic voters, that he believed it was too little too late and would have no real impact on events in Spain, that he was afraid that the weapons might fall into the hands of Franco’s regime, that he was afraid of alienating Britain and France who maintained positions of neutrality vis-à-vis Spain, and that he was afraid of sparking a world war. It is exceedingly likely that Roosevelt was motivated by a combination of several, or even all, of the above factors. See Tierney, 94-101; Kanawada, *Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Diplomacy*, 64; Dallek, *Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 160-1; Flynn, *Romanism*, 42-3; Traina, *American Diplomacy*, 131-5.
Congressmen and the like.” Ultimately, the Foreign Relations Committee tabled any discussion of revision because, Pittman claimed, the political pressure had been so intense. Harold Ickes declared, “It is fear of the Catholic sentiment in this country which has prevented the lifting of the embargo which might have saved the Spanish situation months ago.” In February 1939, Catalonia fell. Britain and France recognized the Franco government. In April the United States did the same, after much lobbying by Catholic politicians such as David Walsh and John McCormack.

Although many American Catholics had previously urged intervention in Mexico and had opposed an embargo during the Italo-Ethiopian War, Catholics seemed unanimous in their support for the embargo. Their a position was not a principled stance in favor of neutrality or isolationism, but rather a move calculated to work in favor of Franco’s forces. In supporting an embargo towards Spain, Catholics, even prominent Irish-Americans, ironically, found themselves adamantly supporting a policy that had developed in England. Although some have claimed that Catholic isolationism in the years prior to World War II was the result of knee-jerk anti-British sentiment, actions

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90 Dallek, Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 180.


such as this show that the reality was far more complicated than such a hypothesis suggests. 93

**Totalitarianism and Subversion**

As the decade progressed Catholics became more and more vocal about the threat posed by totalitarianism. The Catholic Church had been skeptical of secular government and modern political philosophy since the French Revolution. When new national governments in Germany and Italy directly challenged Church authority in the 1800s, with Chancellor Otto von Bismarck openly declaring Kulturkampf (“Culture War”) against the Catholic Church in Germany, the Vatican issued a series of very public denunciations of modern states. 94 By the 1930s, many Catholic leaders were denouncing totalitarianism as culmination of this trend towards secular, centralized governments. Totalitarianism, which valued the state above all else, represented an affront to the traditional Catholic way of life, which valued family, Church, and eternity over temporal and materialistic concerns. 95

The creation of the Soviet Union had confirmed and inflamed Catholic fears of a secular, all-powerful state. Catholics were appalled when the Soviet Union closed churches, regimented childhood education, and sent women to work in factories, thereby undercutting traditional gender roles. When the Mexican government began implementing some of the same policies, Catholics became convinced that Communist

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94 O’Toole, *Faithful*, 130-1.

ideas were spreading. Suddenly, it seemed that newly powerful nation states were assaulting the Catholic conception of social order. *Commonweal*, a popular and relatively liberal Catholic periodical, warned its readers that the "gravest problem of our times" was "the swiftly growing tendency of governments to use all their enormous powers and influence to destroy religion or to deny religious considerations any place in the objective interests of any government."\(^{96}\)

Some Catholics saw Fascism as part of the same broad trend towards totalitarian government. In the early 1920s, Father John Ryan summarized his objections to Fascism: "Fascism contradicts the Catholic doctrine on the authority, functions, and purpose of the state, on the natural rights of the individual, and on the means which the state may rightfully use."\(^{97}\) As early as June 1933 *Commonweal* was warning of the threat that Nazism posed. The magazine denounced Nazism as "racial nationalism exalted to religious fervor" and warned that the regime posed a threat to Jews, Catholics, and Protestants alike.\(^{98}\) In the same month, Representative McCormack spoke in Congress about his "repugnance" for Hitler’s actions in Germany. McCormack denounced Hitler’s "ruthless" behavior towards German Jews, and asked, "To what pernicious limits may not the execrable influence of Adolph Hitler extend?"\(^{99}\) Throughout the decade, Catholics kept a sharp eye out for any action that might curtail freedom for Christian churches in Germany, affect the Catholic education of German

\(^{96}\) "President Roosevelt and Mexico,” *Commonweal*, XXIII, Issue 5, 29 November 1935, 1.

\(^{97}\) Ryan quoted in Miscamble, 526.


children, or otherwise indicate the Nazi government was going to crush traditional Christian society. In 1929 and 1933, the Catholic Church signed concordats with both Mussolini and Hitler, in effect granting recognition to the regimes in return for guarantees that the Catholic Church would not be persecuted in Italy or Germany.

While Italy and Germany were at least nominally protecting religious freedom, events in Mexico and Spain convinced Catholics that leftist regimes were embarking on a worldwide crusade against Christianity. As a result, some Catholics decided that Fascism was preferable to Communism. Cardinal William Henry O’Connell of Boston declared, “If the Italians and Germans like Fascism because it saved their civilization for them, that is their business.”

Commonweal put it bluntly, “If it now must be a choice of evils, the choosing between Communism and Fascism, between tyranny and terror of a conservative counter-revolution, the choice of a conservative reaction will be made, we think, by most western peoples.” In that choice of words, it is clear that Catholics were not blind to the dangers of Fascism, but rather viewed it as the lesser of two evils. Commonweal elaborated, “Because we hate Communism more than we do Fascism, it does not follow that we like Fascism. The issue today is between democracy and all forms of totalitarianism.” The willingness of Catholics to turn a blind eye to Fascist

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abuses led many to criticize the Church, but, for the most part, such toleration of Fascism was short-lived. 103

It soon became clear that concordats with Hitler were hollow gestures and that he was just as much of a totalitarian menace as the Soviets. By late 1935, the Vatican was criticizing the Nazi government for violating elements of the concordat, while Catholic periodicals in America were giving front page attention to Hitler’s growing war on religion. 104 By the time the Vatican issued an encyclical about the plight of religion in Nazi Germany in early 1937, prominent Catholics such as Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago were publicly protesting Hitler’s “infringement of religious liberties” while Catholic periodicals criticized Roosevelt’s inaction towards Germany. 105 Many Catholics had been willing to tolerate Fascism as long as it “let its totalitarian principles remain for the most part in the realm of inoperative theory “but by 1937 such totalitarian principles were clearly being implemented. 106 By that summer, Catholic periodicals were claiming that “Germany, Russia, Spain and Mexico are all in the tidal wave of a monstrous persecution of religion.” 107

Long before the Nazi-Soviet pact, many American Catholics had begun to lump Communism and Fascism together as totalitarian threats. Commonweal explained,

103 See McGreevey, Catholicism and Freedom, chapter 6, particularly page 173. See also Flynn, Romanism, 54.


106 Ryan in Miscamble, 534.

107 Commonweal, 2 July 1937, 259.
Both are dictatorships, both are maintained by powerful armies, able and dominant police-systems, organized and perfected espionage, extra-legal tribunals, concentration camps, the abolition of all civil and political liberties, of all parties save one which is recognized and incorporated in the State, the monopoly of the press and the wireless, of the schools and the training of youth, the militarization of the whole people.\textsuperscript{108}

*The Michigan Catholic* denounced Fascism and Communism as “forms of pagan absolutism” which were “diametrically opposed to Christian principles of freedom and personal initiative.”\textsuperscript{109} Those principles, most simply, were that “the rights of man are from God and not from the state.” Under totalitarian governments, Father James Gillis wrote in 1938, there is a “wild perversion of natural law” in that states are seen as supreme and a dictator like “Hitler is the State, the law, the creator, the life-giver, the ‘raison d’etre’ of the State.”\textsuperscript{110} “Ruthless dictators invariably strike at religion and the Church as the final bulwark of human liberty” and therefore “adherents of various faiths” should unite to oppose the threat “known as totalitarianism.”\textsuperscript{111}

The development of oppressive states abroad influenced the way Americans looked at Roosevelt’s New Deal. Roosevelt’s political opponents seemed to play upon such fears, but many were also sincerely concerned about the growth of centralized government at a time when dictators were consolidating their power in Europe. Even the liberal *Commonweal* noted in 1934,

State power is being exercised in a way previously unknown save in the World War period. It is hoped and believed by many millions - no doubt, as yet, by a great majority of the people - that these measures, this whole tendency, is

\textsuperscript{108} Luigi Sturzo, “Communism: Fascism,” *Commonweal*, 16 April 1937, 686.


\textsuperscript{111} “Religious Front Against Totalism,” *Michigan Catholic*, 17 November 1938.
intended and will operate as a just and beneficent use of governmental power in an emergency, and that it will go no further than to bring about much needed reforms in our economic, social and political institutions. But there are many others, and their numbers rapidly increase who dread, or pretend to dread, that we too are adrift on the tide of that fundamentally subversive revolution which has engulfed the hapless peoples of Russia and Germany and Mexico.\footnote{112}

A few months later \textit{Commonweal} was even more blunt in its assessment that “Sovietism, Fascism, and President Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’ will be found in the long run, despite apparent divergencies to have been fundamentally the same thing, or at least to be moving in the common direction of universal Collectivism.”\footnote{113} Even as many American Catholics were eager to see Roosevelt expand the powers of the presidency to address the Great Depression it seems, the examples of Russia, Germany, and Mexico were always in the back of their minds.

From the fears of totalitarianism arose the fear of subversion in the United States. The tendency to look for internal enemies has a long history in the United States. The development of the Communist International, however, took those fears to a whole new level and imbued them with a legitimacy that had perhaps never before been matched. The 1919-1920 Red Scare demonstrated just how seriously Americans took such fears of Communism in the United States. The interwar years were a period of intense anticommunism. American Catholics were at the forefront of this movement. In 1936, the American hierarchy launched a “nation-wide crusade against Communism.”\footnote{114} They soon found a powerful ally in the federal government.

\footnote{112}“The New Deal and Mexico,” \textit{Commonweal}, XX, Issue 26, 26 October 1934, 1.

\footnote{113} \textit{Commonweal}, 8 February 1935, 421, folder: Communism – clippings – 1930s, box 14, ACTU – Detroit, Reuther Library.

\footnote{114} Darrow, “Catholic Political Power,” 60.
As Communist and Fascist ideologies spread, Americans focused more and more on combating the influence of these subversive ideologies in the United States. In 1934 Congressman Samuel Dickstein of New York proposed a committee to investigate Nazi subversion in the United States. John McCormack was put in charge of the committee and given a dual mandate to investigate Fascist and Communist activity. The McCormack-Dickstein Committee primarily focused on evidence that foreign nations, particularly Russia, Germany, Italy, and Mexico were promoting subversive behavior and propaganda via organizations like the Friends of New Germany and the Communist Party of the United States, as well as through the actions of individual diplomats and illegal aliens. McCormack’s committee proposed several pieces of legislation, including regulations which would require foreign agents to be registered with the State Department and laws allowing the expulsion of foreigners engaged in propaganda efforts.

After McCormack’s committee issued its report in February 1935, McCormack became aware of public statements by the Mexican consul in California urging Mexican-Americans not to participate in an Our Lady of Guadalupe parade which was to serve as a protest against the Mexican government. McCormack bemoaned the fact that his committee had not known about the Mexican government’s actions while it was still impaneled. “The Mexican Government should be advised that ‘religious freedom of conscience, together with the free exercise thereof’ is a constitutional right in the United States,” McCormack insisted, “and that any Consul of Mexico in this country will not be


permitted to interfere with the same."\textsuperscript{117} The problematic consul, as well as another consul facing similar charges, was soon transferred. Rep. Clare Fenerty of Pennsylvania introduced a resolution calling for both consuls to be removed from the country altogether. Many American Catholics, meanwhile, warned that the incident provided evidence that communism was going to spread across the Rio Grande.

In 1938, Congress re-established the committee under the direction of Representative Martin Dies (D-TX). Instead of focusing on foreign agents and propaganda originating abroad, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) started looking at issues that were more domestic and political in nature. In particular, Dies began searching for a communist presence in New Deal programs such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and theater projects. From there, Dies expanded his focus to include the labor movement, particularly the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and its political allies. In doing so, Dies shifted the focus on subversion from external threats to internal ones, from foreign propaganda to American activists, and from radicalism to liberalism. While Dies drew the ire of many liberals in his own party for his attacks on New Deal agencies and labor leaders, he also found significant support among many Democrats. When Roosevelt and his allies attempted to smother HUAC by blocking its renewal, Congress was inundated with petitions and resolutions calling for Congress to continue the Committee. In Boston, the City Council passed four different commendations of the Committee. The councilmen celebrated the

\textsuperscript{117} McCormack statement, 2 April 1935, folder 10, box 149, National Catholic Welfare Council (NCWC) Mexico files, Catholic University of America Archives.
Dies Committee for providing a “true picture of the ungodly practices of Communism and Nazism.”

The council’s support for Dies reflected a growing Catholic fear of the New Deal’s reach. Even as many Americans were demanding new actions from the government, so too were many becoming weary of the growing government bureaucracy. While Americans eagerly accepted relief and jobs from a multitude of bureaucratic agencies (with acronyms like the PWA, WPA, and CCC), they simultaneously developed a skepticism of the increasingly powerful, modern bureaucracy. It seemed, historian Alan Brinkley has noted, that “the rapid growth of the national bureaucracy imperiled the very basis of the Constitutional system.” Coughlin’s supporters believed that “power…should not reside in distant, obscure places,” Brinkley says. They worried that increased bureaucracy would mean “the individual” would “have to live in a world in which he could not govern or even know the forces determining his destiny.” Critics of the New Deal were not always consistent. Coughlin seemed hypocritical for arguing for a strong government intervention in the economy even as he was denouncing New Deal policies as “a radical leaning towards socialism or sovietism.” But both impulses were pulling at Americans during the Depression; they wanted an active government to help provide relief, but they also feared the growth of a potentially repressive government. They therefore lashed out at the bureaucracy that developed to confront the Depression.

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118 “Commendation of Boston Congressmen for Action on Dies Committee,” Record of Boston City Council 1938, 6 February 1939, 60. See also: 9 January 1939; 18 September 1939; 4 December 1939.

119 Brinkley, Voices of Protest, 155.

120 Brinkley, Voices of Protest, 144.
Meanwhile, elected officials also began to criticize the growing bureaucracy. Some politicians feared losing power to New Deal administrators. Others distrusted Roosevelt but were unable to criticize him personally because of his immense popularity. Instead they criticized the bureaucratic tendencies of the New Deal. Senator David Walsh expressed such sentiments in a humorous way when he presented a poem entitled “If Roosevelt Ruled Ireland” which included the lines, “The Harp...would soon be played by someone on the WPA" and Wallace would be telling "all the farmers how the pratties ought to grow.”\footnote{“Walsh in Appeal to Irish Race,” \textit{Boston Post}, 15 March 1936, 2.}  Walsh seemed to capture the mood of his constituents, many of whom had developed a strong distrust of the New Deal bureaucracy and the bureaucrats that administered it, even while many still retained loyalties towards Roosevelt himself.

Fears of government bureaucrats were not entirely abstract. At the very beginning of his administration Roosevelt reached out to progressive Republicans like Harold Ickes and Henry Wallace, placing them in high profile positions within the administration. Although progressive reformers and the message of the Social Gospel shared many themes with Catholic teachings, Catholics had often viewed progressive Protestants as an intrusive presence in urban life, disrupting and interfering in traditional communities and families. So some Catholics viewed reformers and former social workers such as Frances Perkins and Harry Hopkins with great suspicion. The \textit{Boston Post}, for instance, warned against the possibility of turning the “government over to the radical social workers.”\footnote{“Williams and Hagood,” \textit{Boston Post}, 7 March 1936, 6.} Time and again, when the administration attempted to assert more regulatory control over issues such as child labor it met great resistance from
ethnics and religious minorities who feared the possible growth of repressive government.

Many Americans also distrusted Roosevelt’s so-called “Brain Trust”. Newspaper men in particular were brutal in their mockery of the Ivy League intellectuals who were congregating around Roosevelt. For many urban ethnics who were schooled in nitty-gritty, machine-style politics, the Brain Trusters undoubtedly looked like naïve idealists at best and, more likely, uppity Anglo-elitists, while some Catholics, such as Father Coughlin, suspected that the members of the Brain Trust were Communists.123 Many of the attacks reeked of anti-intellectualism and anti-Semitism. By the 1930s, populist critiques of oppressive “elites” had grown to include academics, especially those in the Ivy Leagues. The fact that Harvard and other elite schools had been trying to erect quotas and barriers so as to exclude Jews and other ethnics only heightened the distrust. At the same time, polls showed that overt anti-Semitism was still common in the United States during; 1930s and complaints about Felix Frankfurter and other prominent intellectuals often included thinly veiled anti-Semitic attacks.124

The distrust of progressives, social workers, and intellectuals blended with the anticommunism of the Popular Front era. Historians such as Michael Denning have written extensively about the efficacy of the Popular Front in the United States during the 1930s. Denning argues that the “the heart of this cultural front” was in the “second


generation of the second wave of immigration: ethnic Italians, Jews, Poles, Mexicans, Serbians, Croatians, Slovaks, Japanese, Chinese, and Filipinos, along with African Americans who migrated north."\textsuperscript{125} Denning argues that the Popular Front, or Cultural Front as he calls it, "found its audience among the ethnic working classes of the modern metropolis, but recruited its artists and intellectuals from those urban working classes."\textsuperscript{126} While this is undoubtedly true, there were also many who were appalled by the Popular Front. These people were frightened by the blatant ties to the American Communist Party, appalled by Popular Front support for the Loyalists in Spain, and shocked by the avant-garde nature of Popular Front culture. For those Americans, New Deal ties to, and support for, the Popular Front became a major concern, culminating in the attacks upon and dismantling of the New Deal Federal Arts Project.\textsuperscript{127}

The presence of former Klansmen in the Roosevelt administration was also a major cause for concern for Catholics. The most prominent and controversial figure was Hugo Black. A member of the Alabama KKK in the 1920s, Black had defended and Alabama minister who had murdered a Catholic priest. Black was one of Roosevelt’s most loyal supporters in the Senate before becoming a Supreme Court Justice in 1937. In early 1936, Black drew the ire of the \textit{Boston Post} when he subpoenaed the phone records of Roosevelt’s political enemies during a Senate utilities investigation. The \textit{Post} warned that Black’s actions were a “bold assumption that there is no limitation to the power of

\textsuperscript{125} Michael Denning, \textit{The Cultural Front} (New York: Verso, 1996), xv.

\textsuperscript{126} Denning, xix

the Senate to invade the private affairs of any citizen.”128 The Post continued to lash out at "Klux Methods By Black" and tied the Klan threat to that of a “bureaucratic dictatorship." Since Roosevelt was still well trusted in 1936, the Post made sure to draw a distinction between Black and Roosevelt: "Of course, President Roosevelt isn't the type of man who turns dictator. The real dictators are men of the type of Senator Black...the Ku Klux Klan type."129 A little over a year later, Roosevelt enraged many Catholics by nominating Black for the Supreme Court.

Black’s nomination came on the heels of two other developments which undermined Roosevelt’s reputation in many circles. FDR’s attempts to reorganize the Supreme Court and the executive branch in 1937 had fueled fears of dictatorship. For traditional conservative Republicans, Roosevelt’s attempt to reorganize the judiciary was a predictably controversial action. Roosevelt underestimated the backlash from Democrats, however. Southern Democrats who feared that such changes would threaten white supremacy reacted with fierce opposition. So too did minority groups throughout the nation. In San Francisco, an appeal to oppose the proposals circulated among Catholics. “If Roosevelt packs the Supreme Court with extremists as many suspect he would like to do,” the author noted, “that body could do to the Catholic Church what the Communists have done to it in Russia, in Mexico, in Spain, in Ontario, Canada and in the French Revolution.”130 Republicans played upon the fears of religious minorities in particular. An undistinguished Senator prior to the court packing crisis, Senator Arthur

128 “Close to a Dictatorship”, Boston Post, 13 March 1936, 16.
129 “Yes, We Could Get Dictator,” Boston Post, 29 March 1936, 1.
130 “Attention Catholic Voters,” folder: Political Action 1935-36, San Francisco Archdiocese Archives
Vandenberg of Michigan assumed a key role in the Republican resistance to the proposal. Vandenberg, and other GOP leaders, silenced Republicans in the days after Roosevelt first put forth his sweeping proposals.\textsuperscript{131} After letting Democrats do the dirty work of publicly denouncing the President and the plan, he warned minority groups such as the Seventh Day Adventists that the Court was their last form of protection from future persecution.\textsuperscript{132} Many Catholics who had witnessed the Klan a decade earlier did not need the Senator to explain the danger to them. They were quick to point out that it had been the Supreme Court that had struck down the Oregon state law which had sought to mandate public education and prohibit parochial schools.\textsuperscript{133} Senator Walsh summed up the sentiment of many of his Irish Catholic constituents when he declared, “The Supreme Court is the last bulwark, the standing army of the free man.”\textsuperscript{134}

Roosevelt’s attempts to reorganize the executive branch of the government provoked a remarkable backlash as well. Now generally regarded as a relatively tame bill which sought merely to streamline bureaucratic overlaps and provide some more secretaries to the President, the Reorganization Bill met fierce resistance from Americans who believed that it was a step towards the centralization of power and the development of a dictatorship. Conservative Democrats and Republicans spoke out against the bill, as did the leader of the American Federation of Labor and numerous other prominent

\textsuperscript{131} James T. Patterson, \textit{Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal} (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, Published for the Organization of American Historians, 1967), 102-110.

\textsuperscript{132} “Address – Michigan Conference Seventh Day Adventists”, 28 August 1938, roll 6, Vandenberg Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

\textsuperscript{133} “Religious Fears and Court Issue,” \textit{Michigan Catholic}, 1 April 1937.

\textsuperscript{134} “Walsh in Appeal to Irish Race,” \textit{Boston Post}, 15 March 1936, 2.
Americans. Senator Walsh warned, "It is not too much to say that what we are now here considering today is the question of plunging a dagger into the very heart of democracy!" Father Coughlin called for his supporters to flood their Senators with telegrams opposing the bill and in doing so “stop the Reorganization Bill as Washington stopped George III.” An estimated 300,000 telegrams poured into Congress from Americans opposed to the bill. Republicans and conservative Democrats united in opposition to the bill, including many leading Catholic politicians. David O’Brien argues that for American Catholics, the Reorganization Act “seemed a further attempt to undermine constitutional government and create an arbitrary, all-powerful federal bureaucracy capable of crushing religious liberty and educational freedom.” In the face of such pressure, politicians across the country, even committed liberals like Senator Robert Wagner of New York and Prentiss Brown of Michigan, shifted their position and opposed the Reorganization Act. Roosevelt himself thought the critiques serious enough to respond from his vacation in Warm Springs with a press release which stated that he had “no inclination to be a dictator” and no desire to substitute “any form of dictatorship for a democracy like the United States.” Such an unprecedented denial

136 Quoted in Patterson, Congressional Conservatism, 222.
137 Patterson, Congressional Conservatism, 222.
138 O’Brien, Social Reform, 74-5
139 Patterson, Congressional Conservatism, 220, 225.
140 Patterson, Congressional Conservatism, 225.
was indicative of just how widespread the accusations of dictatorial ambitions had become. Despite Roosevelt’s best efforts, the bill went down to defeat.\textsuperscript{141}

**Conclusion**

Although overwhelming numbers of Catholics were voting for Roosevelt and other Democratic candidates in the 1930s, there were glaring tensions between the Roosevelt administration and his Catholic constituents. They valued his leadership in a time of economic crisis. But many Catholics seemed skeptical of New Deal policies and New Dealers themselves. Catholics who had been conditioned to fear a potentially oppressive government saw the expanding bureaucracy and growing trend towards federal regulation as disturbing trends. Their fears were exacerbated by cultural and personality conflicts with leading New Dealers who were seen as menacing figures: leftists, intellectuals, Progressive Republicans, and former Klansmen.

Catholics who held these concerns had a number of options available to them. Some defected to the Republican Party, which made elaborate efforts to reach out to them. But a long history of party loyalty and cultural identification continued to wed many Catholics firmly to the Democrats. Others were drawn to figures such as Father Coughlin who seemed to offer a real alternative to the New Deal. Coughlin preached “social justice” like Roosevelt, but he also developed a discourse which warned of dangers to American Catholics and Americans as a whole: internationalism, Communism, federal bureaucracy, and a developing leftist culture. Some of these followers of Coughlin followed him into his own political party in 1936; many more

\textsuperscript{141} Two years later, a much more modest reorganization act passed by a slim margin. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism*, 301-2.
remained firmly wedded to the Democratic Party. But even for those who remained solid Democrats, suspicions of New Deal liberalism remained near the surface. Catholic politicians, and those with large Catholic constituencies, grew increasingly combative as the decade developed; some would become marquee members of the conservative coalition which flourished after 1938.

That Americans would be viewing their national government in an international context was not all that surprising, but such a dynamic was also developing at the local level. All of the developments in Washington, as well as those overseas in Europe, served as the backdrop for state and local politics throughout the 1930s. As Catholics in Boston, Detroit, and San Francisco debated local issues, they did so with one eye on national and international events.
CHAPTER TWO: BOSTON

In 1936, Democrat Charles Hurley was elected governor of Massachusetts. Although an urban, Irish-Catholic Democrat, Hurley was not a New Dealer. During one speech, Hurley laid forth his critique of the New Deal, “Modern liberalism originated in the theories of the leaders of the French Revolution, who professed a determination to abolish for all time the dogma that authority is derived from God. This type of so-called liberalism today by which so many are deluded [is] an attempt to emancipate man from divine authority….On the continent of Europe…liberalism has been openly hostile to religion” and has replaced “genuine Catholic liberalism, based on the traditions of an old faith” with “a false liberalism, based on a perverted conception of human rights.” Condemning “the mad nightmare of Russia and the equally mad reaction called Hitlerism” while simultaneously condemning the “the killings of innocents in Spain and Mexico,” Hurley declared that such “upheavals” were beginning to affect the United States: “We are not outside the world; we are very much a part of it. The false liberalism of the 19th century is producing its effects upon our culture….Intelligence has come to be regarded as synonymous with lack of faith. Tens of thousands of our educated young men and women are pouring out of our colleges annually, soaked in infidelity….We are
living in a world which is apparently going mad,” said Hurley, and “It may yet be our
destiny to save the America we love.”¹

Hurley’s fears resonated with many other Catholic citizens of Boston in the
1930s. Although Catholic voters served as the core of the state’s Democratic Party, and
they had voted overwhelmingly for Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, they remained deeply
skeptical of New Deal liberalism and often viewed liberalism through the lens of
developments in Mexico, Russia, Spain, and Germany. In a larger sense, Hurley’s
criticism, with its references to developments since the French Revolution, seemed to be
leveled at modernity and the modern world as much as at liberalism or totalitarianism.
Hurley’s skepticism of modern ways of thinking, and his belief in the need to return to
the pre-Enlightenment ideas of authority derived from God, derived from long-standing
Catholic opposition to modernist culture. One area in which this was particularly evident
was in the Church’s fierce defense of families and traditional gender roles. Even Pope
Leo XIII’s Rerum Novarum, the great social encyclical which defended the rights of
workers, had been conservative in its attitudes towards women and families. Rerum
Novarum asserted that “a woman is by nature fitted for home-work, and it is that which is
best adapted at once to preserve her modesty and to promote the good bringing up of
children and the well-being of the family.”² Indeed part of the rationale behind the
Church’s promotion of the rights of workingmen was that better wages would allow men
to continue to serve as breadwinners. Women would therefore be allowed to stay in the

¹ “‘Liberals’ Denounced By Hurley: Says Label False Sees World as Going Mad”, Boston Post, 4 April
1938.

² Rerum Novarum, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-
xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html (last accessed 21 October 2009).
home, where they could raise children.³ By the 1930s, Catholics leaders and Catholic intellectuals expressed great concern about the growing “family crisis.”⁴

Boston’s Catholic culture revolved, in many ways, around the family. In her study of Catholic culture in early-twentieth-century Boston, historian Paula Kane depicts Cardinal O’Connell, and indeed the entire archdiocesan organization, as dedicated to promoting traditional attitudes towards home and families. O’Connell denounced feminism, encouraged patriarchy, and continually told his flock to embrace “The Family and The Home.”⁵ Kane argues, “Home continued to represent for Catholics an institution of God, a sacred place, a nursery for heaven, and a building block of American patriotism. The social function of the Christian home, presided over by women, was to teach children obedience to authority and to prepare them to defend their Catholic faith in the world.”⁶ During the 1930s, Catholics, nationally and in Boston, came to see the family as under siege, fears that, at times, reached levels of paranoia. Historian Jeffrey Burns notes that a “highly charged rhetoric and sense of urgency were matched only by the vagueness with which the forces destructive of family life were described.

Individualism, socialism, feminism, materialism, naturalism, and other ‘false

³ Rerum Novarum declared, “It is a most sacred law of nature that a father should provide food and all necessaries for those whom he has begotten.” Rerum Novarum also denounced the idea of government involvement in family life: “The contention, then, that the civil government should at its option intrude into and exercise intimate control over the family and the household is a great and pernicious error.”


⁶ Kane, Separatism, 157.
philosophies’ had been allowed to run amuck in the ‘neopagan’ milieu of the modern world, causing inestimable damage to family life.”\(^7\)

Catholic fears were fueled by events in Mexico, Russia and Germany, where governments were restricting parochial education, mandating that children participate in various government sponsored activities such as the Nazi Youth, and, at least in Mexico and Russia, radically altering the roles of women. Catholics also had sharp memories of efforts to ban parochial schools in the 1920s, and they saw in Washington D.C. the growth of an increasingly-powerful, increasingly-secular federal government. In such a climate, Boston’s Catholics became worried about issues related to family life, child rearing, and childhood education. As a result, Boston’s Catholic responded in a reactionary way, moving to combat perceived subversion in the schools.

The battle lines in the ensuing conflicts were not new, even if global events provided a new source of conflict. For nearly a century the educational system had been a battleground between Boston’s Catholics and Protestants. During the 1930s, old conflicts were renewed as Catholic politicians sought revenge for decades of persecution at the hands of Yankee elites.

**A History of Conflict**

Boston’s Catholics were stalwart Democrats, their political identity forged in the crucible of the immigrant experience. Boston’s politics had long been driven by ethnic rivalries. For the first two hundred years of the state’s history, Anglo-Saxon settlers, known as Yankees, ruled supreme. By the 19th century, class divisions had solidified into

\(^7\) Burns, *Family Crisis*, 3.
clear patterns, with Yankee elites developing into something of a formal caste, dubbed “Brahmins” by Supreme Court Justice and Boston native Oliver Wendell Holmes. But class divisions among the Anglo-Americans residents of the city took a back seat to ethnic divisions between Yankees and immigrants. There had been a scattering of Irish-Americans in Massachusetts since the American Revolution, but it was only in the 1820s that large numbers of Irish immigrants began to cluster in Boston. The potato famine twenty years later accelerated Irish immigration, with 37,000 immigrants arriving in 1847 alone, almost ten times the yearly average. With Irish immigration came a nativist backlash. The Know-Nothing Party, which arose in response to the growing Catholic presence in America, was extraordinarily powerful in Boston in the 1840s and 1850s. When that party collapsed, the Republican Party took its place. While Yankees thronged to this new party, Irish immigrants in Boston wedded themselves to the Democratic Party. This ethnic-based partisan alignment lasted well over a century. Historian Gerald Gamm’s statistical study of Boston politics found that even as late as 1940, about 95% of Boston Irish voters were Democrats.

While Irish immigrants thus participated in the political system in Boston and other cities of the state such as Lowell, Worcester, and Springfield, Yankees dominated most rural areas. Their numerical superiority allowed the GOP to dominate the state government until the twentieth century. Yankee leaders shifted power from Boston’s city officials to the state legislature. They also passed a series of laws intended to thwart

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ethnic politicians who might seek to establish a political machine, such as a law which said that no one could serve consecutive terms as mayor. Then the balance between the rural Yankees and the urban Irish was disrupted by the wave of new immigrants who arrived in America during the late 19th century. Hundreds of thousands of Italian, Polish, and Jewish immigrants arrived in the Bay State during those decades, as did tens of thousands of immigrants from other areas such as Lithuania and Portugal.\textsuperscript{10} In response, a number of prominent Brahmins formed the Immigration Restriction League (IRL) in the 1890s. The IRL continually pressured Congress to restrict immigration, with Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge frequently serving as its point man. A literacy requirement for immigrants became the IRL’s favorite proposal. Three times Congress passed the proposal, and three times the president vetoed it. By 1920 first and second generation Americans made up 71.5 percent of Boston’s population, a rate second only to New York among American cities.\textsuperscript{11}

As their numbers grew Boston’s Catholics grew into a formidable political force. Irish Catholic politicians John Fitzgerald, Martin Lomasney and James Michael Curley dominated the city’s political scene for decades. The political power of Cardinal William O’Connell was reputed to be so great that many Catholic politicians would not take a stand on a given topic until finding out what the Cardinal had to say about the issue.\textsuperscript{12} Socially and culturally, the city’s Catholic leaders tended to be conservative. City leaders


\textsuperscript{11} Stack, \textit{International Conflict}, 24.

\textsuperscript{12} For more on O’Connell, see: Kane, \textit{Separatism}, and James O’Toole, \textit{Militant and Triumphant}, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).
continued to enforce old Puritan “blue laws” which restricted activities on the Sabbath. Beyond that, they put in place new laws censoring public displays and print media they considered immoral. That censorship prompted Roger Baldwin, president of the American Civil Liberties Union, to decry the “extraordinary combination of the Catholic, Puritan, and Victorian spirit” that existed among Boston’s city leaders.13

Even as the city became more diverse, the city’s political and religious systems retained a firmly Irish Catholic character. While leading Republicans alienated immigrants with their anti-immigration policies, local Democrats proved no more enthusiastic about the idea of opening the doors to Italian, French-Canadian, and Jewish immigrants. Unlike other cities where political machines developed to institutionalize power, Irish politicians in Boston continued to rely upon more informal ward politics. When the situation required it, they appealed to the new ethnics, but when circumstances allowed they would completely ignore non-Irish voters and rely merely on their Irish Catholic base.14 According to historian Paula Kane, “In 1944, 85 percent of Boston’s parishes and about 80 percent of Boston’s urban population…were Irish.”15 It is not surprising, therefore, that of the 110 city councilmen elected from 1924 to 1949, 84 were Irish-Americans and only 4 were Italian-American.16 Although a large percentage of the

14 Stack, International Conflict, 39.
15 Kane, Separatism, 5.
16 Stack, International Conflict, 33. There were also 12 Jewish, 9 Yankee, and 1 African American councilmen elected.
new ethnics grudgingly supported the Irish Democratic Party leaders come election time, ethnic divisions remained within the Catholic community.

As the immigrant population in the cities swelled, Yankee dominance of the state government declined and Catholic influence rose. In 1914, David Walsh became the first Irish-Catholic governor of the state. Five years later he became the first Irish-Catholic Senator. Walsh believed that he, and the party, could not consistently win elections with urban, Irish voters alone, so he helped to open up the state’s Democratic Party to include not only the Boston Irish but new ethnics and Democrats in the western part of the state who had often been ignored by Bostonians. Despite Walsh’s successes, tensions remained between veteran politicians in Boston and the upstarts that Walsh was promoting. Although most Irish politicians went along with this new statewide strategy, they continued to retain firm control on Boston’s politics for many decades. They used their power to wage fierce ethno-religious political wars.17

Education had long been one of the central areas of conflict in the Bay State. Under the direction of Horace Mann, Massachusetts had led the nation in the development of modern public education in the mid-19th century. Mann and his supporters claimed that public education was vital if American democracy and capitalism were to thrive. Those early efforts had also been driven by the local Anglo-Saxon elite’s

17 The group dynamics were complicated and convoluted. Ethnic tensions still existed among the city’s Catholics: Irish Americans, Italian Americans, and French Canadians. Although they were coreligionists, shared basic beliefs in common, and were members of the same social organization (the Church), differences abounded. Various Catholics held different theological, cultural, social, and political beliefs. They could and would unite when combating the state’s Protestant elites, but were often divided in other situations. While Italian Americans might view Irish politicians as protectors at times, they also saw sometimes them as oppressors. Meanwhile, prominent Italian Americans in the state sought influence and power equivalent to their growing numbers in the city. While diversity and complexity clearly existed within the Catholic community, certain commonalities and trends were clear, including persecution at the hands of the Yankee majority in the state.
desire to control and assimilate the immigrant lower classes. In the words of an 1850 School Committee report, educators sough to put such students “in the right path amid the moral darkness which is their daily and domestic walk.”\(^{18}\) Boston’s 19\(^{th}\) century public schools required students to read the King James Version of the Bible, sing Protestant hymns, and recite Protestant prayers daily, so that the city’s schoolchildren might develop proper moral attitudes. These requirements were extremely controversial; there was a huge scandal in the city in 1850 when the submaster of one public school physically punished an Irish student who refused to recite the Protestant version of the Ten Commandments.\(^{19}\) Early Catholic leaders in the city, especially Bishop John Fitzpatrick, tried to pressure the city schools into respecting the culture of its Catholic pupils. By the late 19\(^{th}\) century, however, Fitzpatrick’s successors had set out to create a separate school system for Boston’s Catholics.\(^{20}\)

Anglo-Saxons frowned upon, and even feared, the development of Catholic schools. They sought not only to deprive them of public funds and accreditation, but also to impose government regulation and supervision on them.\(^{21}\) Nonetheless, the Catholic school system flourished in the early decades of the twentieth century: by the onset of World War II there were 158 parochial elementary schools, 67 high schools, and 24

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\(^{21}\) O’Connor, *Catholics*, 147.
academies in Boston. In response, a nationwide backlash against Catholic schools developed in the early twentieth century, culminating in the KKK anti-Catholic initiatives of the 1920s.

By the 1930s, these long-standing ethnic and religious antagonisms had merged with highly charged national politics and a chaotic global scene to create an even more contentious climate in the area of childhood education. The local newspapers were filled with stories of how the socialist state in Mexico had banned parochial schools, required children to attend public schools, and had instituted classes in sex education and Marxist theory. Looming even larger in the Catholic imagination was the Soviet Union. The Archdiocesan newspaper *The Pilot* insisted that the “most thoroughly organized branch of Soviet propaganda is to be seen in their universal system of education.”

Despite Boston’s large system of parochial schools, Catholic politicians dedicated significant effort to fighting atheism and socialism in the public schools. In fact, Boston’s CatholicS often seemed to be trying to impose policies similar to those the Brahmin leaders had favored decades earlier. Prominent Catholics throughout the city began to argue that Bible study and mandatory prayer in the schools were necessary in the face of the totalitarian threat sweeping the world. *The Pilot* bemoaned the godless state of American public schools and declared that the principle of separation of Church

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23 In Massachusetts, Irish politicians repressed the Klan and kept it from becoming a political force. In Boston, Curley banned Klan meetings, even on private property, and the City Council passed an anti-Klan resolution. But, the power of the Klan was apparent in nearby Portland, Maine, where the Klan exerted significant control over the city government and pushed for laws restricting public funding for Catholic schools. Kenneth Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 1915-1930 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

and State “has been so far departed from as to put the whole force and influence of the
tax-supported schools on the side of one element of the population, namely that which is
pagan and believes in no religion whatsoever.” “Our ‘liberals,’” the Pilot continued,
“succeeded in foisting on our society a school system calculated to create atheists.”
As a result, the paper continued, “children are surrendered for years to a system which by its
silence denies the existence of God.”

Catholic rhetoric was driven by the fear that Marxists, philosophers, and scientists
would destroy all Christian beliefs of naïve teenagers. Colleges and universities came
under attack as well. Like Protestant Fundamentalists in the South a decade earlier, the
Catholic media recited stories of impressionable youngsters who went to college sharing
their parent’s beliefs and returned home disillusioned and alienated, convinced by their
professors that Christianity was a mere myth based upon tribal gods. “So-called
‘educational institutions’,” according to a Pilot editorial, “killed this green uncertain
faith,” crushed the moral system of its students, and turned “loose on the world young
barbarians who have been freed from the discipline of the Church before they have
learned to discipline themselves.”

"Men who teach atheism,” claimed The Pilot, “are essentially wreckers, destroyers. Where their poison drips green grass will never grow
again.”

Catholics often tied this atheistic menace directly to liberalism or its rhetorical variations: “ultra-liberalism,” “extreme liberalism,” “academic liberalism” or “so-called liberalism.” When Wisconsin’s state legislature launched an inquiry into radicalism on the campus of the University of Wisconsin, *The Pilot* seized upon the legislature’s findings as an example of what was going on in American higher education. Wisconsin, *The Pilot* claimed, was an “ultra liberal center” of radical thought and a "hot-bed of un-American socialistic and communistic activity.” The radicals at Wisconsin were held up as the “indisputable…results of academic 'liberalism'.” The United States,” *The Pilot* concluded, was “too closely committed to the principles of democracy to tolerate long the conceit of flaming liberals.”

These fears were inflamed by developments in Mexico. Boston Catholics were extraordinarily involved in Mexican affairs during the 1930s. In the 1920s Congressman James Gallivan of Boston had been one of the leading American critics of the Mexican government. With each new revelation of Catholic persecution in, Boston’s Catholic community reacted fiercely and vocally. Massachusetts Catholics were well-represented in the wave of petitions that flooded into the State Department and White House after Ambassador Daniels publicly praised the Mexican education system. The Massachusetts General Court was among the state legislatures that condemned the Mexican government’s actions; the legislature also specifically endorsed the Borah

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resolution to condemn “the vindictive and antireligious policy of the present Mexican Government” and launch a Senate investigation of “religious persecution” in Mexico.\(^{33}\)

Although Senator William Borah had his name attached to the measure, Massachusetts Senator Walsh took the lead in pushing for its passage. Although he was a leading isolationist, Walsh agitated for American action towards the Mexican regime. Walsh formed the National Committee for the Defense of American Rights in Mexico, solely with the purpose of lobbying for the Borah resolution. By downplaying the anti-Catholic nature of the Mexican government’s reforms in favor of stressing their anti-religious nature, Walsh was able to win support from some prominent Protestant and Jewish groups. To combat Secretary of State Hull’s position that the United States had no right to interfere in the affairs of foreign nationals, Walsh also played up the laws’ impact on American citizens living in Mexico, who he claimed were being deprived their basic rights to worship freely.

While Walsh pushed the Borah resolution in the Senate, Congressman Joseph Higgins took the lead in coordinating a similar resolution in the House of Representatives. Higgins was a Congregationalist, not a Catholic, but he represented a heavily Catholic district in Boston and clearly realized the importance of Mexico to many of his constituents. Higgins garnered the signatures of more than 200 Congressmen on a petition urging the President to investigate the plight of churches in Mexico and personally brought it to the White House.\(^{34}\) Congressman John McCormack of Boston,

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\(^{33}\)“Resolutions in Favor of the Adoption by the Senate of the United States of a Resolution now Pending Before it Relative to Religious Persecution in Mexico,” 12 March 1935, 812.404, NARA.

meanwhile, sought to expel Mexican consuls from the United States, boasting about his actions to Catholic groups throughout the state.\textsuperscript{35} Virtually every Massachusetts politician in Congress was involved in actively speaking out on Mexican affairs, demonstrating just how important the issue was to Boston voters. The idea of the state closing private schools and imposing atheistic education upon Mexican children was abhorrent to Boston’s Catholics. That the Roosevelt administration might be endorsing such an action through its ambassador in Mexico was frightening.

**The Teachers Oath**

In 1930, New York Representative Hamilton Fish led a Congressional committee to investigate Communist subversion in the United States. Fish advocated the deportation of Communists and the strengthening of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, while warning of the dangers of communist subversion in the nation’s universities.\textsuperscript{36} Few Americans paid Fish much attention, but in Boston he found an enthusiastic audience. On May Day 1931, Mayor James Michael Curley invited Fish to participate in the city’s “Patriotic exercises.” At the event Fish warned that “communists, socialists, pink intellectuals, college professors and a smattering of ministers” were threatening the American way of life.\textsuperscript{37} The Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.) and


\textsuperscript{35} McCormack statement, 2 April 1935, folder 10, box 149, NCWC Mexico, Catholic University of America Archives.

\textsuperscript{36} Albert Fried, \textit{Nightmare in Red} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 45.

Veterans of Foreign Wars (V.F.W.) picked up the cause and promoted a loyalty oath in 1932, which was largely ignored by state politicians.

A few years later, however, the movement picked up steam among Catholic politicians. In the intervening years, the Hearst press had begun promoted loyalty oaths throughout the nation and had even baited professors at high profile universities into making statements that they could use as proof of communist subversion. Perhaps because of Hearst’s efforts, the movement gained the support of prominent Catholic leaders in Boston. Irish politicians picked up the proposal and took it one step further, extending it to private school teachers as well as public employees. In particular, Boston politicians charged that Ivy League intellectuals, particularly those at Harvard, were corrupting the youth of America through their radical teaching.

For decades, Boston’s private colleges and universities had been a battlefront in the city’s ethnic wars. The city’s prestigious universities such as Harvard and M.I.T. had made a conscious effort to exclude immigrants and other undesirables throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, in the mid-nineteenth century the Yankee legislators refused to grant charters to the Jesuits to form Boston College and Holy Cross College. Even in the late nineteenth century, after the legislature had relented, Harvard Law School refused to recognize undergraduate degrees granted by either Catholic college. In the early part of twentieth century, even Tufts University and Boston University, never mind that bastion of Brahmin power Harvard, “remained.”

according to historian Richard Freeland, “overwhelmingly Protestant despite the increasingly Catholic character of Boston.”  

Catholics were by no means the only group facing discrimination. President Lowell presided over a “social narrowing” of Harvard in the 1920’s, imposing limits on the number of Jewish students who would be admitted each year so as to preserve the Yankee character of the university in the face of a perceived Jewish challenge. Lowell also instituted racially segregated dorms. By 1926, Harvard actually required applicants to include a picture and to disclose any name changes in their family’s history, thus institutionalizing ethnic prejudice. Upon succeeding Lowell as president in 1933, James Conant famously attempted to make Harvard more representative of the general population. Conant’s plan, which focused on accepting and supporting more students from the southern and the western regions of the United States, did not include any efforts to accept more students from Boston’s immigrant communities. His plan thus did little to change the opinion of Harvard among Boston’s ethnics. Harvard was not alone in provoking the immigrant communities. In the 1920’s Tufts endeavored to make itself into an elite university. To accomplish this, President John Cousens declared that Tufts needed to cease being an “asylum for the children of the foreign born” and instead attract the “best families.”

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40 Freeland, *Academia’s Golden Age*, 41.


42 Freeland, *Academia’s Golden Age*, 44.
Concerns about communist subversion in the universities thus became enmeshed with, and frequently overshadowed by, ethnic antagonisms and resentments. Boston’s Catholics, after all, viewed the private universities and the private prep schools that fed them as, in the words of historian William Shannon, “bulwarks of a social and economic system from whose power and privilege most Irish were shut out.”43 This disdain for Ivy League colleges, and the Yankee tradition they represented, can clearly be seen in Mayor James Michael Curley’s letter to the Harvard Board of Overseers. “The Massachusetts of the Puritans is as dead as Caesar,” wrote Curley, but there was nothing to fear since “their successors--the Irish--had letters and learning, culture, and civilization when the ancestors of the Puritans were savages running half naked through the forests of Britain.” “It took the Irish,” Curley concluded, “to make Massachusetts into a fit place to live.”44

The Pilot’s editorial stance during this time period illustrates Catholic concerns that existed about subversion in the education system. Although The Pilot did not always match mainstream Catholic opinion, it was found on the coffee tables of nearly every Catholic family in the city and frequently did mirror general opinion.45 The paper repeatedly editorialized against the secularization of the public education system, which given that the Archdiocese had traditionally ignored the public education system in favor of promoting parochial schools, was surprising. Perhaps it was because Catholic enrollment in public schools was rising during the Great Depression, or perhaps they were simply intent on fighting a holding action against the rising tide of radicalism. In

44 Shannon, American Irish, 216.
45 O’Connor, Catholics, 211.
any case, *The Pilot* insisted that the “liberal” interpretation of church and state “had put the whole force of the tax-supported schools on the side of one element of the population, namely, that which is pagan.” “Our ‘liberals,’” the editorial claimed, “succeeded in foisting upon our society a school system calculated to create atheists,” while “the rights of the vast religious majority were flatly ignored.” Public schools therefore created students susceptible to atheism. But it was the universities that truly corrupted Catholic youth. “College intelligentsia” destroyed the belief systems of impressionable youngsters and cast doubt upon all of the “convictions which were sacred to their fathers,” even patriotism and “college loyalty.” Students at Harvard football games did not even “cheer when their team appeared on the football field,” complained *The Pilot*. In short, the “educational system…produced a type of mind which rejects every loyalty our society has cherished.” Such is the end result of an educational system which “denies the existence of God.”

Speaking on *The Catholic Truth Hour* Father Corrigan called for something to be done about subversion in the schools. He insisted that the United States should not have to endure a revolution similar to those that struck “in Russia, and Spain, and Mexico” and warned that the United States could succumb to a “revolution of mind,” spurred on by “traitorous professors and disloyal teachers.” “Many teachers in our education institutions,” he argued, “have failed not only to preserve our national ideals, but, by their atheistic and disloyal teachings, are giving active support to agencies that plan the downfall of our country and the overthrow of its Constitution.” Corrigan called for “immediate legislative action in every single American State, from Massachusetts to

California, to end for all time the Red Menace in our schools” by curtailing “academic license.” Otherwise, American children would be corrupted by “these Red, atheistic teachers, instructors and professors with a thousand ideas for the destruction of our social order, the destruction of the family, the destruction of religion.” 47

*The Pilot* also promoted Fish’s warnings of Ivy League subversion, quoting the Congressman as saying that the development of Communism “is more rapid in American colleges than in any other sphere of Communist activity” and that Communists in the universities were “teaching class hatred, hatred of religion and hatred of American institutions, including hatred of the American flag.” 48 The paper concluded that something had to be done to address “this queer sinister manifestation” and declared, “If Leningrad thinks our colleges are worth corruption, we should feel that they are worth saving.” In combating radicals, who demonstrated a “genius for corruption,” *The Pilot* declared that all Americans had to “exhibit some zeal for the American institutions they threaten.” After all, declared *The Pilot*, “The Communist is not a bogey. He is a reality and a menacing one.” 49

With prominent Catholics supporting it, a loyalty oath for teachers made its way through the state legislature in 1935. The wording of the oath was benign. Those who took the oath were required to state, “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support the constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the position of ___

47 Radio broadcast printed in *The Pilot*, 26 January 1935.

48 Fish quoted in *The Pilot*, 9 March 1935.

according to the best of my abilities.” Furthermore, there was no real enforcement mechanism to punish those who violated the oath. President James Conant of Harvard even admitted that it was “as innocuous as such a law could be,” but he believed that it was a “straw showing the way the wind is blowing,” and he feared that the wind was blowing towards American Fascism.

Conant and the presidents of all thirty-five Massachusetts colleges, even the presidents of Catholic colleges, appeared before the General Court to speak against the bill and in defense of academic freedom. They met a hostile audience. Many of the presidents, including those of Harvard and MIT, were booed by the spectators who jammed the committee room. In contrast, the crowds cheered the witnesses who testified in favor of the bill. When the college presidents complained about “the implied distrust of the teachers of this State who have given their lives to the fulfillment of the patriotic duty of teaching the youth of this Commonwealth,” the audience and many representatives seemed less than sympathetic. Representative Thomas Dorgan (D-Dorchester) – who led the campaign on behalf of the oaths – personally charged that the presidents of Mt. Holyoke, Smith, and Boston University were ‘reds’. He also declared that Harvard and Tufts each had Communist professors. While Dorgan was in the midst of speaking about the need to “keep America for Americans,” another


53 Boston Globe., 2 April 1935.

54 Boston Herald, 25 June 1935; Heale, 158.
representative entered the chamber with a large American flag, which he sought to present dramatically and ceremoniously to Dorgan.\textsuperscript{55}

The committee on education voted 10-5 against the oath, but the legislature passed it anyway. When the oath bill reached the floor of the State Senate, President James Moran claimed that it was required to protect the “youth of this Commonwealth” from “anti-American propaganda.” He then attacked the “illogical reasoning” of “the intelligentsia” and academia’s “segregated scheme of life” that caused them to ignore “the opinions of the rest of society.”\textsuperscript{56} On the other side, Henry Parkman, representing the Back Bay – the wealthy, Anglo section of the city – called for his colleagues to “recover their sanity.” He charged that they were “going back to the Dark Ages in this sort of legislation trying by this method to inspire loyalty.” Opponents of the bill called for a roll call vote, a ploy that backfired. Given the political climate of the day, few legislators wanted their constituents to find out that they had voted against the oath.\textsuperscript{57} Fourteen of 15 Democratic Senators and 101 of 115 Democrats in the lower house voted in favor while only 15 opposed it.\textsuperscript{58} On the other side of the aisle, only 43 out of a total of 124 Republicans voted for the oath. According to historian Judith Holmes, "Among Catholic Democrats (Irish, Italian, French Canadian and Portuguese) 91% percent supported the teachers' oath."\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{55} Holmes, “Politics of Anti-communism,” 66.

\textsuperscript{56} Heale, \textit{McCarthy’s Americans}, 159.

\textsuperscript{57} Holmes, “Politics of Anti-communism,” 67-8.

\textsuperscript{58} Heale, \textit{McCarthy’s Americans}, 159.

\textsuperscript{59} Holmes, “Politics of Anti-communism,” 77.
As the oath made its way through the legislature, Governor Curley, a devout anti-communist, used his powers and influence to help propel its passage. In fact, the American Legion hailed Curley’s “whole-hearted, enthusiastic” support for the bill, which they claimed was “so energetic as to even discourage many sources of opposition.” He made his case repeatedly during the commencement season. At Holy Cross, Curley questioned “whether our schools have not at times failed to appreciate their full obligation to make vital their instruction to meet the needs and demands of contemporary society.” He explained that colleges and universities provided “three definitive services.” First, they preserved and promulgated “the proved values of the past.” Second, they provided practical applications for knowledge, especially economic development. Finally, they made “our youth more curious and creative.” Colleges and universities were supposed “to act as the guardian of truth, as a servant of that truth” and Catholic colleges like Holy Cross, he claimed, should especially focus on “impressing upon its students the unalterable fact of the relationship of the human to the divine.” The Governor to his audience, “You who are graduating...I trust, armed with enduring faith in those things that are eternal.... go forth into a sorely tried world...which all too much has exalted the material over the spiritual, -- which its eagerness for personal advantage has forsaken the higher Christian teaching of service to others.” Curley’s conception of education as rooted in spiritual truths and practical applications and useful only to the

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60 American Legion Proceedings, quoted in Holmes, “Politics of Anti-communism,” 68.

61 Addresses and Messages to the General Court, Proclamations, Official Addresses, Correspondence and Statements of His Excellency Governor James M. Curley For the Years Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-five Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-six, eds. Edmond J. Hoy and Walter S. Ryan., published by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Dec. 9, 1936, 319-325, Special Collections, Malden Public Library, Malden, MA.
extent that it improved the lives of ordinary people was fundamentally different from that of many leading American intellectuals. But Curley was famously attuned to his constituency and many of the working-class ethnics who served as his base undoubtedly agreed with his emphasis on practical democratic education.

At the state college’s commencement, Curley was even more dismissive of the value of higher education. "In the light of events that have taken place throughout the world,” he claimed, Americans were justified “in questioning the real value of our educational institutions." The "progress made in combating ignorance and poverty, or the lack of progress, does not reflect creditably upon our educational institutions.” Moreover, he directly attacked the "educated element in American life” who he claimed utilized their “energies and intellects” simply to protect their own wealth while acting “brutal and callous in their disregard for the creative source of wealth, the brains and the hands of the workers.”

Curley was less confrontational at Harvard, going so far as to say that Harvard could take "justifiable pride" in "patriotic and valiant service" to the country throughout its history. The other speakers at Harvard seized the opportunity to bring up the oath controversy. President William Neilson of Smith College told the assembled Harvard alumni he "was ashamed of them" for not speaking out against oath. Neilson declared, "This miserable and silly and pernicious bill never would have triumphed in our Legislature if the alumni took a hand in the fight against it." Charles Burlingham, the president of the Harvard alumni association, targeted the law itself, which he claimed

62 Addresses and Messages of Governor Curley, 326-7.

63 Addresses and Messages of Governor Curley, 338.
subjected professors “to the espionage of inquisitors, sleuths, and snoopers.”64 The Governor saved his thunder for another event later the same day.

After leaving the Harvard exercises, Curley went to the state convention of the American Legion, where he simultaneously declared his candidacy for the Senate and railed against the Harvard officials he had met earlier in the day. He denounced the Harvard crowd as unpatriotic and declared that “it was most unfortunate that educated men hold such views.” Harvard men proved that teachers as well as students had to be taught “to respect the flag of the United States.” “In the present situation many of the schools have remained passive,” he said, “while in others pacifism and internationalism -- even Communism and Bolshevism have openly been taught.”65

A week after his speech at Harvard, on June 26, 1935, Governor Curley signed the loyalty oath bill into law.66 But the debate about the oath continued to rage throughout the summer. According to one contemporary survey, Boston’s newspapers published “92 news items pertaining to the oath bill, 43 letters, and 22 editorials during the summer months.”67

Harvard President Conant led the attack on the new law. Demonstrating that it was not only those on the right who drew upon worldwide events to frame local issues,

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Conant compared the lack of academic freedom in Germany and Russia to the situation in Massachusetts. “Even in our own Commonwealth,” Conant declared, “I am sorry to say we have seen the first step taken in the same direction” as in Fascist Germany and Soviet Russia through “the enactment of a Teachers’ Oath Law.” Conant flatly declared, “No issue of patriotism is here involved; the issue is between those who have confidence in the learned world and those who fail to understand it and hence distrust it, dislike it, and would eventually curb it.”

Father Corrigan countered that the oath was a necessary “protection for our children,” explaining, “I know that there are here a small minority of teachers in our schools and colleges who are not living up to our best ideals but have been planted here by the Communist party to sow the seeds of Communism in our youth. Of this, there can be no doubt whatsoever.” What is more, Corrigan made the link between subversion in Boston and subversion abroad: “All of Europe is aflame. Mexico has its persecutions and even up in Canada they are being influenced along Communistic lines. The seeds have been planted here in America.” “The nuclei of Communism,” Corrigan elaborated, “have been planted in the ranks of labor, in schools and colleges.”

Others pushed the patriotic theme even more vigorously. In the summer of 1935, the General Court passed a law requiring all schoolchildren to salute the flag daily, under penalty of expulsion. Governor Curley also wholeheartedly supported Hearst’s attempts to celebrate “Constitution Day” throughout the nation in September. As he endorsed the

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68 Document 31, p. 7, box 12, James B. Conant papers, Pusey Library, Harvard University

69 “Fr Corrigan, SJ Defends Oath Law”, undated newspaper clipping, folder: 1936, carton 18, CLUM collection, MHS.
“eternal vigilance represented in the observance of Constitution Day,” Curley seized upon the moment to lash out at “so-called intellectuals that harbor the delusion that Almighty God has centered in their puny heads the wisdom of the ages.” Hardly a reactionary, Curley simultaneously declared his willingness “to change the economic order and to amend the Constitution” of the United States to make it more fair, equitable, and efficient. Yet his defensiveness in the face of the “liberal” culture of the New Deal is clear.

The start of the school year put the oath to the test. Although most university educators opposed the oath, the vast majority went along with the law once it was enacted. President Conant probably represented most academics when he stated, “I was very much opposed to the passage of the bill, but now that it is on the statute books we shall see that Harvard does everything to obey it.” At Tufts, a few professors resigned. Many more disdained the law and those who passed it. Boston University’s President Daniel Marsh bluntly stated, “The bill is silly; it is stupid, lacking in good sense.” Like all college presidents, however, Marsh instructed his faculty to comply with the law, even though he continued to believe the bill to be unjust and unwarranted.

Harvard’s faculty responded more vigorously, creating a teachers’ union in October of 1935 for the explicit purpose of opposing the oath. The Boston Post, the local newspaper targeted at working-class ethnic Democrats, expressed suspicion of the union, reporting that many of the union’s “directors have previously figured into the public eye.

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70 Addresses and Messages of Governor Curley, 340-1.

71 Letter to Godfrey Lowell Cabot, 21 September 1935, box 12, James B. Conant papers, Pusey Library, Harvard University.

72 “BU President Hits Oath Law,” Boston Post, 11 October 1935, front page.
as liberal leaders.” “Among them,” the Post reported, “is professor Kirtley F. Mather, who at first refused to take the teachers’ oath...Instructor Albert Sprague Coolidge, known for his liberal views on many subjects, and Professor Max Lerner, another nationally known liberal, whose views have been considered extremely radical by some in the past.” Being a liberal was suddenly enough in and of itself to make one suspect in the eyes of the city’s newspaper of choice for ethnic Democrats.

Despite all of these struggles, many oath opponents believed the law would prove unenforceable. These hopes were spurred in part by the fact that the Commissioner of Education, Payson Smith, the man charged with instituting the oath, openly opposed it. Many therefore assumed the law would eventually lapse into one of the multitude of unenforced laws on the books. Those hopes were dashed in December, when Governor Curley replaced Commissioner Smith, whose term had expired, and called on the Attorney General to draw up an enforcement mechanism for the oath. Curley replaced Smith with James Reardon, whose primary qualifications, in the words of one historian, “seemed to be that he was Irish and he supported the teachers’ oath.” On the night before he was sworn in Reardon made a public statement on the topic, “I am 100 percent in favor of the Oath bill. I do not believe that Communism and Socialism should be spread among our school children, and the teachers who spread this type of propaganda should be driven from our schools.” Meanwhile, Attorney General Paul Dever called for private schools to lose their charters and public schools to lose their funding if they

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73 “Harvard Staff in Labor Union,” Boston Post, 24 October 1935.

74 Holmes, “Politics of Anti-communism,” 69.

75 Reardon quoted in Holmes, “Politics of Anti-communism,” 69.
did not comply. Dever also declared that the heads of private schools could be held responsible for the failure of their employees to take the oath and that those who refused to take the oath would be held in “material breach of contract.”

Opponents of the oath mobilized a vigorous counteroffensive. Harvard professors, led by renowned historian Samuel Eliot Morison, formed the Society for Teaching Freedom to unite the state’s professors and grade school teachers in opposition to “pressure groups seeking to regulate their activities.” Morison quipped to audiences that Massachusetts and its oath were becoming the butt of national jokes like the Scopes Trial of a decade earlier. Massachusetts educators made a large-scale effort to repeal the oath law early in 1936. Conant explained to a friend that he opposed the attempt to overturn the law but since “the move has been made by some other group” he would contact “all the college presidents of the state to see if they will once again take a united stand in opposition to the oath.” Not all colleges agreed. The presidents of Boston College and Holy Cross, who had opposed the law the previous year, abstained this time around. One historian has attributed this to the machinations of Cardinal O’Connell. This was also, however, the time when events in Spain were spiraling towards Civil War. In fact, debates about the loyalty oath would share the front pages of Boston newspapers in the weeks and months to come with stories of anticlericalism in Spain. Newspaper

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77 “Links Massachusetts with Oath Law to ‘Monkey Trial’ and ‘Ku Klux’ States,” Boston Globe, undated clipping, carton 18, CLUM collection.

78 Letter to Grenville Clark, 17 February 1936, box 12, James B. Conant papers, Pusey Library, Harvard University.

headlines told the city’s citizens, “Spain on Verge of Civil War: Cabinet Sits as Mobs Fire Churches, Crying ‘Burn Pope’s Property’. “ Catholic periodicals were even more vivid, providing details about atrocities such as when a dead nun’s mouth was used as an ashtray by Spanish Communists.

Boston’s Catholics were very much cognizant of and engaged with the Spanish Civil War. Cardinal O’Connell condemned the Valencia government as “piracy and Communism gone rank” while defending Franco as a defender of the faith. Most of his flock agreed. Historian Donald Crosby has stated that “Boston, unlike other cities, lacked a large, vocal group of dissenters who rejected the pro-Franco position.” Perhaps that is because the Spanish Civil War was seen through the context of local events. As intellectuals at Harvard rallied around the Loyalist government, Catholic politicians and their constituents became more firmly attached to Franco. For American Catholics who had lived through the Klan’s resurgence the previous decade, it did not take a great leap to see support for Spanish Republicans as indicative of anti-Catholic prejudice. The Catholic response was merely the mirror image of some on the American left, who saw Catholic support for Franco as indicative of a Catholic sympathy for demagogues and dictators. In that respect, events abroad served to reinforce existing antagonisms between liberals and Catholics in Boston and therefore exacerbate existing conflicts.


81 The Pilot, 8 August 1936.

As Boston’s Catholics stiffened their support for Franco in his crusade to defend Christian civilization in Spain, they also flexed their political muscle to block any measures emanating from their political opponents. One such measure, sponsored by Eleanor Roosevelt among others, called for 500 Basque children to be brought to the United States as refugees. Cardinal O’Connell came out against the measure, which he claimed would be traumatic for the children. O’Connell suggested that it would be better for them to stay in Spain, where he was sure they would be treated with mercy by General Franco. Hundreds of letters and telegrams poured into the offices of Massachusetts Congressmen and Senators urging them to block the children’s admission.83 Spurred by these calls, Congressman McCormack met with leaders from State, Labor, Immigration, and even wrote to the president personally.84 McCormack claimed the effort to bring the Basque children to the States was “a smoke screen for Red propaganda.”85 The effort was successfully thwarted by Catholic opponents of the plan. While Senator Walsh and Governor Hurley posed for newspaper photographers smoking victory cigars, the five hundred children were stranded in Spain.

In such a charged environment, the second round of battles over the loyalty oath was even more ferocious than the first. Civil Liberties Union records described the scene at the State House during hearings about the bill to repeal the oath: “The hearings on this bill were attended by the largest crowds, and lasted longer, than any in the history of the


84 Crosby, “Boston’s Catholics and the Spanish Civil War,” 98.

State, filling to capacity the Gardner Auditorium for several days."\(^{86}\) The *Boston Globe*’s account of the hearings declared, “Teachers’ Oath Hearing Near Riot.”\(^{87}\) Morison again took the lead in opposing the oath, telling the legislators that loyalty oaths were an “ancient form of tyranny.” “The fact that such a law could be passed in this Commonwealth in the A.D. 1935,” Morison said, “astonished me as if the old law against witchcraft had been re-enacted, or the blue law against kissing your wife on the Sabbath had been suddenly enforced!” That Morison was disparagingly comparing oath supporters to Puritans was particularly ironic since Morison was himself a member of the Brahmin aristocracy with deep roots in Massachusetts high society. He argued that the universities had “done more to honor the name of Massachusetts, and carried her name farther “than her ships, soldiers or statesmen,” a claim that received a cool reception among many Bostonians who disdained the Harvard crowd. \(^{88}\) Other opponents of the oath were just as confrontational. One professor lectured the committee that it was impossible to “legislate patriotism, religion or morals into a nation or a people.” He cited the Spanish Inquisition as an example and then insisted, “In fact, you cannot legislate common sense into a people. If you could, I don’t believe you would have the Teachers’ Oath bill on the statute books today.”\(^{89}\) Still another attempted to turn the tables by

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\(^{87}\) *Boston Globe*, 19 March 1936.


\(^{89}\) *Boston Globe*, 19 March 1936.
suggesting that “you have a good chance of getting outbursts of Communism wherever you have gag legislation like this.”

As tensions rose, perceived slights touched off hostile exchanges that demonstrated the centrality of class rivalries and ethnic antagonisms. Representative Thomas Dillon of Cambridge complained that opponents of the oath had “treated the members of the committee as if they were so much dirt; and down deep in their hearts they really think we are that much dirt.” Oath supporters called Conant a “deceiver” and charged that the president of Wheaton College had “a diseased mind.” Another supporter of the oath declared that the “fake professors have given us nothing for 50 years but a few chemical formulas” while yet another insisted that professors who objected to the oath should be expelled from the country. Meanwhile, one pro-oath witness, a Legionnaire, debated Republican Senator Parkman, an opponent of the oath:

Parkman: What good has the oath done it one year of existence?
Splaiz: You know as well as I do that these long-haired men and short-haired women are a menace to the country.
Parkman: But the Teachers’ Oath bill has not made it any shorter or longer.
Splaiz: Are you serious Mr. Senator or are you trying to have fun with me. I am your equal either way. Know that, sir. I am your equal! You have been sitting here all day trying to be disagreeable, but I notice you didn’t heckle any of those ‘Hawvawd’ professors.

While the exchanges cannot help but bring to mind Richard Hofstadter’s concept of “status anxiety,” the exchange also illustrated the near fixation of some Bostonians on

90 Boston Globe, 19 March 1936.
91 “Teachers Oath Cont,” 7 April 1936, box 18, CLUM collection, MHS.
gender norms. A complex set of resentments and insecurities that had been developing for years among the city’s ethnic residents bared themselves in the rhetorical attacks upon Harvard professors. Representative Dorgan employed the rhetoric of Americanism in his attack, declaring, “What is an American? Certainly it is not a professor. The man on the street is a better American than some of the professors.”95

Those resentments fused with foreign threats. The Boston Globe reported of the proceedings, “College presidents and professors, pictured as part of a Moscow-conceived plot to overthrow the United States Government by force and supplant it with Communism, were charged with using their plea for ‘academic freedom’ to conceal their true subversive intentions.”96 The Globe reported Dorgan as stating “that where there was smoke there was fire, and the row being kicked up by the professors over the bill seemed to be smoke tinged with red.”97 Dorgan said that he believed it was the duty of the legislature to “protect the children…against the dangerous minority of professors.”98 Of Earle Winslow, who had resigned as professor at Tufts rather than take the oath, Dorgan said, “I don’t want to see Prof. Winslow hanging around here without a job. I would like to get him a job over in Moscow.”99 The repeal bill went down to defeat by a vote of 133-88. “I knew the Legislature would keep America for Americans,” Dorgan

99 “Teachers Oath Cont,” 7 April 1936, box 18, CLUM collection, MHS.
told the press, once again employing the language of Americanism. Others were moved to propose even more extreme measures. William Francis, former Secretary of State, proposed that the state government take over control of Massachusetts’ private colleges in the state so that the legislature could assert direct control over the educators.

Boston politicians continued to draw upon this discourse of subversion in their public pronouncements. On July 4th, Acting-Mayor John I. Fitzgerald told a crowd at Faneuil Hall that the “smug complacency” which characterized America’s attitude towards global threats should be “thrown off.” Fitzgerald was confident that the United States did not have to fear a foreign invasion but warned “a foe much more dangerous, conspirators who poison the minds of our youth with propaganda - the paid hirelings or foreign nations” who had “gained control…of our colleges and universities.” These “agitators” sought nothing less than the “overthrow of our form of government,” Fitzgerald declared.

On Columbus Day, speakers once again denounced Communist conspiracies and called for vigilance in the face of subversion. The annual celebration on the Boston Common featured Patrick J. Moynihan, the leading figure in the state’s Knights of Columbus. Moynihan treated the crowd to a long speech which celebrated the “sacrifice of Columbus and of those who made America in reality a ‘New World’” and who had

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100 “Teachers Oath Cont,” 7 April 1936, box 18, CLUM collection, MHS.


102 “Acting Mayor John I. Fitzgerald in Address at Faneuil Hall on July 4 Sound Warning Against Internal Foes and Agitators Whose Aim is Breakdown of Government by Corruption of Youth of Land,” City Record, 11 July 1936.
allowed the “principle of government enunciated and applied here” to manifest “its superiority over all other systems” in the world. Unfortunately, Moynihan warned, that democratic system was being “challenged today” by “forces working in our midst that, if permitted, would destroy this greatest citadel of democratic thought” and replace it with a system “which denies man's endowment from God” and would “supplant Christian doctrines of life with the whims of some petty, arrogant tyrant.” “Today in America there are those who openly espouse the extreme and violent form of the socialistic philosophy of economics.....where wholesale executions and mass banishments are resorted to in the enforcement of their doctrines, and where vicious and intense efforts are made to drive religion from the hearts of the people.” Moynihan concluded by pleading “for alertness by all Americans against the propagandists of subversive doctrines.”  

On the same day, Acting Mayor Fitzgerald addressed crowds at Parkman Bandstand by using Ferdinand and Isabella’s support for Columbus as a jumping off point to discuss the Spanish Civil War:

Look at Spain today! Submerged in a welter of civic strife, radicalism battling murderously to retain the throttling hold it has obtained on the country....Let us honor the memory of Christopher Columbus today; let us weep for Spain; let us take due warning from Spain's unhappy lot. In that detestation and in that rise of communism we have a frightful object lesson.

Fitzgerald then connected the situation in Spain to the crisis in the United States, saying that “the same communistic forces which brought on civil war in Spain are endeavoring to gain a foothold in this country.”

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103 Moynihan speech, *City Record*, 12 October, 1936.

104 Fitzgerald speech, *City Record*.  

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Over the next few months the Spanish Civil War insinuated itself into the local political discussion at a number of points. In the fall, the mayor refused to grant a permit for a Labor Day rally on the Common in support of the Loyalist government, claiming the issue was likely to provoke violence.\footnote{Angoff, Secretary of CLCM, to Mayor Mansfield, 31 August 1936, folder: Correspondences Sep-Dec 1936, carton 1, CLUM collection vol. 1, MHS.} Civil Liberties Union officials pleaded with the mayor that they be able to make their case to him personally, but Mansfield, as acting mayor, refused, consulting only with Rep. Thomas Dorgan, self-proclaimed “father of the loyalty oath,” before refusing the permit.\footnote{“Bulletin”, November 1936, CLUM collection vol. 1, MHS.} Shortly thereafter, the Supervisor of Spanish Language teaching in Boston public schools, Marie Solano, urged her colleagues to “keep the Spanish language a clean, decent subject of study in American public schools, without any tinge of “ism” in the mind of the public.”\footnote{Marie A Solano (Supervisor of Spanish Language teaching in Boston public schools) to Fellow Members of the AATS, 19 November 1936, folder: Correspondences Sep-Dec 1936, carton 1, CLUM collection vol. 1, MHS.} The fear subversion in the schools clearly had not abated.

**The 1936 Elections**

In 1932, Roosevelt won 67.1% of the votes in Boston, winning by a margin of 101,000 votes. According to historian Charles Trout that was a larger margin of victory than any other major city in the nation.\footnote{Trout, *Boston, the Great Depression*, 116.} In 1936, however, Roosevelt was worried about the possibility of losing Boston, not because of the challenge posed by the Republican Party but because of the challenge posed by Charles Coughlin. Boston was
arguably the “strongest Coughlin city in the world,” James Michael Curley claimed in 1935. Coughlin’s newspaper, *Social Justice*, was in the words of Thomas O’Connor, “required reading in all of Boston’s Catholic neighborhoods.”109 Catholic Bostonians, says O’Connor, “regarded the charismatic priest from Michigan as their champion in the struggle between rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots.”110 In August 1935, Coughlin took time out of his Berkshire vacation to visit his good friend “Governor Jim” in Boston. According to the extensive newspaper coverage of his visit, Coughlin’s arrival "created a furor" and all state business came to a halt as "Representatives and Senators left their chambers" and the "galleries...suddenly filled."111 A joint session of the legislature invited him to make a speech. Introduced by Speaker of the House Leverett Saltonstall, who declared himself “greatly honored” to be in the priest’s presence, Coughlin lectured the House and Senate “on the dangers of Fascism and Communism and dictatorships, and received a State flag to take back to Detroit with him.”112

Shortly thereafter, Coughlin decided to form his own political party. He sought out local and national candidates, intending to run a candidate in every congressional district in New England. In an attempt to reach out to Midwest Populists, Coughlin settled on North Dakota Congressman William Lemke as his presidential choice and Thomas O’Brien, a Irish Catholic lawyer whose political experience was limited to a

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single term as District Attorney in Boston, as his vice presidential candidate – an obvious overture to the Boston Irish who so strongly supported him. Coughlin’s bid worried Curley, McCormack, and other Irish political leaders. Curley was in a particularly tight spot, since he was locked in a tight race with Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. for the Senate and could ill afford to have Coughlin siphon off votes. Yet Coughlin’s supporters quickly found 40,000 local supporters to sign a petition putting O’Brien’s name on the ballot for Senate as well as for Vice President.

Coughlin’s combination of economic populism, isolationism, and cultural conservatism appealed to a great many Boston ethnics, as Cardinal O’Connell well knew. O’Connell and Coughlin were firmly in agreement on issues such as American involvement in the World Court and the persecution of Catholics in Mexico, but the Cardinal had long been appalled by Coughlin’s populist economic policies and, more to the point, had been irritated by the growing power of a mere parish priest operating outside of traditional channels of power. On multiple occasions, O’Connell openly denounced Coughlin’s meddling in national politics. O’Connell’s statements were nationally publicized. Mail from Catholics throughout the country, and even his own Archdiocese, demonstrated that many Catholics were willing to go against a Cardinal of the church to defend the radio priest. One “Real Catholic” from Boston wrote to O’Connell, “If you want to get yourself more disliked by the Catholic people, of Boston, Continue attacking Rev. Father Coughlin. Thousands of people love him, which I am

sorry to say they do not approve of you.”114 Moestino Torra wrote that “I believe that Rev. Chas. E. Coughlin is doing more good for the country and for the poor than all the churches in this country put together.”115 J.F. Welch declared that he was severing “all connections” with his church of 57 years as long as “you are the head of it here.”116 A.M. Trancis, who was obedient enough to “beg to be excused,” warned the Cardinal “that times are changing and we must have some forceful men in the Church – otherwise before another hundred years the U.S.A. will be in the same position as Mexico, Russia and Spain, - Godless.”117 The mail did not dissuade O’Connell from continuing to criticize the priest. But it clearly demonstrated the strong support Coughlin had among a significant portion of American Catholics.

Indeed, Coughlin found a great deal of support among those Boston Catholics who were developing a deep distrust of New Dealers. Fighting off this two-pronged challenge from Yankee Henry Cabot Lodge and Coughlinite Thomas O’Brien, Curley begged James Farley to keep Rexford Tugwell, Frances Perkins, Harry Hopkins, and other prominent New Dealers out of Boston during the campaign because, he claimed,

114 “Real Catholic” to O’Connell, 10 December 1934, O’Connell’s Coughlin collection, Archdiocese of Boston Archive.

115 Modestino Torra to O’Connell, 20 April 1932, O’Connell’s Coughlin collection, Archdiocese of Boston Archive.

116 J.F. Welch to O’Connell, 9 December 1934, O’Connell’s Coughlin collection, Archdiocese of Boston Archive.

117 A.M. Trancis to O’Connell, 11 December 1933, O’Connell’s Coughlin collection, Archdiocese of Boston Archive.
“The opinion of most persons is that they are communistic.” David Walsh, meanwhile, refused to endorse Roosevelt publicly in the months leading up to the election.

On October 12, 1936 Coughlin held a campaign rally at Braves Field in Boston, where 27,000 spectators turned out in poor weather to hear the Radio Priest attack the Roosevelt administration and its “communistic tendencies.” The crowd that filled the stadium’s grandstands, pavilions, bleachers, and even the coffee concession stands “went bughouse” when Coughlin emerged to speak. He started his speech by withdrawing his support from William Connery, a local congressional candidate, and reiterating his opposition to James Michael Curley, because both men had endorsed Roosevelt. According to Coughlin, Curley had called the priest four times in the week prior to the rally, pleading with him to remove the Coughlinite candidate from the Senatorial race and warning that a split between Coughlinites and Democrats would lead to a Republican victory. Coughlin refused to grant Curley’s request, instead lampooning New Deal Democrats and playing call and response with the crowd: “Harold Ickes? Is he a Democrat? When and where? Henry Wallace, Rexford Tugwell? Were they ever Democrats? Was your Mr. Frankfurter from Harvard University ever a Democrat?” From there, Coughlin shifted his focus to foreign affairs, zeroing in on Ambassador Daniels’s alleged support for the Mexican government as proof of the Roosevelt


119 “Priest Talks to Crowd of 27,000,” Boston Globe, 12 October 1936.

120 Fr Coughlin Rally Sidelights,” Boston Globe, 12 October 1936, 12.

administration’s communistic tendencies. Daniels’s name drew boos from the crowd.\textsuperscript{122} Again, international events were center stage at a Boston political event.

Roosevelt made a campaign tour throughout urban New England the following week, trying to shore up support. Walsh issued an unenthusiastic endorsement and agreed to appear with the president in public. Many in the city were far more excited than Walsh by the visit: an estimated 125,000 turned out to see and hear the president when he appeared at Boston Common. A few weeks later Roosevelt won his landslide reelection. Boston voted for him in large numbers, as had the rest of the country. Yet, Roosevelt's vote total of 63.9% of Boston voters was down from 1932 (67.1%) and Al Smith’s 1928 total of 66.8%. "As Roosevelt picked up steam in other cities,” historian Charles Trout explains, “he lost momentum in Boston.”\textsuperscript{123}

Coughlin’s party, meanwhile, scored its biggest vote totals in Boston and Massachusetts. The Lemke-O’Brien ticket received 8.3% of presidential voters in Boston, compared to 2 percent nation-wide. Lemke received more than 118,000 votes total in Massachusetts. More than 11 percent of voters in South Boston and Charlestown, predominately Irish communities, and between 10 and 16 percent of Irish voters overall voted for Lemke, according to Gerald Gamm, with higher percentages coming from lower class voters.\textsuperscript{124} Twelve point four percent of votes in (Italian) East Boston went for the Lemke.\textsuperscript{125} In the year’s congressional race, thirty-five thousand people supported the

\textsuperscript{122}“Priest Talks to Crowd of 27,000,” \textit{Boston Globe}, 12 October 1936.

\textsuperscript{123}Trout, \textit{Boston, the Great Depression}, 291


\textsuperscript{125}Trout, \textit{Boston, the Great Depression}, 292.
Coughlinite candidate who was opposing Rep. John McCormack, although McCormack still won handily. 126

Henry Cabot Lodge, Republican candidate for Senator, tried to capitalize on the Democrats’ problems. In particular, he moved to the left, adopting liberal positions on labor, social security, and relief. Lodge also reached out to ethnic voters who had traditionally been shut out of the G.O.P.’s ranks. In private, Lodge told his friends that the political situation in Massachusetts consisted of three groups: the Irish who voted Democratic, the Anglo-Saxons who voted Republican, and a third group of miscellaneous ethnics such as Polish and Italian-Americans who were excluded from both parties but who held the balance of power. 127 Lodge actively wooed that third group in 1936. He spoke French to French Canadians and Italian to Italian Americans. He told a Polish group that Poles had twice saved European civilization, first from Islam and later from Communism, and that they should be proud of their “racial customs and tongues” because “such things contribute to the beauty of the nation.” 128 He also used foreign policy as a political tool: speaking to an Italian-American group he denounced “the unnatural attitude which was expressed last winter in connection with the Ethiopian expedition – an affair which was certainly none of our business.” 129


127 1937 Diary, Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 August 1937 entry, Moffat Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.


129 “Lodge Denounces Deal Foreign Policy,” Boston American, 26 May 1936.
The teachers’ oath was a significant issue in the campaign. Lodge supported the teachers’ oath, much to the surprise of his constituents in Beverly, Massachusetts. A staunchly Republican, predominantly Yankee town where William Howard Taft and Henry Frick had summered, Beverly was not populated by people clamoring for a loyalty oath. In fact, one astonished resident told Lodge that he had “taken it for granted that a representative from Beverly would of course favor its repeal.” “Surely you know,” the constituent said, “that the educators as a body were against the law, that whenever church sentiment was expressed it was unfavorable, that organized labor declared for its repeal, and that all circles of intelligent, liberal or cultured people deplored it.” Lodge nonetheless continued to support the oath, probably calculating that his position would gain more votes than it would lose in a state-wide race, particularly among those ethnics he was attempting to woo. Curley, meanwhile, faced intense opposition from teachers union because of his support for the oath. In reply, Curley went on the offensive, falsely accusing the union of voting to send aid to the Communists in Spain. In the end, Lodge defeated Curley by a few thousand votes, fewer than Thomas O’Brien received as the third party candidate. Curley assumed that O’Brien’s votes came from his own constituents and therefore cost him the election.

In the governor’s race, Democrat Charles Hurley won easily. Hurley was not a New Dealer. He expressed his disdain for “modern liberalism” and, as Governor, would repeatedly come into conflict with the Roosevelt administration. Almost immediately

130 Herman Johnson to Lodge, 10 April 1936, folder: unlabeled correspondence, carton 40, Lodge papers, MHS.

131 “Second Attempt Made for Labor to Back Curley,” Boston Transcript, 6 August 1936.

after becoming governor, Hurley publicly rejected the president’s personal plea to help pass an amendment to the constitution to ban child labor. In a letter, which he released to the media, Hurley decried the “staggering grant of power” which the amendment would grant to the federal government and expressed his fear that such power might be abused. “It is not too fantastic to visualize,” Hurley said, that such a law could result in “compulsory military training, involuntary work on public projects, forced attendance in concentration camps, restriction of religious education and similar actualities inimical to the welfare of our youth and repugnant to the traditions of America.”

In retrospect, it is odd that Roosevelt and Hurley carried the same state in the same year as members of the same party, since they represented totally different ideologies. But their concurrent elections demonstrate the complexity of the Democratic Party in the Bay State in the 1930s. On the one hand, Roosevelt was extremely popular and Bostonians seemed to support his economic policies. On the other the hand, Boston’s Catholics seemed fearful of the growth of a secular, centralized state.

**Epilogue**

In 1937, opponents of the teachers’ oath launched another attempt to it. This time the oath’s opponents avoided the confrontations that had characterized the previous year’s attempt. This low profile approach, combined with large increases in Republican legislators during the previous election, resulted in the legislature passing the repeal bill. Hurley quickly vetoed it. “Repeal now,” he claimed, “would encourage certain vicious minorities whose motives and conduct are inimical to, and destructive of, the principles

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upon which this Republic was founded.” According to Hurley, the opponents of the loyalty oath were “small groups of persons, among whom the very idea of God is repugnant.” The oath is “complimentary,” he insisted, “in that it recognizes the teaching profession as a responsible and potent agency in charting the standards and habits of our people.”

Tom Dorgan, who had lost the previous year’s election for the state legislature and was dedicating himself fully to protecting the oath, claimed that Hurley’s decision “justifies the stand taken by leading patriotic organizations and outstanding members of the clergy in their convictions of the necessity of the retention of the teachers’ loyalty oath.” Hurley’s veto, said Dorgan, was “a reflection of the courage, patriotism and unswerving loyalty to the traditions of democratic America manifested by a Governor who knows not the meaning of the word retreat.”

In the winter of 1937-1938, the Massachusetts legislature convened a special commission to examine the possible presence of subversive organizations in the commonwealth. The hearings became something of a spectacle: one legislator butchered Marx by asking a Communist witness about the “Boogwazzies,” while another legislator denounced a witness as a “paganist.” Committee members also spent a significant amount of time debating whether swearing in Communists was effective since they did not believe in God and might lie anyway. Perhaps the most infamous moment came

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134 *Boston Globe*, 1 April 1937.

135 *Boston Globe*, 1 April 1937.
when Senator Burke, described by the *New Republic* as representing “the Vatican on the Commission,” asked a witness if he planned “to liquefy the church.”\(^{136}\)

The fear of “subversion” continued to influence Boston politics for years to come, with the Spanish Civil War and events in Germany simply inflaming emotions. Governor Hurley frequently claimed during these crises that “public happenings” in Spain had vindicated his decision to veto the oath repeal. Hurley, in fact, went a step further, calling for censorship of textbooks in 1938. The Spanish Civil War also created drama within the school committee in 1939. A group of students from Roxbury Memorial High School who had gathered to discuss the war under the auspices of the American Student Union were chastised by the headmaster, who threatened to withhold their diplomas for “entering an alliance against the government” by “listening to those who themselves do not believe in God…and are striving to overthrow this country which, under God, is the safest place…to live.”\(^{137}\) City councilman Joseph Lee Jr., a member of a prominent Brahmin family, seized the occasion to castigate Catholic politicians for aiding and abetting the “Rome-Berlin axis” which prompted the rest of the school committee to denounce Lee as a communist, threaten his impeachment, and send a letter of commendation to the headmaster of Roxbury High. Lee’s cause was not helped when media reports surfaced that he had dismissed the tenants of one South Boston neighborhood as “low-grade Irish, Poles, and Lithuanians.”\(^{138}\)


\(^{137}\) Boston School Committee Minutes, 6 February 1939.

\(^{138}\) Trout, *Boston, the Great Depression*, 272.
Meanwhile, the legislature’s Special Commission to Investigate the Activities within this Commonwealth of Communistic, Fascist, Nazi and Other Subversive Organizations, led by Senator Sybill Holmes, finally delivered its report in May 1938. Only 29 of its 580 pages were dedicated to the threat of fascism, despite strong evidence of fascist activity in Boston. The remainder of the report focused on the threat that communism posed. The Special Commission’s final report concluded that Communists were “implacable enemies of all organized religion, whether of the Old or New Testaments.”139 Drawing upon secret surveillance by the National Guard as well as Red Squad files from across Massachusetts, the report spent more than 500 pages detailing CP activity in the state. It also laid out a comprehensive agenda for combating communism through a series of twelve bills which sought, among other things, to ban the Communist Party from the ballot and create a Division of Citizenship to investigate foreign radicals. Such a commission predated the House Un-American Activities Committee, but Martin Dies soon gathered his share of notoriety and popularity in the Bay State, as would Senator McCarthy in the postwar era. Through the 1950s, anticommunism therefore continued to thrive in the Boston area.

In the battles against communism, education and childhood issues continued to be touchstone issues. Again and again, Boston Catholics expressed concern that Christian children were being threatened by atheism, materialism, and “foreign” ideologies like Communism and Fascism. Again and again, they complained about government

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139 Heale, *McCarthy’s Americans*, 166.
intrusion into the realm of family life, particularly the raising of children. And again and again, Boston Catholics criticized liberals for acting in a radical manner.

Foreign events were critical in shaping the response of Bostonians to these local concerns during the 1930s. From the beginning of the decade, developments in Mexico inflamed the fears of Boston Catholics and stiffened their resolve to resist communist subversion in the schools. To be sure, a history of prejudice against Catholics in Boston, prior struggles over the education system, and the recent efforts of the Klan to pass oppressive laws in other states played a role as well. But such concerns were given a more ominous and threatening air as a result of the development of mandatory public school systems in Russia and Mexico which prohibited religion, taught a Marxist view of scientific materialism, and violently oppressed the Church. Suddenly, it was not a matter of combating a few thousand, or even million, Klansmen, but a matter of fighting worldwide forces arrayed against the Catholic way of life.

As the same time, support for New Deal liberalism gradually waned among Boston Catholics. While liberal Republicans migrated towards President Roosevelt, some Irish and Italian voters began voting for the GOP. Prominent Irish Democrats like Governor Charles Hurley and Senator David Walsh became openly hostile towards the New Deal. Moderate Republicans like Henry Cabot Lodge won elections by wedding support for liberal programs like unionization and social security with cultural conservatism and opposition to liberal internationalism.
CHAPTER THREE: DETROIT

In the fall of 1938, as Michigan Governor Frank Murphy was running for reelection, he came under attack for being a communist sympathizer. A close friend and political ally of the President, Murphy possessed a sparkling resume as former Mayor of Detroit and Governor of the Philippines. Many analysts thought of him as the consummate New Dealer whose political successes and failures were bellwethers of New Deal liberalism. But in 1938, Murphy was seen as suspect because of his close relationship with organized labor and left-wing activists. In particular, anticommunists saw his endorsements from the United Automobile Workers (UAW) and the Communist Party as definitive proof of Murphy’s Communist leanings. Although Murphy was a devout Catholic, he was criticized by other Catholics who viewed his associations with radicals as anathema. His political opponents played upon such Catholic concerns to undercut Murphy’s base.

Murphy’s friend Arthur Maguire, a prominent Catholic layperson in Detroit, warned Murphy that such propaganda could be damaging within Detroit’s Catholic community. An endorsement from the Communist Party, he said, was the ultimate “political curse as far as Catholics are concerned,” given that American Catholics still had “fresh in their minds the tragic picture of nearly 15,000 priests slaughtered in Spain” and “the rape of many nuns.” Maguire believed it vital that Murphy not only
distance himself from the Communist Party but also establish his opposition to Communism in general. Writing to Archbishop Mooney, Maguire commented that he was “shocked” by the “propaganda being used, especially among the Catholic people to make it appear that Governor Murphy is in great sympathy with the ‘Reds.’” Murphy and Maguire also visited the Archbishop together to personally assure the prelate that the accusations against Murphy were false. The Archbishop, for his part, agreed to publish a couple of Murphy’s speeches in The Michigan Catholic, although he did not formally endorse Murphy. Maguire later thanked Mooney for publishing the speeches, although he also threw in a jab against Catholic defectors from Murphy's camp. They were akin to “reactionary Catholics in Spain,” claimed Maguire, in that they “took all hope out of the hearts of the Common people,” which he claimed “was one of the main causes of the Spanish Civil War.”

The incident illustrates some of the central dynamics of the Catholic community. In the first half of the decade, there was wide support among Catholics, and even non-Catholics, for a program of “social justice.” The Catholic Social Justice movement was given official papal blessing in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII’s Rerum Novarum and forty years later by Pope Pius XI. The Church was highly critical of unfettered capitalism and the damage inflicted upon society by the modern industrial system. While the Church therefore called for social reform, Catholics debated the extent and form of those reforms,

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1 Maguire to Murphy, 12 October 1938, roll 43, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
2 Maguire to Mooney, 8 October 1938, roll 43, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
4 Maguire to Mooney, 6 November 1938, roll 43, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
debates which were energized by the Great Depression. For some, the call for social justice was a radical critique of American society and the American economic system. For others, it was simply a call for progressive reforms to protect the downtrodden in society and address the stark inequalities that industrialization had produced. Father Charles Coughlin’s rise to national prominence thrust Catholics teachings on social justice into the national consciousness. The phrase became Coughlin’s trademark and the name of his political organization, The National Union of Social Justice, and his newspaper, Social Justice.5

Although the call for social justice was open to interpretation, its popularity in Detroit suggested that many Catholics agreed that substantial reforms were needed to protect the working-class residents of Michigan. Over time, however, Catholics in Detroit became divided on the question of how to best respond to the social and political upheavals of the late 1930s. Some, like Frank Murphy, attempted to work for change with a broad coalition of reformers, including labor activists, socialists, and even some communists. Other Catholics viewed any associations with radicals as inherently suspect. Both sides had their views shaped by international developments. For folks like Maguire, events in Spain were the result of Catholics ignoring the legitimate concerns of the masses and blocking much needed social reform. For many other Catholics, however, developments in Spain and Mexico were clear proof of the fundamental danger that

emanated from godless ideologies. The conflicts of the 1930s polarized the community, forcing Catholics throughout the city, and indeed the nation, to make a decision about whether they should collaborate with the efforts of the fledgling Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to unionize the city’s workers.

**Detroit’s Catholic Community**

The Catholic community in Detroit was large and diverse. Detroit had traditionally been far more welcoming of immigrants than Boston had been. While Boston’s Brahmins actively discouraged and persecuted Irish immigrants in the 1840s, Michigan’s leaders sought to attract immigrants to the state, an area only a few years removed from being the frontier. Michigan set up an immigration office in New York to attract arriving immigrants. Large numbers of German, Dutch, and Irish immigrants settled in Michigan in the mid-19th century. The wave of new immigrants which hit America in the late 19th century brought hundreds of thousands of newcomers to Michigan and its largest city, Detroit. By 1930, Michigan had roughly 850,000 first-generation immigrants, a large percentage of them in Detroit, where the rapidly growing automobile industry attracted huge numbers of workers. More than a quarter of the city’s population, in fact, was foreign born. An influx of Eastern European immigrants also boosted the size of the Catholic diocese of Detroit, had consisted of 725,000

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Catholics by the onset of the Great Depression, a figure representing just under half of the city’s total population.\(^8\)

Although the diocese of Detroit, like almost all dioceses in America, was dominated by a predominately Irish hierarchy, Polish, Italian, Lithuanian, Hungarian and Slovak parishes thrived. In that respect, Detroit’s Catholic community was far more ethnically heterogeneous than the Boston archdiocese, although Detroit Catholics were just as conservative as Boston Catholics in many respects. The recent immigrants from Eastern Europe were perhaps more open to labor radicalism than their counterparts in Boston, but Leslie Tentler, author of the official history of the archdiocese, has pointed out that some of those Eastern European immigrants remained isolated in ethnic neighborhoods, speaking a separate language, holding on to traditional values, and maintaining an “intensely parochial, almost tribal, view of the world.”\(^9\) That parochial worldview often clashed with the sort of liberalism that leading New Dealers espoused. While most Detroit Catholics did speak English and were not nearly as isolated at the groups Tentler described, they too often appeared “ambivalent about the secular, rationalist underpinnings of New Deal reform.”\(^10\)

Much like Cardinal O’Connell in Boston, Detroit’s Catholic hierarchy did little to dissuade their flock from parochialism. From 1918 to 1937, Bishop Michael Gallagher presided over the diocese. Gallagher was, by many accounts, “an abrasive and impetuous

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man, and inclined to conspiratorial, even apocalyptic, views on history and politics.”

His temperament demonstrated itself in many forms. Most obviously, Gallagher became the patron and protector of Father Charles Coughlin. Gallagher encouraged Coughlin as he built up his media empire, supported him when he entered the political realm in 1936, and shielded him when prominent Catholic leaders such as Cardinal O’Connell and Cardinal Mundlein criticized Coughlin’s behavior as unbecoming of a Catholic priest. Gallagher also led an effort to combat communist subversion in his diocese. In one instance, Gallagher created a Catholic youth organization because he believed that without a proper outlet “Catholic boys … will drift into indifferentism or even communism.” After all, he claimed, “the revolutions in Russia, Spain and even Mexico were led by youths.”

Gallagher’s parochialism was not completely unwarranted. The Ku Klux Klan was extraordinarily strong in Detroit in the 1920s, almost taking control of the city’s government. It is worth noting again that Coughlin’s radio career started when he went on the air to make an impassioned speech against the Klan. Michigan’s religious, ethnic, and racial minorities continued to face threats after the Klan’s collapse. In the early 1930s, an organization called The Black Legion harassed many of the same groups as had the Klan. The Legion claimed 200,000 members and was responsible for at least fifty-seven killings before media attention and judicial investigations caused the organization to collapse in 1936.

Reports of the Black Legion, combined with the recent history of

11 Tentler, Seasons of Grace, 300.
12 Gallagher quoted in Tentler, Seasons of Grace, 430.
13 Rubenstein and Ziewacz, Michigan, 212.
Klan success, understandably caused anxiety and fed conspiracy theories among minority communities in the city.

When Bishop Gallagher passed away in 1937, he was replaced by Bishop Edward Mooney, who was elevated to Archbishop when the status of the diocese was changed in 1937. Mooney was more liberal on economic matters than Gallagher. But he was still parochial in many respects, a perspective Tentler attributes to “cultural isolation” and limited experience with non-Catholics.14 Although Mooney was less supportive of, and in fact critical of, Coughlin, his views and attitudes towards subversion, liberalism, and even other faiths was not all that different from Gallagher’s, nor was his response to international events.

Catholics in Detroit responded to international events in much the same way as Catholics in Boston and other cities: opposing recognition of the Soviet Union, protesting Mexican repression of the Church, and supporting Franco in the Spanish Civil War. The Detroit Diocesan Union of Holy Name Societies developed in 1920 to combat a Michigan law that sought to ban parochial grammar schools throughout the state; when that law was defeated, the union expanded its concerns.15 By the early 1930s, it was demanding that the United States break diplomatic relations with Mexico. In the last year of the decade, the Union gathered a reported 175,000 signatures on petitions calling for the arms embargo to be maintained against Spain’s Loyalist government.16

14 Tentler, Seasons of Grace, 338.

15 Tentler, Seasons of Grace, 428.

16 Tentler, Seasons of Grace, 490.
The Triumphs and Struggles of Labor

By the time Mooney became bishop in 1937, Detroit had been struggling through the Depression for almost eight years. The crash had hit Detroit harder than most cities. Between 1929 and 1932, the auto industry collapsed, with roughly half of all auto workers laid off. By 1932, unemployment in the city stood at forty percent, with one third of all Detroit families having no source of income.17 Facing such a desperate plight, workers began to organize into a number of fledgling unions.

One group of workers was drawn to Father Coughlin. In the early 1930s, Coughlin’s radio listeners heard him say that “laws are written to safeguard rights and not to protect privileges” and “Congressmen are elected to represent the welfare of the many and not the greed of the few.”18 Coughlin frequently spoke out in support of autoworkers, even telling a congressional committee in 1930 that Henry Ford’s abuse of his workers was radicalizing them and that Ford was therefore the “greatest force” for communism in “the world.”

Given his interest in labor’s cause, Coughlin jumped at the chance to support a group of Chrysler workers when they set out to form a union, the Automotive Industrial Workers’ Association (AIWA) in 1935. Coughlin’s endorsement boosted the credibility of the fledgling union among the many Polish Catholic workers at Chrysler, and the union made a point of thanking “our advisor and supporter Charles E. Coughlin” for his help. Its leaders often met at Coughlin’s home and asked his advice. For this reason, the

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AIWA became known throughout Detroit as “Coughlin’s union.”19 The American Federation of Labor had also been developing a union, the United Automobile Workers, in Detroit’s auto factories. In 1936, the two unions merged and folded into the fledgling CIO. Coughlin blessed the merger, declaring, “There can be but one for success.”20 AIWA officials Richard Frankensteen and R.J. Thomas thereafter became prominent figures in the UAW, where they continued to promote their vision of social justice. Within months, however, Coughlin turned against the union that he had helped form.

While labor unions set about organizing the autoworkers of Michigan, the state also went through a political transformation, transitioning from a solidly Republican state to one that was becoming increasingly Democratic. In 1930 Frank Murphy was elected Mayor of Detroit after the previous mayor, Charles Bowles, was recalled due to a series of scandals. Murphy set about alleviating the plight of the unemployed in Michigan’s largest city. His programs for providing relief and public works jobs for the unemployed became models of liberal governance. Liberalism also extended beyond the city limits. In 1932 Franklin Roosevelt won the state, the first time a Democrat had won Michigan since 1892. Despite continued high unemployment rates, Roosevelt again won Michigan in 1936, with an even higher percentage of the vote. In Coughlin’s home state, his National Union for Social Justice was limited to only 4% of the 1936 vote and Roosevelt defeated Alfred Landon by more than 317,000 votes.21 FDR won Wayne Country

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20 Jefferys, Management and Managed, 67.

(Detroit) by 214,000 votes and the remaining areas of the state by a total of more than 100,000, an impressive accomplishment for a liberal in predominantly Republican rural areas. The magnitude of his victory was a clear indicator of the personal appeal Roosevelt held for Americans in the midst of crisis.

Roosevelt’s landslide victory in Michigan was not a solitary one, as Frank Murphy was also elected governor of Michigan in 1936. Murphy’s election was followed nationally as Murphy was known to be a friend of the president and was widely considered to be “a New Dealer among New Dealers.” Like Roosevelt, Murphy benefitted from strong ties to a growing labor movement. The Democrats’ victories in 1936 meant that the fledgling labor unions would have powerful friends in high places. Immediately after his election, Murphy told William Green, president of the AFL, that the election would “mark a new day for labor in Michigan.”

Murphy had been a friend of Coughlin’s since the 1920s when Coughlin first arrived in the diocese and Murphy was still a judge. As the Depression developed, the two worked together to push for the cause of social justice. Coughlin endorsed Murphy’s candidacy for mayor, promising that Murphy would feed “the poor.” According to acquaintances, the two were “constantly together” during the early 1930s as they sought to combat the damages wrought by the Great Depression. Reportedly, Murphy even helped draft some of Coughlin’s speeches. Both were strong supporters of Roosevelt’s

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22 Fine, Murphy: New Deal Years, 283.
23 Fine, Murphy: New Deal Years, 253.
24 Fine, Murphy, New Deal Years, 435.
25 Fine, Murphy, New Deal Years, 255.
in 1932 and even after a rift developed between Roosevelt and Coughlin, Murphy continued to serve as Roosevelt’s emissary to the Radio Priest. But while Coughlin and Murphy were united in the early 1930s by their shared commitment to social justice, their approaches diverged in the middle of the decade, when the CIO rose to prominence in the city.

Shortly after Murphy was elected, auto workers at General Motors’ plants in Flint launched a sit-down strike against the auto maker, the world’s largest manufacturing corporation. On December 30, 1936, workers occupied Fisher #1, refusing to leave until GM negotiated a contract with the United Automobile Workers. The workers’ dramatic actions put the newly elected governor in a very difficult position. Breaking with decades of precedent, Murphy refused to take sides against the strike and adamantly refused to send in the National Guard to remove the strikers. Instead, the governor volunteered his services as a mediator and tirelessly worked to forge a settlement. Unable to dislodge the workers, General Motors came to an agreement on February 11, 1937. Forty days after they had occupied their plants, the strikers won the right to union representation.

The UAW’s stunning success in Flint touched off a wave of labor activism, as workers throughout the country sought to emulate the Flint strikers.26 By mid-June there had been more than 170 sit-down strikes across the nation. In Detroit, The Detroit Labor News encouraged its readers to strike “while the iron is hot, never resting, never stopping.” It was not just the automobile industry that was hit by the strikes. On February 27, one hundred female workers sat down in F.W. Woolworth and Company.27

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27 Fine, Murphy: New Deal Years, 327.
The Crowley-Milner department store, the Book-Cadillac Hotel, the Fort Selby hotel, and Stoufer’s restaurant were just some of the service establishments that were hit by dramatic sit-down strikes. The strikes became so widespread that *The Detroit News* suggested that sit-down strikes had replaced baseball as the new national pastime.

The sit-down strikes spurred a massive wave of unionization that pushed the UAW to unprecedented heights: within a year the union had 400,000 members.\(^{28}\) The UAW was overwhelmed with letters asking for help organizing workers, so much so that union officials started to grant temporary charters to non-automotive unions until new CIO-affiliated unions could be created to meet the demand.\(^{29}\) The CIO, meanwhile, grew to represent four million workers, seemingly becoming, in the words of Philip Murray, “the dominant labor force in this nation.”\(^{30}\) Even the CIO’s rival, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) benefited from, and encouraged, the wave of strikes. Labor seemed ascendant and the vision of economic liberalism that New Dealers and labor leaders had espoused seemed victorious.

But the sit-downs provoked less enthusiastic responses among many residents of the Motor City -- the “seething centre” of the phenomenon, according to *Time Magazine*. Nationwide, Gallup polls indicated that sixty-seven percent of Americans thought that sit-down strikes should be illegal.\(^{31}\) Locally, opposition might not have been that high, but


there was substantial opposition to the new technique. Employers were understandably worried that the tactic might be used against them. The owner of one department store even hired undercover security agents to monitor the entrances and keep an eye out for potential sit-down strikers. Many Detroiters assumed that the strikers were “outsiders.” Politicians and policemen claimed to have evidence proving outside influence. In one instance, Governor Murphy, who had once served as a judge, found an ex-convict whom he had previously sent to jail on forgery charges participating in a sit-down strike at the Frank and Seder department store even though the man did not work there. That incident prompted Murphy to condemn “professional sit-down strikers” who were intruding in situations that were none of their business and engaging in a "form of banditry."

As wild rumors swirled through the city, many residents became more and more concerned, assuming that the strikes would trigger violence. Middle class housewives reportedly began to avoid trips downtown while some residents began to stock up on canned goods in preparation for the worst. Religious leaders also spoke out against the new tactics. A Michigan Catholic editorial called for “the leaders of the new mass organization movement” to “enforce discipline among the fringe of reckless and communistic followers who are stampeding larger groups into action ultimately harmful to labor as well as to public welfare.” Just a few months earlier, during the Flint strike, public support for the strikers had been so strong that Father Coughlin’s newspaper, Social Justice, declared that “there is no jury in America that will vote unanimously

32 “Everybody’s Doing It,” Time Magazine, Monday 29 March 1937

against the strikers.” By the middle of 1937, however, many Detroiter were turning against the sit-down strikers, who they began to view as radical and dangerous.  

The sit-down strikes polarized the political scene, locally and nationally. While many citizens, in Detroit and throughout the nation, found concepts such as social justice appealing, the tactics of labor activists were far more controversial. Many liberal Democrats embraced the fledgling CIO, but many other Americans found the new labor militancy to be frighteningly reminiscent of developments in Europe. In California, for instance, Hiram Johnson, a well-known Progressive who had run as Teddy Roosevelt’s Vice-President in 1912 and had embraced Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal in 1933, declared that the wave of sit-down strikes was “the most ominous thing in our national economic life today.” Johnson warned, “If the Sit-Down strike is carried on with the connivance or the sympathy of the public authorities, then warning signals are out, and down that road lurks DICTATORSHIP.” “There awaits,” he declared, “another Hitler and there lurks in the shadows another Mussolini.”  

Leading opponents of the sit-down strikes became vocal critics of Governor Murphy. They laid blame for the copycat strikes at the governor’s feet. Pointing to Murphy’s refusal to send in the National Guard to crush the Flint sit-down strike, opponents claimed Murphy had given succor to the radical element behind the strikes. One such critique came from the Dean of Students at the University of Detroit, a Catholic college. Rev. Fr. Joseph A. Luther declared the sit-down strikes a communist plot and

34 “Auto Owners Refuse to Face Wage Evils; Face Shut-Downs”, Social Justice, 4 January 1937.

35 “Everybody’s Doing It,” Time Magazine, Monday 29 March 1937

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exclaimed that “Governor Murphy should have a little more backbone and less wishbone.”  

Murphy acknowledged the critics who “sneered at [the Murphy administration] as ‘supine’ and ‘cowardly’ … an abettor of Communism…guided by political ambition.”  

But he claimed his critics were wrong, “blinded by narrow adherence of precedent and legal technicalities.”  

“Force alone,” Murphy declared, “would have emptied those plants, but force would have meant bloodshed and probably loss of life, and government in Michigan would today have been thought of as a horrible, oppressive thing which coldly ignored human values and demanded human life as the price of its own ruthless supremacy.”  

“Better and more lasting results,” he argued, “are often achieved by the application of moral pressure and emphasis on moral and spiritual values than by resort to physical force.”  

Murphy also addressed the issue of the sit-down strikes at a commencement speech at the University of Detroit, a Catholic institution. Acknowledging that the “unrest and outbursts” might seem “puzzling” and perhaps even “regrettable,” Murphy nonetheless told the crowd that “in their deepest meaning they are not undemocratic, they are not un-American….let us try, in the spirit of Christian idealism to understand what this movement has as its governing motives.”


39 Frank Murphy, “Industrial Peace,” The Christian Front, November 1937, 157

40 Address at commencement of University of Detroit, 8 June 1937, roll 143, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
While he defended the strikes, Murphy also made a public statement about the need for law and order. “When the authority of governmental agencies is continually flouted or defied,” he said, “confidence in government is impaired, and outraged citizens prepare to take the law into their own hands; democratic rule is endangered and the way is prepared for the rule of mobs or dictators.” The statement did nothing to silence his critics, who continued to argue that mob rule, certainly seen as a dangerous thing in the 1930s, was developing as a result of his weak response to the strikes. *Time Magazine* even went so far as to call Murphy “the Kerensky of the Sit-Down.”

With the media and much public opinion swinging against the strikes, authorities began to crack down on strikers. Detroit mayor James Couzens ordered the police to allow peaceful strikes but to break strikes by outside agitators and remove the “total strangers.” With that kind of leeway, Police Chief Heinrich Pickert launched a series of police raids on sit-downs throughout the city, breaking up strikes and arresting strikers. The Governor supported Pickert’s raids as necessary to uphold the authority of government, a clear sign of the enormous pressure Murphy was feeling from the strikers’ opponents.

Still union organizers pressed on, eager to test their newfound might in the political realm. At the height of a sit-down phenomenon, in March 1937, the CIO held a massive rally in downtown Detroit’s Cadillac Square to protest police action against strikers. An estimated 150,000 people heard Leo Kryczki, CIO activist and Socialist

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41 “Everybody’s Doing It,” *Time.*

42 “Murphy Pleads for Obedience to Law; Chrysler Men Ignore Ouster Order” *Detroit Times*, 17 March 1937; “Everybody’s Doing It,” *Time.*

Party member, and Homer Martin, president of the UAW, urge them to vote for labor candidates in the next elections. The *Labor News* declared that “Labor had made its Declaration of Independence.” Labor leaders subsequently made plans to enter the Detroit municipal elections with a slate of candidates for the nine-member city council.

Labor leaders initially called for leading members of the UAW, CIO, and AFL to run on a united slate. The city government of Detroit operated on a non-partisan system; there were no official party nominees and party labels were not provided on the ballots. Free of the restrictions that exist in most other cities, the labor unions could run their own candidates for city offices without having to worry about winning primaries or party backing. Labor leaders estimated that they could generate 300,000 votes from union members and their families, more than enough to elect a majority of city council members.44 Once they controlled the council, they could put an end to police repression.

The CIO put together a group of candidates: Tracy Doll, Richard Frankensteen, Walter Reuther, Maurice Sugar, and R.J. Thomas. Besides strong supporters of the CIO, some of the candidates also had strong credentials as left-wing activists. Reuther was a committed socialist who had spent a significant amount of time traveling in the Soviet Union, studying its labor system. Sugar was a lawyer well-known for defending Communist clients and was clearly sympathetic with the Communist cause. These left-wing candidates were naturally viewed with suspicion by many Detroiter. In addition, divisions quickly developed within the labor community of Detroit, as the national war between the AFL and CIO threatened to tear apart the fragile alliance in Detroit. Finally,

Francis Martel, leader of the Detroit and Wayne County Federation of Labor, withdrew his support from the slate.\textsuperscript{45}

Despite the internal conflicts, CIO leaders entered the election excited by their prospects. Eli Oliver, the national chairman of Labor’s Non-partisan League, the political arm of the CIO, stated, “We consider the Detroit election to be an indication of what can be done in every industrial city in America where labor is properly organized for political action.”\textsuperscript{46} Though the break threatened to deprive the Labor Slate of the votes of the 35,000 union men the AFL represented, as well as their family and friends, the leaders of the political movement were still confident of their chances in the city council election. CIO officials, however, believed that they did not have the numbers to run a candidate for mayor and would therefore have to ally themselves with one of the current candidates. They settled on Judge Patrick O’Brien, although labor leaders later admitted that they had no idea “why he was chosen and who chose him.”\textsuperscript{47}

O’Brien was a liberal judge with long ties to the Democratic Party. Sixty-nine years old, he had grown up in a mining town in Michigan, put himself through school, became a lawyer, and eventually moved into politics.\textsuperscript{48} A perpetual politician, O’Brien had won election as the state’s Attorney General in 1932 and had extensive connections within the state party. Although he did not fit the mold of the rest of the Labor Slate,

\textsuperscript{45} Nelson, “Autoworkers, Electoral Politics,” 126.


\textsuperscript{47} “A History of the work of the Political Action Committee in the Detroit Municipal Elections 1937,” folder 8, box 11, Maurice Sugar Collection, Walter Reuther Library.

O’Brien was eager to associate himself with the labor movement. While personal political goals may have been part of his calculation, O’Brien also seemed dedicated to the cause of labor. O’Brien, a Catholic, therefore entered into an active association with radicals promoting the Labor Slate.

The mayoral campaign became a bewildering contest. While the CIO supported O’Brien, the AFL supported the sitting president of the Common Council, John W. Smith, a progressive Republican. Smith also had the support of many Democrats, winning endorsements from Murray Van Wagoner, the powerful head of Michigan’s Highway Department, and Lieutenant Governor Leo Nowicki, a prominent Polish-American Democrat. CIO leaders believed that if they defeated Smith in the primary and made the final election a run-off between the liberal O’Brien and the conservative Richard Reading, AFL members and Democrats would have little choice but to vote for O’Brien. In point of fact, they may have overestimated the loyalty of Smith voters to a liberal platform. After Smith lost the primary, AFL leaders, including Martel, backed Reading instead of O’Brien. Martel’s opposition was clearly motivated in part by the competition between the AFL and the CIO. “It is very evident,” Martel declared, “that if he [O’Brien] is elected, the C.I.O. will control the Police Department” and possibly use “force to drive A.F. of L. men off jobs.”49 While most of the AFL followed Martel’s leadership and passed a resolution supporting Reading’s candidacy, some members of the AFL broke off and held their own “rump convention.” At the Wolverine Hotel in Detroit, the AFL dissidents “joined with members of the C.I.O., [and] the Communist

49 “Martel Statement Refers to ‘History’,” Detroit Free Press, 24 October 1937, 1.
Party” in order to endorse Patrick O’Brien as mayoral candidate. Communist involvement, meanwhile, seems to have stoked the concerns of conservative Democrats like Van Wagoner and Nowicki who also choose to back Reading instead of O’Brien, even though O’Brien was a Democrat and Reading a Republican.

Despite the fact that the labor candidates were running for city council, the mayoral race received the majority of the media attention during the campaign. A gray-haired judge who had operated in mainstream politics for decades, O’Brien did not seem to fit the picture of a left-wing radical, despite his whole-hearted embrace of the Labor Slate. Nonetheless, in the campaign propaganda of his opponents, O’Brien became a symbol of the totalitarian menace. When Patrick O’Brien stated in a campaign speech that labor had to "seize the reins of government in every large city in America" and that Detroit would be the example for other cities to follow, opponents seized upon his words as evidence of a conspiracy akin to that in Mexico or Germany. “To seize is to take by force,” explained the Free Press, and “only dictators talk about seizing power” by force. The Free Press insisted that such plots were not only “altogether un-American,” but they were also exactly “what is going on in Europe.”

In contrast to the accusations of radicalism, strategists for the labor candidates attempted to craft a liberal message revolving around the theme of social justice that was central to both liberal and Catholic thought. They also blatantly associated themselves with Roosevelt, campaigning to “Bring the New Deal to Detroit.” One campaign

50 “Martel Statement Refers to ‘History’,” Detroit Free Press, 24 October 1937, 1.


52 “No Grab Wanted,” Detroit Free Press, 28 October 1937.
pamphlet said, "Patrick H. O'Brien is a living example of the spirit of the New Deal." O’Brien declared himself a “part of the Roosevelt-Murphy New Deal.” Another campaign pamphlet asked, “Shall the people or the industrialists rule Detroit? It is essentially the same issue that in the last presidential campaign placed the economic royalists on one side and President Roosevelt and the voters on the other.” Maurice Sugar, when declaring his candidacy for a city council seat, asserted that “the people can no longer be deceived by propaganda of the local Liberty Leaguers who have been running our City in the past,” thereby associating his opponents with Roosevelt’s most vociferous enemies.

When they turned to specific policy proposals, the Labor candidates laid out a concrete, liberal agenda which went further than the New Deal. They called for more hospitals and schools, more outlets for free speech in the form of a city auditorium and a city-owned radio station, affordable housing, and equal rights for African-Americans.

The Labor candidates also focused a lot of ire upon Police Chief Pickert, who they condemned for his intervention in the spring strikes and who they promised to replace

53 1937 election, folder: Detroit; Labor Slate, Walter Reuther Collection, box 6, Walter Reuther Library.
56 “Statement of Maurice Sugar upon filing as Candidate for Council 8/31/27,” folder 21, box 11, Maurice Sugar Collection, Walter Reuther Library.
57 “Our Platform,” Folder: Election, City Council, 1937, Box 2, Frankensteen Papers, Reuther Library. The Labor Slate’s emphasis on the rights of African Americans, along with the resistance they received in that regard, foreshadowed the tumultuous racial conflicts that would engulf Detroit just a few years later. See Thomas Sugrue’s The Crabgrass Roots for more on how racial problems affected the New Deal coalition in Detroit in the 1940s and 1950s.
immediately upon taking power. Sugar even asserted that he was “convinced that the people of this City” do not “want a Hitler as head of their Police department.” 58

Seemingly intimidated by Roosevelt’s formidable numbers the previous year, Reading’s supporters sought to avoid a referendum on the New Deal and keep the focus on the issue of “outsiders” and “radicals” trying to take over the government. Reading supporters ran ads and produced literature which sought to disentangle the campaign from the New Deal. The conservative Detroit News asserted in an editorial that “New Deal issues have nothing to do with City government.” 59 Frank Martel of the AFL even went so far as to say that he was supporting Reading because O’Brien was not enough of a New Dealer: “Pat O’Brien is claiming that his candidacy represents the New Deal. Where was Pat when real exponents of the New Deal were nominating Frank Murphy for governor? He was backing” another candidate in the primary. 60 While such Republican rhetoric clearly demonstrates the popularity of Murphy and Roosevelt within the city, it soon became clear that the President’s popularity was beginning to slip.

Nationwide, Roosevelt’s poll ratings dropped in the aftermath of his failed attempt at packing the Supreme Court and reorganizing the Executive Branch, with even leading Democrats abandoning the President. Conservative Democrats and Republicans charged President Roosevelt with having dictatorial ambitions and pointed to the two

58 “Statement of Maurice Sugar upon filing as Candidate for Council 8/31/27,” folder 21, box 11, Maurice Sugar Collection, Walter Reuther Library.


60 “Martel Statement Refers to ‘History’,” Detroit Free Press, 24 October 1937, 1.
bills as proof. In Michigan, Father Coughlin took a leading role in criticizing both proposals. Coughlin’s efforts were so effective that Representative John Dingall of Detroit wrote to complain to Archbishop Mooney:

> In spite of our attitude and our willingness to counsel and advise with Catholic and other denominational leaders to preserve our collective and individual civic and religious rights we are being made the targets of [Coughlin]… An avalanche of abuse vilification and hatred was heaped upon me because of the erroneous pronouncements of a priest of my own faith and I am helpless to defend myself as I would do most certainly against a layman under similar circumstances….I am helpless in that I cannot inform individually the thousands of people in regard to the real purpose of the legislation or of your frank and clear cut statement regarding it which was read to the membership of the house of representatives.

In the face of such pressure, Senator Prentiss Brown flip-flopped on the court packing and reorganization plans, suddenly opposing both actions. Brown’s actions are a clear indication that public opinion in Michigan was turning against the administration.

Opponents of the Labor Slate began arguing that the candidates were dangerous radicals intent upon imposing a labor dictatorship on the city, and that they were trying to create a political machine that would threaten the “non-partisan” nature of Detroit’s city government. The Free Press warned of “C.I.O. Plans of Conquest,” stating that the CIO’s intention was “to make a conquest of Michigan and its cities….for communistic experimentation.” “Mr. Lewis and his crowd,” the editorial continued, “plot to

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63 Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism*, 220.

establish a tyranny over this state.” In another instance, the *Free Press* referred to CIO organizers as “C.I.O. storm troopers.” The newspaper followed up with an editorial that reported Reading supporters “being beaten up by C.I.O. members for wearing Reading buttons….It is as un-American as any of the tactics used by the dictators of Europe. Your vote Tuesday is your one chance to safeguard your individual liberty.”

The *Free Press*, being well-known as a conservative newspaper, might not have reached many working-class voters, but its message was repeated in other outlets. The *Civic Searchlight*, a publication of the business-oriented Detroit Citizens Council, stated, “Reading….stands for retention of municipal home rule as against interference from outside agencies, whether political or industrial, state or national.” In another instance, *The Searchlight* reported, and the *Free Press* reprinted, “that an organized effort is being made on a national scale to set up a dictatorship in the City of Detroit. This program is made the dominant issue by one organization of union labor, the U.A.W.”

*The Goodwill Ambassador*, another conservative publication which claimed to have a circulation of 15,000, also denounced those who would “stand idly by and allow the affairs of Detroit to become entangled with National politics” and asked, “Shall outside interests dictate the politics of, and interfere with, local governments?” The election, the *Ambassador* declared, “is not a contest between the rank and file of laboring men and

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women within the city; it is a battle being waged by radical leaders who seek to promote
themselves.”

Perhaps most damaging of all, the Labor candidates faced a direct assault from
Father Coughlin, who was still extraordinarily popular in Detroit. Coughlin issued a
statement to the press after the primary stating that Catholicism was incompatible with
the C.I.O. and that he could no more tell a Catholic to support the CIO then he could
“advocate Catholics joining the Mohammedan church or the Knights of Columbus to join
the Masons.” Although Coughlin had blessed the merger of the AIWA and the UAW
only a year earlier, he had become increasingly worried about radicals in the CIO and
UAW. No longer supporting the UAW as a vehicle for social justice, Coughlin now
denounced the CIO as “teeming with Communists from top to bottom.”

Coughlin’s statement was quickly disavowed by Archbishop Mooney, setting off
a mini-crisis in the Detroit Archdiocese. Mooney wrote the papal delegate to the United
States to explain “that Fr. Coughlin’s comparison of Catholics joining the C.I.O. to
Catholics embracing Mohammedanism was calculated to trouble the conscience of many
Catholics in the C.I.O. who had a right to be there and who are fighting communist
influences in the organization.” Mooney soon issued his own press release,

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70 “Goodwill Ambassador,” 1 November 1937, folder: 1937, box 8, Frankensteen Papers, Walter Reuther
Library.

71 Press Release entitled “The Chancery,” folder 1-3, box 1, Mooney Administration – Coughlin Case
Collection, Archdiocese of Detroit Archive.


73 Letter from Mooney to Papal delegate, 29 October 1937, folder 1-2, box 1, Mooney Administration –
Coughlin Case Collection, Archdiocese of Detroit Archive.
Catholicism and Mohammedanism are incompatible on the basis of clearly stated fundamental principles of both. Catholicity and Communism are incompatible on the same basis. But no Catholic Church authority has ever asserted that the C.I.O. is incompatible with Catholicity on the basis of its publicly stated principles — though it is undoubtedly true that there are Communists in the C.I.O. who are making every endeavor to gain control of the organization for Communistic purposes, and it is the conscientious duty of Catholics in the C.I.O. relentlessly to oppose these efforts.  

Richard Frankensteen, a UAW leader, Labor Slate candidate, and committed Catholic, scrambled to portray the Archbishop’s statement as an endorsement of the CIO and the Labor Slate, even going so far as say, “We are in complete accord with your position that Catholics in the UAW should relentlessly oppose the efforts of Communists to gain control of the organization for Communist purposes.” But Coughlin’s attack had shifted the debate about the Labor Slate from questions of economic equality and social justice to questions about the extent of Communist infiltration in the labor movement. Furthermore, although labor leaders interpreted the Archbishop’s statement as an endorsement, Catholic leaders were actually quite cold to the Labor Slate. *The Michigan Catholic* even included, in a prominent place in the October 21st issue, information about Walter Reuther’s links to Communists, the insinuation being that Reuther himself was a Communist.

Amazingly, Coughlin did not stop after Mooney’s rebuttal. Immediately after Mooney issued his press release, and a day after he met with Coughlin personally to ask the priest to quiet down, Coughlin told the city’s newspapers that he would soon be

74 Press Release entitled “The Chancery,” folder 1-3, box 1, Mooney Administration – Coughlin Case Collection, Archdiocese of Detroit Archive.


issuing his rebuttal to Mooney’s statement. Taken aback, Mooney contacted Coughlin and chided him for his behavior. Coughlin then issued a statement to the press that he could not tell his side of the story because his Bishop had silenced him. He simultaneously announced that he would be ending his weekly radio broadcast. Although Mooney did not order Coughlin to stop broadcasting, the implication to the outside world was that Coughlin had been silenced by the Church.\footnote{Tentler, \textit{Seasons of Grace}, 333.}

Hate mail poured into Mooney denouncing him for silencing Coughlin during this moment of crisis, many following the pattern set by Ana Blake Young, whose telegram charged that the “Muzzling of Father Coughlin gives aid and comfort to Communists.”\footnote{Telegram to Mooney from Anna Blake Young, folder 6-2, box 6, Mooney Collection, Archdiocese of Detroit Archives.} Petitions also flowed in to the chancery calling for the Archbishop to allow the Radio Priest to return to the air. The Archbishop responded with letters in which he said the authors must have signed the angry petitions by accident since good Catholics would not sign anything so vicious, especially to an Archbishop. Mooney’s letters led to several apologizes from those chided, including one from the “Loyal Club” in Watertown, MA which meekly replied, “We can offer as our only excuse, our principle devotion to Father Coughlin and the principles he advocates. For any offense we have given and for any disrespect we have shown, we humbly beg your forgiveness.”\footnote{“Loyal Club” to Mooney, 14 January 1938, folder 6-3, box 6, Mooney Collection, Archdiocese of Detroit Archives.} Coughlin was soon back on the air, although with a censor from the Archdiocese looking over each script before broadcast. Although his audience was not as great as it had been when he was on CBS in
the early 1930s, Coughlin continued to have millions of listeners on radio stations throughout the nation.

Even while he was off the airwaves, Coughlin continued to contribute to his newspaper, *Social Justice*, which also attacked the CIO and Labor Slate. The October 18th issue warned that “if he [O’Brien] defeats Reading in the final election, the prediction attributed to President Roosevelt -- 'If Communism breaks in America, it will first manifest itself in the Detroit area' -- will have been fulfilled.” 80 Mooney was well aware of the problem that *Social Justice* posed and insisted that Coughlin publish the Archbishop’s account of the recent controversy in the paper as well as submit the paper to Archdiocesan censorship. Rather than give up control over the paper, Coughlin instead sold *Social Justice* to a friend and supporter who would allow him to wield power behind the scenes. *Social Justice* declaimed status as a Catholic periodical and hence refused to submit to Mooney’s demands. 81 Mooney retaliated by publicly saying that *Social Justice* was no longer a Catholic publication.

Under its new management *Social Justice* continued to promulgate the idea that the CIO was communistic and that the Labor Slate was a threat to the Church and the country. The newspaper even published a prominent article the following week emphasizing the support Bishop Gallagher had given Coughlin in his crusade against Communism in the United States. Even though Mooney obviously outranked the radio priest, Coughlin had the ability to reach many more Catholics than the Archbishop. As

81 Letter from Mooney to Papal delegate, 29 October 1937, folder: 1-2, box 1, Mooney Collection, Archdiocese of Detroit Archives.
late as October 29th a parish priest in Detroit felt the need to make a statement from the pulpit at all Masses explaining that the CIO was not incompatible with Catholicism, that the Vatican encouraged unions, and that the Archbishop had not banned Coughlin from the airwaves. Coughlin had clearly made an impact. His constituency was a strong as ever, so strong, in fact, that Mooney was afraid that if he were too tough with Coughlin it might lead to a schism in the American church, or perhaps even violent outburst from Coughlinites.

Those opposed to the Labor Slate were bolstered by events within the UAW itself. In the summer of 1937, the union’s leadership split. UAW president Homer Martin began to purge those who he viewed as radicals, or perhaps simply as rivals. Arguing that he wanted to ensure “responsible unionism,” Martin denounced his opponents as a communist clique intent on taking control of the union, reassigned some union leaders, and fired others. Martin’s firing of Walter Reuther’s brother Victor was widely perceived as a slap at the city council candidate and was taken by Walter’s critics as proof of his communistic tendencies.

Coughlin, Reading, and other opponents of the Labor Slate jumped on Martin’s statements about a communistic element in the union as proof of their own accusations. Many Catholics supported Martin’s anticommmunist efforts. On October 7, the Michigan Catholic editorialized that Catholic members of the UAW should attend union meetings and support Martin: "By doing this Catholic leaders will be performing a real service to

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82 Letter from “Epiphany Rectory 9903 Mendota Ave Detroit, MI”, folder 1-4, box 1, Mooney Collection, Archdiocese of Detroit Archives.

83 Tentler, Seasons of Grace, 336-7.

the commonwealth as well as to organized labor. Helping the conservative and Catholic members of the UAW to eliminate subversive forces is far more practical than denouncing the organization as Communistic." A week later, the paper argued in an editorial entitled “Oust the Reds!” that Communists should not “rule even a small portion of a union like the United Automobile Workers Union.” Martin was “making an effort to purge it of subversive elements in positions of influence,” the editors insisted, which was arousing “protests among radicals, who raise a clamor out of proportion to their numbers.” A week after that, shortly before the election, the paper noted, “Because Homer Martin is driving some radical out of his union, extreme elements are causing a rumpus and denouncing him as a ‘tyrant.' You can easily guess who is back of the disturbance.”

Prominent Catholic laymen attacked the Labor Slate as well. Responding to rumors that Reading had once been a member of the Ku Klux Klan, John P. O’Hara went on the radio to defend Reading’s reputation. Citing his experience as both a prosecutor and as leader of the Holy Name Society, O’Hara absolved Reading entirely, attacked O’Brien for spreading the charge, and asserted that the real issue of the campaign was “outside interference” from the likes of “Mr. John Lewis.” Likewise, Terry Bannan, a

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86 “Oust the Reds!” *The Michigan Catholic*, 14 October 1937
local leader of the Knights of Columbus, appeared on the radio to denounce O’Brien and the Labor Slate and endorse Reading.\textsuperscript{89}

Labor candidates found themselves on the defensive. In response to attacks on law and order issues, they toned down talk of replacing the police chief. Although they still insisted that Pickert needed to be removed, they insisted they would not merely pick a union man to replace him and, in fact, would select a tough, experienced law man for the job. O’Brien even considered announcing that he would appoint General Pelham Glassford, who had been police chief in Washington D.C. during the 1932 Bonus Army crisis, as his police chief.\textsuperscript{90}

In the face of a wave of attacks against them from Catholic sources, both Frankensteen and O’Brien also felt the need to assert their Catholic credentials. Frankensteen’s supporters issued a brochure entitled “Because We Despise Lies!” which stated, “They say he was born in Moscow and was sent here to lead a Communist state. FACT – He was born in Detroit…attended University of Detroit, graduated from St. Mary’s College, University of Dayton and is a true American\textsuperscript{91} Patrick O’Brien, meanwhile, published a series of campaign ads in The Michigan Catholic. Originally the ads stressed his experience as a prosecutor and his progressive credentials, but as the election drew nearer and the charges against him became more vicious, the stock ad was changed to prominently display the fact that he was a "Member of Visitation Parish," a


\textsuperscript{90} Lovin, “CIO Innovators,” 237-8.

\textsuperscript{91} “Because We Despise Lies!” folder: Election, City Council, 1937, box 2, Frankensteen Papers, Walter Reuther Library.
less than subtle way of promoting his own Catholic credentials.\(^{92}\) While Frankensteen and O’Brien clearly did not see collaboration with the CIO as something incompatible with their faith, the criticism of Father Coughlin and his supporters was clearly taking a toll on them politically.

For his part, Governor Murphy stayed on the sidelines. He was well acquainted with most of the five CIO candidates and his brother had worked for O’Brien. The Labor Slate’s platform was also generally in line with his own. Yet, the stigma of associating with the candidates was so dangerous that Murphy was counseled by advisers, including veteran reporter Carl Muller, to keep his distance, lest he ruin his own reelection chances the following year by tying himself to radicalism.\(^{93}\) Murphy, who was already planning his reelection campaign, allowed only one photo-op with Frankensteen and Sugar. Even during that photo-op, Murphy was careful to avoid any endorsement and made it clear that, as governor, he believed he should stay out of local politics.\(^{94}\)

On election day, the Labor Slate suffered a crushing defeat. O’Brien lost by more than 100,000 votes and all of the labor candidates for the common council failed to crack the top nine and therefore were not elected. Maurice Sugar came in tenth, but his 137,771 votes were twenty thousand less than the ninth place finisher and forty-five thousand less than the eighth-place finisher. Contemporary commentators and historians have pointed out that the results, with all five candidates receiving more than a hundred thousand votes, were actually a pretty impressive foray into politics and could have


\(^{93}\) Fine, *Murphy: New Deal Years*, 482.

served as the base for the formation of a formidable political movement. But the Labor Slate’s showing seemed to indicate the waning power of liberalism in Detroit. The Slate drew tepid support from much of its base and triggered a right-wing reaction from many moderate liberals. Labor leaders admitted that they received little support from the middle class. There was widespread AFL opposition, not only from the federation’s hierarchy but from much of its membership as well. Support from non-automotive CIO unions was also limited. Most telling of all was voter turnout. O’Brien’s 146,000 votes did not even come close to Roosevelt’s margin of victory (214,000) in Wayne County in 1936. Clearly the Labor Slate failed to draw the same level of support as Roosevelt, even though they based the entire campaign around a “New Deal” for Detroit.

The local media interpreted the results as a blow to the CIO. The *Free Press* declared that the results demonstrated “that the people of Detroit intend to keep on running their municipal affairs in their own way without outside interference or dictation, and are not going to let John L. Lewis or anybody else step in as overlord.” In a separate op-ed that same day, the *Free Press* noted that “Mr. Lewis coveted” Detroit because “it was to be his starting point from which to march to Nationwide conquest.” The *Free Press* further interpreted the results as “evidences of growing coldness toward

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98 “The Rebuke was General,” *Detroit Free Press*, 3 November 1937.
the New Deal, which plainly has not added to its popularity by showing flagrant favoritism for the C.I.O. unions."

While commentators have pointed to middle class opposition as the reason for the Labor Slate’s defeat, the strategy of the Labor Slate was never geared towards the middle class. Its goal was to unite and mobilize blue-collar workers and their families. Their failure there was more telling than anything else. Only 38% of labor union members showed up on Election Day. Disinterest was not merely limited to AFL members. Support was lukewarm even from many CIO unions, which provided limited financial support to the campaign and in some cases openly supported Reading. This is not surprising, given the conservative, ethnic character of many of the unions. One local socialist noted, “Most of the thousands of automobile unionists who are providing the mass base of the [Labor Slate] had never been in any labor organization until a few months ago” and, in fact, “many of them followed the Coughlin banners but a short time ago.” Indeed, historian Bruce Nelson argues that many of Homer Martin’s followers in the UAW “had been attracted to Father Coughlin's Catholic variant of populism – especially its resentment of the 'money changers' and its fervent anticommunism.”

These union workers were not likely to vote for radicals in the municipal elections, even if they were linked to the union cause.

99 “The Rebuke was General,” *Detroit Free Press*, 3 November 1937.

100 Lovin, “CIO Innovators,” 236.

101 Seidman in Nelson, “Autoworkers, Electoral Politics,” 141


103 Certainly not all ethnic and Catholic voters were opposed to the Labor Slate. In fact, Polish and Hungarian voters provided the base of support for the Labor Slate. O’Brien won only four of twenty-two
Perhaps the most important aspect of the campaign was the emphasis placed on social justice. Both those on the right and left eagerly sought to appropriate the phrase for their campaigns. Not only had O’Brien and the Labor Slate used the term repeatedly in their campaign materials, but the pro-business Detroit Citizens League used it as well, stating, “Thousands of good Americans whose hearts beat warmly for the rights of men, social justice and a square deal for all classes, including workingmen are convinced, to their surprise and regret, that an organized effort, in the name of social justice, is being made on a national scale to set up a dictatorship in the City of Detroit.”

The Catholic press also interpreted the election results as a demand for social justice. The Michigan Catholic, noting that “leading CIO candidates polled around 150,000 votes” which was “enough to win in an ordinary Detroit election,” stated, “The heavy vote is a warning to do more for adequate housing at reasonable rates and other issues of social justice.”

The popularity of the phrase “social justice” in the political discourse suggests, as The Michigan Catholic noted, that the language of Roosevelt and the New Dealers was still appealing to a large number of Detroit voters.

The phrase “social justice” had another connotation, however. It was the trademark of Father Coughlin, and many of the politicians who utilized the phrase were perhaps actively seeking to appeal to Coughlin’s massive, increasingly reactionary

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audience. The two connotations were not easily separated, as Coughlin’s economic policies were, if anything, more radical than those of Roosevelt by 1937. Many of Coughlin’s followers had been drawn to him because of his economic populism, criticism of unfettered capitalism, and demand for social reforms. By 1937, however, Coughlin’s conception of social justice had also grown to include fears of communism, socialism, and New Deal bureaucracy. When conservatives therefore spoke of “social justice” while also warning of communism, dictatorship, and bureaucratic domination during the municipal elections they seemed to be making a blatant appeal to Coughlin’s supporters. Labor Slate candidates, including O’Brien, were clearly concerned enough about these powerful messages to launch massive counter-attacks, at times trying to defend their positions and even their own Catholicism while at other times distancing themselves from communists and radicals.

The Detroit elections made it clear that “social justice” had a wide base of support and suggested that the majority of voters supported left leaning candidates in regards to economic and social issues and yet were conservative on a number of other issues. What would happen when voters had to choose between these two appeals? Which sense of social justice would be more important?

The Red-Baiting of Frank Murphy

The 1938 gubernatorial campaign thrust these issues to the forefront not only of Michigan politics. Frank Murphy sought reelection in 1938. His opponent was the man he had defeated in 1936, Frank Fitzgerald. Murphy had won in 1936 by just under 49,000 votes, in contrast to Roosevelt who won the state by more than 300,000 votes.
Murphy had done well in Wayne County, however, winning there by more than 119,000 votes and taking 72.8% of the foreign-born vote. 106 During the sit-down strikes, he had become so well known nationwide that his name was being bandied about as a possible presidential candidate in 1940. As a personal friend of the President and the man who had presided over the Flint Sit-Down Strike, Murphy also became a lightning rod for criticism of the New Deal’s ties to labor militancy. Critics throughout the country charged that Murphy’s irresponsible actions and inability to maintain law and order had fostered chaos.

Many members of Michigan’s Democratic Party had always been skeptical of Murphy and indeed the entire New Deal. Traditional, conservative Democrats, they had been turned off by Murphy’s big government approach to state politics. Murphy’s progressive ideology and belief in clean government also alienated many long-time Democrats who believed that patronage was not only a prerogative of those in power, but was in fact vital to maintaining party organization and power. Those Democrats who opposed Murphy coalesced behind William Comstock, the previous Democratic Governor of Michigan, who now formed the Constitutional Democratic Party. Comstock put the matter bluntly: “We don’t like Gov. Murphy, he isn’t our kind of Democrat.” 107 The “we” he spoke of, however, was not a very large group. Though Comstock and other establishment Democrats caused Murphy some problems, they were not powerful enough to block his renomination. Comstock sought to expand his group’s reach by selecting Michigan’s supervisor of the National Union of Social Justice, B.F. Stephenson, as the

106 Fine, Murphy: New Deal Years, 251.
107 Comstock quoted in Fine, Murphy: New Deal Years, 488
nominee of their fledging movement but when Comstock failed to raise enough money to make Stephenson competitive he withdrew.\footnote{Fine, \textit{Murphy: New Deal Years}, 488.}

Other groups also tried to challenge Murphy. Members of Detroit’s Polish community pressured Lieutenant Governor Nowicki to run for the nomination against Murphy. Although 85\% of Detroit Poles had voted for Murphy in the previous election, some were clearly rebelling against his proposed renomination.\footnote{Fine, \textit{Murphy: New Deal Years}, 486.} They too failed to strip the governor of the nomination. After the failure of the Stephenson and Nowicki movements, Democrats next attempted to draft Murray Von Waggoner to run against Murphy, but Von Waggoner decided to wait for a better opportunity; he was elected governor in 1940.\footnote{Fine, \textit{Murphy: New Deal Years}, 487.}

Labor leaders declared their full support for Murphy and promised to do everything in their power to get him elected. But their efforts never quite matched their rhetoric. Although local AFL leader Francis Martel supported him, many AFL members turned away from a man they associated with the CIO insurgency. The UAW, meanwhile, was being torn apart by the infighting that had been growing since Martin’s purge the previous year.\footnote{Fine, \textit{Murphy: New Deal Years}, 491.} Tensions in the union were exacerbated by the recent recession. The CIO did endorse Murphy, but that might have done more harm than good.

As a result of the bad publicity that had resulted from the sit-down strikes, CIO
endorsements were seen as a negative by 55% of voters and as a positive by only 12%.\textsuperscript{112} The State chairman of the Democratic Party even said that he was hoping the CIO would not endorse Murphy because he thought the CIO “offensive to certain people and those boys are the people we want to get.”\textsuperscript{113}

Just as Republicans in Boston had done in 1936, Fitzgerald shifted his politics to the left to take away many of Murphy’s advantages. Fitzgerald campaigned on the need to provide more money to schools, the elderly, and those on relief. He also co-opted the popular program of rural electrification and called for greater investments in hospitals. Fitzgerald even endorsed Doctor Francis Townsend’s plan for a $200 per month, old-age pension, eventually becoming an official “Friend” of the Townsend Movement.\textsuperscript{114}

Fitzgerald also tried to woo ethnic voters to the Republican Party. He openly supported the Democratic Nowicki for Lieutenant Governor instead of his own party’s candidate, Luren Dickinson, in a blatant effort to appeal to Polish and Catholic voters. Fitzgerald also ran ads in Catholic periodicals to appeal to Catholics who might have been nervous about Murphy’s left-leaning tendencies and alleged ties to Communists.\textsuperscript{115}

Those ties ultimately became the key issue of the campaign. On September 29, the \textit{Daily Worker} endorsed Murphy; two days later the Michigan Communist Party did the same.\textsuperscript{116} Republicans used these endorsements to great effect. At their convention

\textsuperscript{112} Fine, \textit{Murphy: New Deal Years}, 491.

\textsuperscript{113} Picard in Fine, \textit{Murphy: New Deal Years}, 492.

\textsuperscript{114} Fine, \textit{Murphy: New Deal Years}, 500-501.

\textsuperscript{115} Fine, \textit{Murphy: New Deal Years}, 512.

\textsuperscript{116} Fine, \textit{Murphy: New Deal Years}, 502.
they said the sit-down strikers had been communists and that Murphy had served as their “benign godfather.” The partisan attacks intensified as the campaign progressed. One Republican campaign pamphlet was titled “Communists Back Murphy in Fight to Turn Michigan Over to Reds.” Another pamphlet said, “Communists have handed the Red Flag to Frank Murphy.” Their “objective is the complete overthrow of the American Republic” and “the first battle to gain this control is being fought by Soviet agents, under immediate orders from Moscow, right here in Michigan on November 8.” The same pamphlet claimed that Communists feared “Frank D. Fitzgerald because these agents of the Soviet know his election means the most telling blow to their conspiracy to seize the government of the United States.” These attacks, simplistic and partisan as they were, dovetailed to a devastating degree with the anticommunist politics surging out of Washington D.C.

Mr. Dies Goes to Detroit

In 1938, Michigan residents, including prominent members of the Detroit Knights of Columbus, requested that the Dies Committee come to Michigan to dig into the details of the sit-down strikes. Rep. Martin Dies (D-TX) made a name for himself as chair of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which spent 1938 attacking New


118 “Communists Will Give Murphy Aid,” roll 110, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

Dealers and New Deal agencies as havens for subversives. With the election approaching, Dies decided to take his act to several battleground states, including Michigan. There the Committee heard testimony from witnesses who testified about communist influence in the schools, as well as from witnesses who talked about communists recruiting members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Those revelations were merely a warm up for the main act, an investigation of the sit-down strikes which had rocked the state during the previous year.

Witnesses appearing before the Committee savaged the Governor for aiding and abetting the communists who allegedly had perpetrated the sit-down strikes. The superintendent of the Detroit Police Department testified that three-quarters of the recent strikes had been communist-inspired and that Murphy had actively encouraged the strikers. Judge Paul Gadola, testifying about the sit-down strike in Flint, claimed that Murphy had interfered with the implementation of his injunction against the strikers. The Flint city manager called Murphy’s actions during the strike “treasonable.” In the heated atmosphere of 1938, such blatant red-baiting, coming with Congress’s seal of approval, threatened to cost Murphy a number of Catholic and ethnic supporters upon whom he was relying for reelection.

Historians have often dismissed the charges of Committee witnesses as, in the words of historian M.J. Heale, “the outrage of a deposed ruling class.” These accusations certainly have their merits, since many witnesses were tied to the state’s Republican Party.


121 Heale, McCarthy’s Americans, 92.
or to the auto companies. For many ethnic, working-class Detroiter, however, the Dies Committee seemed to provide important information about the subversive threats that surrounded them. Ordinary citizens and legislative bodies around the country (state legislatures, city councils, and even some school boards) sent messages of support to Dies and his Committee. Months later, when the Committee’s term had expired, those same groups flooded Congress with letters calling for its continuation. Catholic periodicals trumpeted the Senator’s cause and hailed the Dies Committee for its important role in rooting out subversion. While the Michigan Catholic drew attention to the Dies Committee’s unfair treatment of Frank Murphy, noting that the committee had failed to ask Murphy for his side of the story, the paper also endorsed the committee. The committee, it said, “made a fine beginning in uncovering un-American activities” and the paper “defended” the committee “against the charge of Red-baiting raised against it by Communists.” Social Justice was more exuberant in its praise, even promoting Dies as a presidential candidate.

Murphy and his supporters feared that the committee’s attacks would cost him the election, undermining Murphy’s support among his core constituency of urban ethnics. Murphy’s election in 1936 had depended upon a classic New Deal coalition. If allegations of communist sympathies undermined his support within ethnic communities, Murphy would have a very hard time winning reelection. The Governor dismissed accusations that he was supportive of communists by arguing that such attacks were usually leveled at those “that fight for social justice and economic justice.” Murphy also denied any foreign allegiances and proclaimed that he was “just a hundred per cent

American and nothing else.”¹²³ But Murphy worried about the attacks, which he believed showed that his opponents would “stop at nothing.”¹²⁴ He therefore appealed to prominent figures in the Catholic community such as Arthur Maguire to help him “offset the obscure and vicious Red propaganda.”¹²⁵

For his part, the president interpreted the Committee’s attacks as an offensive against the New Deal. In an unprecedented move, FDR attacked the Congressional Committee for acting irresponsibly. Roosevelt charged that the Committee’s actions were a “flagrantly unfair and un-American attempt to influence an election” and further charged that the Committee hearings were merely a way for enemies of the administration to receive “headlines which they could not otherwise attain.”¹²⁶ Unwilling to openly denounce his party’s leader, Dies claimed the President was “wholly misinformed” and repeated his assertions that “well-known Communists instigated and engineered the sit-down strike” and that Murphy had done nothing to stop them.¹²⁷ Murphy’s opponents, meanwhile, seized upon the President’s statement as further evidence of the administration’s interference in Michigan politics, proof of his dictatorial tendencies. Fitzgerald campaigned against the President’s attempt “to select a Governor for Michigan.”¹²⁸

¹²³ Quoted in Fine, Murphy: New Deal Years, 506.

¹²⁴ Murphy to Maguire, 13 October 1938, roll 43, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Fine, Murphy: New Deal Years, 506.


¹²⁷ Fine, Murphy: New Deal Years, 505.

¹²⁸ Fine, Murphy: New Deal Years, 505.
As the attacks against him mounted, Murphy was put in the difficult position of having to justify his actions during the sit-down strikes almost two years after the fact. Immediately after the accusations were made by the Dies Committee witnesses, Murphy telegraphed the congressman to demand an “immediate opportunity to be heard” in front of the Committee.\(^\text{129}\) When Dies refused, Murphy began to make a series of speeches denouncing Communism and defending his actions. Publicly, he asserted his faith in “the people of Detroit,” who “know the strength of my religious beliefs.” But Murphy was sufficiently concerned to make publicly denying the accusations. “I do not consider myself as having anything in common with the Communist Party,” he declared.\(^\text{130}\) Murphy denounced the Dies Committee as a political tool of his opponents while suggesting that the Committee was a step “toward despotism” and away from democracy.\(^\text{131}\)

As the sit-down strikes became a central issue in the campaign, Murphy attempted to portray himself as a peacemaker. Strict enforcement of the law, he argued, would have led to pitched battles in the street. He also cited the numerous commendations he had received in the aftermath of the strikes, even from some of those who had opposed the sit-downs. “Elsewhere in the country,” Murphy noted, “strikes of far less consequence have ended in bloodshed and the loss of life. Here the greatest strike in history was settled with no violation of civil liberties, no bloodshed, and no destruction of human

\(^\text{129}\) Telegram from Murphy to Dies, 23 October 1938, roll 43, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

\(^\text{130}\) Murphy, Radio Address, 2 November 1938, roll 144, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

Although reasonable and rational, Murphy’s statements did nothing to combat the growing perception that lacked the courage necessary to restore law and order. Even one sympathetic historian described Murphy’s peacekeeping message as indicative of a weak personality.\textsuperscript{133}

Seeking to counter the attacks, Murphy claimed that rather than developing a totalitarian state as critics claimed, liberal government was actually forestalling radical ideologies. “Depression,” he claimed, was “the time when communism and fascism stand at the threshold and is the time when we must be prepared to thrust them back.”\textsuperscript{134} The government, Murphy claimed, had effectively warded off radical advances by providing relief to the poor and support for the unions seeking social justice. Citing statistics regarding the amount of federal funds the Roosevelt administration had provided Michigan, Murphy argued that the New Deal was “a 65-million dollar bulwark against communism and fascism.”\textsuperscript{135} “Democracy,” Murphy declared, was “threatened not so much by the Communist agitator as by economic cruelty and injustice, by widespread and continued unemployment, long hours of work at low wages, denial of the right to organize for the purpose of collective bargaining, etc.”\textsuperscript{136}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[132] Murphy, Radio Address, 24 October 1938, roll 144, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
\item[133] Goodman, \textit{Committee}, 49.
\item[134] Murphy, Radio Address, WJR Detroit, 29 October 1938, roll 144, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
\item[135] Murphy, Radio Address, WJR Detroit, 29 October 1938, roll 144, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
\item[136] Murphy, Radio Address, 2 November 1938, roll 144, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
\end{footnotes}
What became clear in Murphy’s statement was that his view of the situation was shaped by his own Catholic principles. Murphy stated in one speech, “My conception of democracy and Christian justice told me that it was the government’s first duty to meet the needs of the stricken people who had nowhere else to turn.” In campaign ads, he touted the fact that his politics were based on the map laid out in the “encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII, [and] Pope Pius XI.” His support for unions, public relief, and social security emanated from his deep belief in Catholic social teachings. Far from being a radical, he believed himself to be a devout Catholic and he strongly believed “democracy and Christianity” to be “twin-born” and inseparable. While eschewing the label of “radical,” he brushed aside such accusations as the price of reform: “The cry of ‘radicalism’ is far from new in American politics. There is hardly an individual in our history who fought the people’s fight for security who was not at one time or another subjected to the same type of campaign that is now being employed.”

Fitzgerald, meanwhile, deliberately played upon the communist’s endorsement of his opponent. In fact, Communist support for Murphy, the Dies Committee revelations about communist influence in the sit-down strikes, and Roosevelt’s attempts to determine Michigan’s governor became the three main themes of Fitzgerald’s campaign. He argued that the Communist Party was “fighting shoulder to shoulder with the present governor” and working to oppose Fitzgerald because they feared him. Murphy, Fitzgerald claimed, was “blandly accepting every bit of help” the Communist Party “can give him.”

137 Murphy, Radio Address, 20 October 1938, roll 144, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

138 Murphy, Radio Addresses, 29 October 1938 and 2 November 1938, roll 144, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

139 Murphy, Radio Address, 2 November 1938, roll 144, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
Fitzgerald declared, “By allowing the Red forces to join hands with him, the Governor forces good Americans to say this, ‘It's time to stand up and count noses. Are you for Communism or are you for Americanism?’”

Once the Dies Committee ratified Fitzgerald’s campaign strategy and put Congress’ imprimatur on the charges, Fitzgerald added the committee’s details to his address and lashed out at Roosevelt for denouncing a great American like Dies. HUAC, Fitzgerald argued, had proved that the sit-downs "were inspired by Communists." Following up on Judge Gadola’s charge that Murphy had refused to enforce his court order against the Flint strikers, Fitzgerald argued that "Murphy evidently took a leaf from the booklet of the big New Deal…by ignoring the Court order and exerting executive dominance over the judicial branch.

Fitzgerald also used Roosevelt’s critique of the Dies Committee and defense of Murphy to criticize the New Deal’s dictatorial tendencies. Contrasting New Deal liberalism with “true liberalism,” Fitzgerald asserted that the New Deal “should be 'leftism' and perhaps a bit stronger than that.” Roosevelt, Fitzgerald claimed, was trying to impose his will upon Michigan and “dictate to the people of Michigan their choice of a governor.” Responding to Harold Ickes’s assertion that President Roosevelt needed good men like Frank Murphy in office, Fitzgerald declared, "President

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141 Radio Address, 24 October 1938, folder: Speeches and press releases, 1938, box 22, Frank Fitzgerald Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

142 Revised copy of Fitzgerald’s state convention address, folder: Speeches and press releases, 1938, box 22, Frank Fitzgerald Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

143 Radio Address, 26 October 1938, folder: Speeches October 1938, box 22, Frank Fitzgerald Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
Roosevelt needs Frank Murphy” but Michigan does not and "Michigan is supposed to be
electing a governor this year - not Mr. Roosevelt.” Fitzgerald summed up the issue as
he saw it, "The New Deal forces which failed so miserably in other commonwealths are
taking a last, desperate fling. They are attempting, now, to make Michigan an
everlasting, ever blooming rubber stamp. Perhaps they want, too, to make sit-down
strikes and labor holidays a perpetual part of this state.”

Time and again Fitzgerald went out of this way to tie Murphy to the Labor Slate
candidates. He noted that Murphy had appointed Richard Frankensteen to a state
commission and reminded audiences that Frankensteen was “famed for his active part in
the sit-down strikes.” Fitzgerald also pointed out that Frankensteen had been one of those
charged by Homer Martin as being a Communist, charges he claimed were “similar to
those presented by the Dies committee.” The Republican candidates concluded that there
must exist “a strong bond of sympathy and understanding between Murphy and
Frankensteen.” Fitzgerald pointed out that Maurice Sugar had “called the circuit judge
and said the chief executive wanted postponement of the eviction order” which Gadola
had issued during the Flint strike. Fitzgerald also noted that Frankensteen, Doll, and

144 8 October 1938, folder: Speeches October 1938, box 22, Frank Fitzgerald Papers, Bentley Historical
Library.

145 Radio Address, 26 October 1938, Speeches October 1938, box 22, Frank Fitzgerald Papers, Bentley
Historical Library.

146 Radio Address, 24 October 1938, folder: Speeches October 1938, box 22, Frank Fitzgerald Papers,
Bentley Historical Library.
Reuther, three of the leading Labor Slate candidates, were members of a "Murphy-for-Governor committee." 147

While much of his campaign’s rhetoric was rooted in a climate of fear, Fitzgerald also made an explicit comparison between subversion in Michigan and abroad. He argued that if Murphy was right to let sit-down strikers seize property, "then it is right to let lawless mobs club Jews and destroy their homes and business places in a foreign land." 148 Fitzgerald continued, "Let other nations destroy their temples, if they wish. Let other nations tell their people how they shall worship, and under what banner they shall work. But we shall not have those things here!" "Think of what has happened here,” Fitzgerald warned, “through the inspiration of those who follow old World theories." 149

The rhetorical assaults devastated Murphy’s re-election bid. Fitzgerald defeated the governor by a margin of 52.8% to 47%. 150 Although his greatest struggles came in the rural areas of the state, Murphy also lost votes in the state’s cities. His support in Flint dropped from 62% in 1936 to 51% in 1938. In Wayne County his vote fell by only 2 percent (from 60% to 58%), but that was because his decline among white voters was offset by an increased percentage of African-American votes. Perhaps even more telling, total votes cast in the election dropped 8.2% from 1936, with the majority of that drop...
occurring in urban areas. Undoubtedly the lack of a presidential election depressed turnout, but the fall-off also shows that many urban voters were less enthusiastic about and less supportive of Murphy than they had been two years earlier, whereas rural voters were still energetic in their support of Fitzgerald. In fact, Fitzgerald received virtually the same vote total in 1938 as in 1936, but Murphy received almost 150,000 fewer votes. Perhaps those 150,000 voters could not bring themselves to vote for the Republican candidate, but they could stay home.

Commentators, and Murphy himself, attributed his loss to the accusations of communism and the impact those attacks had upon Catholic voters. Murphy bitterly noted that probably no more than six priests had voted for him, even though he said “more prayers every day than any of them,” while others estimated that he lost 40,000 Catholic votes in the city as a result of the charges leveled against him. Maguire wrote to Murphy praising him for preserving his self-respect and “not once having sacrificed your convictions for Social Justice.” But, Maguire also noted that many Catholics, “who gave lip-service to Social doctrines you have enacted into law deserted their own party to vote against you. We know this is true and this defection, in my judgment, had much to do with your losing the election.” Maguire claimed that many Catholics had fallen for the red-baiting tactics of Murphy’s opponents and charges that Murphy “should have been more firm” with the strikers. Administration officials

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151 Fine, Murphy: New Deal Years, 509.
152 Fine, Murphy: New Deal Years, 510.
153 Murphy in Fine, Murphy: New Deal Years, 512.
154 Maguire to Murphy, 10 November 1938, roll 44, Frank Murphy Papers,
privately held many of the same beliefs. Harold Ickes noted in his diary “that the Catholic issue was cutting very heavily in” Michigan and that the Dies Committee hearings “[u]ndoubtedly…hurt Murphy a great deal.”¹⁵⁵ The results were also widely interpreted as a blow to New Deal liberalism, one of many blows suffered in 1938. Murphy, after all, had been a friend of the President and possible presidential candidate himself, running in the industrial heartland of America on a program that was intended to appeal to industrial areas. Ickes noted in his diary that Murphy’s defeat was “the most serious” of that election season.¹⁵⁶

**Conclusion**

Increasingly concerned about communist infiltration in the labor movement by the end of the decade, some Catholic leaders sought to stimulate a Catholic form of unionism. In 1938, a Detroit Chapter of the American Catholic Trade Unionists (ACTU) was formed.¹⁵⁷ The ACTU Constitution announced that it was not in and of itself a union and it did not intend to “usurp any of the functions” of existing unions, but it did “seek to enroll all Catholic unionists in the ACTU.”¹⁵⁸ The ACTU sought to guide the union along Catholic lines, once issuing a resolution for instance which “officially condemns secularism both inside and outside our ranks and affirms that the solution of all social and economic problems must rely on the reform of personal morals and individual

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responsibility to God in thought and action as members of society.\textsuperscript{159} It took a few years for the ACTU to become a strong force in the auto industry, but by the war years it was a major player in the UAW.

Archbishop Mooney also created the Archdiocesan Labor Institute, which sought to educate Catholic labor activists and, to that end, created a series of parish labor schools. Eight schools were opened in 1939; by 1940 there were 34 parish schools training more than 1200 individuals in the rules of parliamentary procedure, organizing techniques, and Catholic social doctrine.\textsuperscript{160} Although one person attempted to distribute anti-CIO pamphlets at one of the inaugural meetings, the Church blocked such literature from future meetings. Refusing to denounce the CIO, Mooney nonetheless warned that communist infiltration of labor unions was a grave threat and proclaimed that parish labor schools would “sift the good from the bad in labor proposals and be the defenders of sound, constructive union activity against the inroads of communistic agitation.”\textsuperscript{161} The way to accomplish that aim was, according to the Executive Secretary of the Detroit ACTU, to “stop raving verbally about Communism and organize our 20,000,000 people so that they are as effective as the Communists.”\textsuperscript{162} Although they did not organize that many Catholics, the ACTU did succeed in becoming a powerful voice for Catholic labor teachings, promoting both unionism and anticommunism. The ACTU promoted this

\textsuperscript{159} “Resolution Condemning Secularism”, folder: ACTU – undated, box 1, ACTU-Detroit, Walter Reuther Library.

\textsuperscript{160} Tentler, \textit{Seasons of Grace}, 343.


Catholic vision in the years to come through its influential *Wage Earner* newspaper as well as through its position in the developing Reuther coalition in the UAW.

The ACTU’s creation was the last stage in Detroit Catholics’ struggle to determine how to respond to the events of 1937-1938. Prominent figures and ordinary voters alike faced a series of decisions regarding organized labor, as the UAW and CIO went about organizing much of the workforce within the city, and indeed the nation. These questions were not answered in a vacuum. In the chaos of the late 1930s, as Europe plunged towards war and Roosevelt struggled with a conservative backlash, seemingly local issues such as sit-down strikes and municipal elections were interpreted as part of national and international phenomenon.

While a consensus of sorts had once existed around issues of social justice, by the late 1930s the consensus had shattered. For Catholic liberals like Frank Murphy, Richard Frankensteen, Patrick O’Brien, and the thousands of voters who supported them, issues of social and economic reform continued to take precedence. They welcomed alliances with powerful national forces like John Lewis and Franklin Roosevelt in order to advance their agenda for reform and were even willing to work with radicals who shared their desire for social reform. In contrast, other Catholics like Father Coughlin and his supporters, abandoned their push for labor organizing, a cause for which Coughlin had been a leading champion, due to fears of communist subversion within the UAW and CIO. Such Catholics reached out to their own national allies, such as Martin Dies, even though the conservative ideologies of such associates were the antithesis of the Catholic social teachings that Coughlin and others had been championing for years. In the
supercharged, highly polarized climate of the late 1930s, it seemed like everyone picked a side.

In the late 1930s, the ACTU attempted to find a middle way of sorts. The ACTU would become famous for its anticommunist influence in the UAW. At the same time, ACTU leaders and the Archbishop sincerely encouraged Catholic workers to join unions, even CIO-affiliated unions, in order to defend their own rights and advance the cause of social reform. While the ACTU would have some success in this regard, it is clear that battle lines had been drawn by 1938 and many Catholics had already begun to associate the CIO and UAW with the type of radicalism seen in Russia, Mexico, and Spain. While proponents of the ACTU attempted to navigate a path between two extremes, their brethren in San Francisco similarly attempted to find a middle way.
CHAPTER FOUR: SAN FRANCISCO

Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the Tenney Committee, California’s version of the House Un-American Activities Committee, began hearings to investigate fascist activities in the state in the preceding years. Among those who came under fire from the Committee were Sylvester Andriano and Angelo Rossi. Harry Bridges, president of the West Coast longshoremen’s union, testified against the pair. “I always thought Rossi was a Fascist,” said Bridges. “I was always sure of it, in my own mind – politics aside. I am glad that people are waking up to it.”¹ Just a few years earlier, ironically, Bridges had been facing possible deportation from the United States for membership in the Communist Party while Rossi and Andriano had been among the leading anticommunists in San Francisco.

There were rational reasons for questioning Andriano and Rossi. Andriano, in particular, had a record of extensive contact with the Italian government, including serving as a lawyer for the Italian consulate and participating in an Italian language program that was infamous for the propaganda it distributed.² The attempts to deport


Bridges had been predictable as well. Bridges’s close associations with self-professed Communists had fueled suspicions that he himself was secretly Communist. Soviet archives have recently revealed that Bridges was not only a party member, but also a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the United States. Each was therefore intimately connected to the international dramas of the 1930s. Yet, in large part, Bridges’ testimony against Andriano and Rossi marked the continuation of long-standing battles within San Francisco over issues of social reform and subversion, battles which gave birth to a vibrant Catholic Action movement in the Bay Area.

Andriano was probably the foremost leader of the Catholic Action Movement in San Francisco during the 1930s. The movement arose from circumstances like those in Detroit. As in Detroit, San Francisco was home to one of the most active labor movements in the country during the 1930s, centering on the longshoremen’s union that Bridges led. The longshoremen’s union was arguably even more radical and energetic than the United Automobile Workers. While Catholics in San Francisco often sympathized with the union’s calls for reform, they struggled, like their brethren in Detroit, to reconcile those concerns with their fears of spreading Communism. Catholic Action was an attempt to find a middle way between the extreme inequalities that had long existed in the fields, factories and docks of the Bay Area and the growing threat of Communism. While there were some Catholics in

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3 Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, "Communists and the CIO: From the Soviet Archives," *Labor History*, vol. 35, no. 3 (Summer 1994). The documents do not use the name Bridges, but they do describe a person in Bridges’s position as head of the longshoremen’s union on the West Coast and it seems quite likely therefore that the documents refer to Bridges.
San Francisco who were solidly pro-Bridges and others who were adamantly opposed to him, the Catholic Action Movement tried to stay neutral when it came to Bridges and his union. Catholic activists instead focused on aggressively pushing their dual agenda of social justice and anti-communism, trying to avoid the polarization which had occurred in Detroit. As the decade progressed, however, local politics became increasingly intertwined with politics in Washington D.C. By the late 1930s, senators and congressmen from outside of California became a significant force in San Francisco politics, shaping local debates in a number of ways.

In addition to analyzing the complexities of the Catholic response and the Catholic Action Movement in San Francisco in the 1930s, this chapter addresses another theme, that of “alien” threats to California and San Francisco. San Francisco had a long history of anti-immigrant campaigns. In the 1800s and early 1900s, the city had been at the center of efforts to restrict Asian immigration. San Francisco’s frontier-town history ensured that debates about immigration evolved in a dramatically different way than such debates in Boston or other East Coast cities. While Catholic immigrants from Ireland and Italy were often the target of anti-immigrant sentiment in Boston, in San Francisco Catholics were among those leading efforts to exclude immigrants from Asia. Deeply engrained in the city’s history, anti-immigrant sentiment became important to the local political discourse. But while “alien” held specific racial connotations in the late 1800s, by the 1930s the term was used far more loosely. Prejudice against Asian immigrants remained firmly embedded in the city, but other groups also became targets of anti-alien campaigns. Mexican immigrants and even migrants from other states, such as the famous Okies.
who fled to California to escape the Dust Bowl, were seen as dangerous invaders. In addition, the label of “alien” was applied to threatening political ideologies. At times the anti-alien discourse of the 1930s seemed to link foreigners with foreign ideologies as one amorphous threat. In an interesting turn of events, San Francisco’s Catholic leaders, including both members of the hierarchy and leading laypeople, consciously refused to join the movement to depict Harry Bridges as a dangerous alien in need of being deported despite the fact that anti-immigrant sentiment had traditionally been strong among the city’s Catholic population. The policy of the Catholic community in this regard was indicative of their efforts to pursue a moderate path of Catholic Action.

San Francisco Catholics

The Archdiocese of San Francisco encompassed an estimated 400,000 Catholics in 174 parishes. Catholic leaders claimed that fully one half of the city’s population was Catholic, though the U.S. census put the figure at 28% of the city’s population and 68% of San Francisco’s church members. Even those lower figures are indicative of a large and highly influential church. The vast majority of the city’s Catholics, and more than two-thirds of the city’s population, were Irish, German, and Italian ethnics. The Latino population in San Francisco was not nearly as large as in the city to the south, Los Angeles. Still, Mexican-Americans did have a significant presence within the state, and within the California Catholic community, differentiating San Francisco from Detroit and Boston.4

Unlike Boston, San Francisco was not a Democratic stronghold prior to the New Deal. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, the city’s government was dominated by Republican Mayor ‘Sunny’ Jim Rolph. The political system in San Francisco was also different than that of eastern cities. In San Francisco, one historian writes, there was “no political machine worthy of the name.” Furthermore, the Progressive reform tradition that thrived in California during the first decades of the twentieth century crossed ethnic lines. Irish Catholic Progressive reformers were far more common in San Francisco than in many eastern cities, where reform movements often developed around middle class Anglo-Americans. Irish Catholics were also well represented in the San Francisco’s city government, occupying about “half of the principal elective executive” offices and making up roughly a third of the members of the Board of Supervisors.

Like the city of San Francisco, California was virtually a one-party state during the early decades of the twentieth century. Progressive Republicans dominated California in the 1910s and 1920s. Cross-filing was possible in much of California, so a candidate could run simultaneously on the Democratic and Republican tickets. As a result, progressives like Hiram Johnson ran virtually unopposed; Johnson served three terms as governor and as a senator for nearly thirty years. California politics continued to be dominated by Progressive Republicans until 1932. FDR won landslide victories in California in both 1932 and 1936, taking more

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6 Lotchin, “John Francis Neylan ,” 90.
than 60% of the vote in 1936. Roosevelt was the first Democrat to win the state since Woodrow Wilson and only the second since Grover Cleveland. On the coattails of the New Deal, a Democratic governor was elected in the 1930s, the first Democrat to occupy the governor’s mansion in the twentieth century. William McAdoo, former Secretary of the Treasury under Wilson, became the de facto leader of New Deal Democrats in California when he was elected senator in 1932, with Roosevelt’s strong support. The appeal of the New Deal seemed in large part to be its progressive character.

Support for the New Deal did not extend to local politics, though, as evidenced by the continued reelection of Mayor Angelo Rossi throughout the 1930s. A Republican with close ties to both the Archbishop and the business community, Rossi was also an ardent anti-communist who often drew the ire of labor leaders, including Bridges, for his alleged union busting. The labor movement made a concerted effort to defeat him at several points, but Rossi always emerged triumphant. He was beloved by the city’s Italian community, but his base of support also included a very large percentage of the city’s non-Italian Catholics during the 1930s. As Mayor, Rossi pushed an anti-communist agenda. In June 1934, he declared “American Legion Week” in San Francisco, during which “minute men” paraded in the streets and lectured in city theaters in order “to stamp Communism out of American life.” His virulent anti-radicalism pit the city’s leaders against San Francisco’s surging labor movement, one of the most militant in the nation.

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7 Issel, “Still Potentially Dangerous,” 254.
San Francisco’s Labor Movement

Historian Bruce Nelson refers to the mid-1930s as San Francisco’s “Pentecostal” era of insurgent unionism,” when union movements spread like wildfire, emerging from the city’s docks and sweeping along the West Coast, resulting in “years of major institutional gains, sustained bursts of self-activity, and expanding consciousness.” The centerpiece of this “syndicalist renaissance” was the militant unionism of waterfront workers, which emerged from an oppressive system that had been foisted upon the longshoremen after widespread labor unrest in 1919.

During World War I, labor activists on the waterfront were constrained by the Longshoremen’s Association of San Francisco, popularly called the “Blue Book” because members carried around such books as proof of membership. The Blue Book was widely considered a company union. Longshoremen were required to pay dues to the union but were generally blacklisted if they attempted to pursue any grievance. The Blue Book’s hiring process was also corrupt and inefficient. Workers seeking a job were hired through the infamous “shape up.” Men gathered around a gang boss who selected whomever he felt like hiring for any given job. Racial and ethnic prejudice played a significant role in hiring decisions, but even when discrimination did not occur, the shape-up was, in the words of historian Kevin Starr, “a humiliating ritual, the men standing around like cattle or sheep, or (dare I say?) like the women on parade in the city’s 135 bordellos.” Corruption and extortion were commonplace,

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with workers frequently forced to pay the boss to get hired. Even then, work was generally unstable. ¹² Those who did find jobs worked in brutal conditions, so much so that heart attacks were common on the waterfront. ¹³ Workers fed up with the Blue Book eventually mobilized to create an alternative.

The reformers split into a number of factions. Two major unions, the International Longshoremen’s Association (an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor) and the Marine Workers Industrial Union (led by former leaders of the International Workers of the World), tried to organize the waterfront, while three factions vied for control of the ILA. Within the ILA, the most radical faction became known by its meeting place, Albion Hall. While many of the more conservative elements in the ILA sought government intervention and arbitration to help solve labor disputes, the Albion Hall group sought direct action through strikes and slowdowns. Although the larger factions within the ILA held most of the leadership positions within the union, the folks at Albion Hall aggressively pushed their agenda for maritime workers and effectively maneuvered through the union’s treacherous political process.

Conflict between the ILA and the shipping companies began to boil up in 1933. When Blue Book officials expelled ILA workers from ships one day, ILA members burned their blue books in a bonfire near the docks. Shortly thereafter, four workers were fired for wearing ILA buttons on the job. In response, ILA workers, led by Albion Hall, announced a strike until the four men were rehired. The ILA

¹³ Starr, Endangered Dreams, 87
leadership condemned the strike, but the crisis was eventually resolved by a three-
man board appointed by the National Recovery Act: the board had the four men
rehired.\footnote{Charles Larrowe, \textit{Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States} (New
York: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1972), 18-21.} As the ILA became more assertive, the union divided. While some in the
ILA wanted to wait for the NRA to issue a formal code for labor relations for
maritime workers, as they had already done in other industries, the Albion Hall group
sought to use direct actions to create its own agreement with the ship owners. Rather
than limit their efforts to San Francisco, the more radical union leaders sought to
create one big union which would unite all maritime workers, not only longshoremen
but also seamen and other maritime workers along the entire Pacific Coast. In a short
time, the more radical members of Albion Hall assumed leadership roles within the
union, in reality if not quite in name.

The Albion Hall group served as ground zero for the “syndicalist renaissance”
that Nelson describes.\footnote{Nelson, \textit{Waterfront}, 2, 6.} Bridges and the rest of the Albion Hall group continually
made attempts during the 1930s to bridge the traditional divide between seamen and
longshoremen, to forge One Big Union, and to create a coastal labor movement that
would link workers from Seattle to San Diego. Both friends and foes described the
movement that Bridges led as “militant” in its outlook; it was without a doubt one of
the most aggressive and energetic unions in the nation during the 1930s. Among the
participants were a significant number of Communists. “It is undeniable,” Nelson
argues, “that the Communists were a major force in the maritime industry” and they
were “not only more able and energetic than the AFL incumbents, but were far more in tune with the sentiments and aspirations of the men.”

In February 1934, ILA delegates from ports up and down the West Coast met in San Francisco to plan a strike if shipping companies did not agree to a deal with the union. The union set a strike deadline of March 23. Prodded by local politicians and businessmen, President Roosevelt requested that the union hold off until the NRA could investigate the situation. But the President’s actions only delayed the walk-out. On May 9 a strike went into effect; within a week many unions had joined the walkout, including the Teamsters, the Sailors Union, the Marine Firemen, and virtually every other union affiliated with the ports. By May 15, not a single ship left the port of San Francisco, usually one of the busiest in America.

The strike became a bitter contest between the Albion Hall group and local business leaders, working through the Industrial Association of San Francisco. Both sides launched substantial propaganda campaigns to depict their actions as serving the greater good of the community. As head of the strike committee, Bridges was widely seen as the leader, even while others held higher positions in the union’s hierarchy. Joe Ryan, the conservative president of the ILA, tried to cut a deal with the shipping company but Bridges persuaded the striking workers to reject the compromise. In response, conservative union leaders joined the Industrial Association in claiming that Communists had seized control of the strike. Violent clashes broke out between strikers and the police as well as between strikers and strike-breakers. Historian

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Kevin Starr paints the picture: “San Francisco now found itself locked in a citywide species of street theater (costly to some as it turned out) in which the fascist/Communist drama could be acted out on the great sweeping scenic northern waterfront of American premier Pacific port, the Embarcadero.”

In early July, the civic and business leaders moved to reopen the port by force. A series of full-scale battles ensued, during which strikers set up barricades to defend their position. On “Bloody Thursday,” July 5, two strikers were killed and another had his skull punctured by a tear gas canister shot at close range, but miraculously managed to survive. In Bloody Thursday’s aftermath, the strike committee held an elaborate funeral for the two victims. It also declared a general strike for the following week. As President Roosevelt was on vacation, the Industrial Association lobbied Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins to crush the strike by deporting the unions’ Communist leadership. Mayor Rossi, meanwhile, issued a series of increasingly forceful statements calling for an end to the strike. On July 14 he declared a city-wide emergency, describing it as “the most serious situation” the city had faced since the 1906 earthquake. “Acts of violence will not be tolerated,” he said. Two days later, on the first day of the general strike, Rossi wrote to the Governor requesting troops. “I am convinced,” he insisted, “the situation…is largely due to the efforts and activities of Communists who have no regard for our American

18 Starr, Endangered Dreams, 93-105.
19 Starr, Endangered Dreams, 105-112.
form of government.” Immediately, mobs attacked the union headquarters, as well as the offices of various radical leaders and radical organizations, including the Communist Party. Violence spread into the areas surrounding San Francisco, as mobs targeted perceived radicals in San Jose, Santa Clara, and the farm areas of Northern California.

The San Francisco newspapers credited conservative unionists, notably the Teamsters, for the physical attacks upon “communist” elements in the city. Most historians, however, blame the violence on some combination of the Industrial Association and the police. Given the speed and coordination of the assaults, it seems unlikely that they were spontaneous outbursts from impromptu posses. Chief of Police William Quinn, a product of Sacred Heart College and Saint Ignatius Law School, supported the riots, referring to the vigilantes as “750 volunteer citizens, who took up the gauntlet.” Mayor Rossi “congratulated” the “people of San Francisco,” “loyal members of organized labor,” and the “loyal citizens of San Francisco” who had volunteered “service and cooperation” in “maintaining law and order.” Although Rossi insisted that the city would not “tolerate any attempts to destroy union labor” in the aftermath of the strike, he seemed enthusiastically supportive of the brutal methods that had been used against the strikers.


24 Quoted in Larrowe, Harry Bridges, 35.

John Francis Neylan pushed to end the strike in his own way. One of the most prominent Catholic citizens of the city, Neylan was considered the “Czar of local politics.” A leading Progressive, he had made a name for himself decades earlier when, as a young newspaperman, he published a series of articles exposing corruption in city government. The articles brought him to the attention of Governor Hiram Johnson, who hired him as head of the state’s Board of Control, where he continued his efforts to reform California’s political system. After leaving government, William Randolph Hearst recruited him. Neylan became, according to historian Roger Lotchin, “one of the few ‘no’ men in the Hearst Empire.”

When the Strike of 1934 seemed imminent, civic leaders called upon Neylan to solve the growing problem. After failing to avert a general strike, Neylan began leading the effort to end it.

On July 14, Neylan convened a meeting of San Francisco’s newspaper publishers. He told the group that Communists had taken over the strike and argued that the newspapers should coordinate their coverage so as to crush the growing communist conspiracy. The Newspaper Publishers Council obliged, clearing all subsequent stories with Neylan. Stories sympathetic to Bridges were cut, even an exclusive interview that one reporter at the *San Francisco Chronicle* managed to wrangle. A week later Neylan called together business leaders and urged them to offer the striking workers arbitration. The more conservative elements of the Labor Council soon accepted the offer of arbitration, outvoting Bridges and his followers, thus helping to bring about an end to the strike.

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26 Lotchin, “John Francis Neylan ,” 92.

Historian William Issel has argued that Neylan’s actions were representative of Catholic Action and has argued that Neylan was seeking to implement Catholic principles by protecting the rights of workers without going too far to the left. Neylan was indeed an ardent Catholic. His actions, however, seem, far more reactionary than Issel’s account suggests, part of a cutthroat attempt by the city’s business leaders to divide and conquer the union. Neylan, a longtime Progressive, was clearly drifting rightward by this time, repeatedly condemning the New Deal and the growing influence of centralized government. Even historian Roger Lotchin, who wrote admiringly of Neylan’s progressive politics, acknowledges that he “gave up on some of his Progressive ideals” because he became “uncomfortable with the New Deal.” Neylan’s efforts to stifle news coverage sympathetic to workers and his virulently anti-communist rhetoric are not indicative of a moderate, progressive approach. Historian David Selvin has even theorized that Neylan coordinated the violent red raid. In Neylan, therefore, we see the making of a reactionary, akin to the right-wing politics of some figures in Detroit. He may have been firmly committed to the idea of social justice and the rights of workers, but in 1934 he had a choice between revolution and reaction and chose the latter.

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28 Issel, “Faith Based Activism,” 522


31 Lotchin, “John Francis Neylan ,” 105.

President Roosevelt and Secretary Perkins responded to the chaotic situation by appointing a three-man National Labor Board to mediate the dispute. Archbishop Edward Hanna was one of the three men selected to serve on the panel. Historian Jamie De Alba has argued that “the Catholic Church’s influence among the largely working class population in San Francisco…determined the President’s selection of the archbishop.”[^33] The other two members of the board were Oscar Cushing, leader of the local Legal Aid Society, and Assistant Secretary of Labor Edward McGrady, an Irish Catholic from Boston who had drawn the ire of Catholic authorities in that city when he testified in favor of the Child Labor Amendment. In this case, McGrady took the conservative position, publicly denouncing the strike as a Communist conspiracy.[^34] Prodded by this statement, Secretary Perkins requested the local Immigration and Naturalization Services office begin investigating Harry Bridges to determine if he was indeed a Communist. After checking with the San Francisco police, local agents reported that there was no evidence linking Bridges to the Communist Party.

The Archbishop used his position on the panel to chart a new course for labor relations in San Francisco. Hanna had credibility among the conservatives in the city, given his strong record of anticommunism. Yet he also repeatedly supported the right of workers to bargain collectively for a just wage, declaring “a bargain cannot be just if a worker is forced out of necessity to accept a wage and conditions that make it


impossible for him to support his family.” The diocesan newspaper, *The Monitor*, denounced both The Right and The Left, arguing that “laissez faire extremists on one hand [and] the communist fanatics on the other” were perpetuating the strike and hurting the “general welfare” of the city. Denouncing the “materialists on both sides,” *The Monitor* called in early June for the strike to be settled along the lines of the papal encyclicals and called for Catholics in the business and labor communities to apply the Church’s teachings.

On July 13 Hanna gave a radio speech laying out the Catholic principles that shaped his approach to the strike. The Archbishop declared that he believed in the “right of workingmen to organize,” yet stressed the goal was to reach a settlement which would benefit workers, employers, and society as a whole. “Christian principles” should be the centerpiece of any settlement, he said, stressing that all involved had rights and obligations, including obligations to the community and even to the national economy. “We must never forget,” Hanna declared “that in the present economy of our civilization, our lives and our deeds are so bound up with the industrial order” that the whole population therefore suffers during such labor conflicts. More than a thousand letters of support and congratulations poured in to the Archbishop’s offices the next day.

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During mediation, matters swung in the workers’ favor. Archbishop Hanna openly questioned the Blue Book, the long hours, the lack of meal breaks, the low pay, and the working conditions on the docks. The final settlement sought to rectify many of those problems. While not going nearly as far as Bridges would have liked, Hanna nonetheless steered the committee in the direction of greater rights for the workers. William Issel has argued that the settlement “realign[ed] the relationship between organized labor and business in the direction called for by Catholic leaders….The Catholic principles that had shaped the outcome of the Great Strike” increasingly became “a part of San Francisco’s popular culture.”

After the strike, however, the labor movement realigned in the direction of Bridges rather than Hanna. In 1935, Bridges became the West Coast Director of the CIO as well as the president of the ILA. He took his longshoremen out on strike again in late 1936, paralyzing all of the major ports on the West Coast. Bridges emerged from that strike as the dominant labor force on the West Coast and public enemy number one of California’s anticommunists. Up and down the west coast, anticommunists swung into action to try to stifle him. Red Squads in Portland and Los Angeles searched for evidence of communist affiliations which could be used to crush him. Patriotic organizations, led by the American Legion, sought to do likewise. San Francisco’s Catholics, including prominent Catholic leaders, joined the crusade. Their anticommunist activities have often led historians to portray

38 De Alba, “Apostle of the Dock.”

39 Issel, “Cross and Flag.”

Catholics as anti-union, but the Catholic response to the international and industrial upheavals of the 1930s was far more complex. Catholic leaders attempted to find a middle way in the midst of the chaos of the mid-1930s, via a vibrant Catholic Action Movement.

**Catholic Action**

Catholic Action emerged from a variety of papal pronouncements during the early part of the twentieth century. In 1905 Pope Pius X issued *Il Fermo Proposito*, which introduced the idea of Catholic Action. Pope Pius XI expanded upon the idea in the 1920s and early 1930s, calling upon Catholics worldwide to unite in opposition to atheism, anti-clericalism, Communism, and Fascism. In response to the growing threat of Fascist repression in Italy, the Pope proclaimed the right of Catholics to participate in society and to shape the moral and political system of their home country. Although the United States was not the target of these proclamations, American Catholic activists sought to implement the ideas. Papal proclamations often blended together with the labor encyclicals (*Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*) to energize Catholic activism in the labor movement.

Father Charles Coughlin took the cause of Catholic Action in one direction. In the spring and summer of 1938, Coughlin’s *Social Justice* issued several calls for Catholics to come together and form a Christian Front, in order to preserve Christian society in America. By July a formal organization was established in New York City.

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41 Quoted in Issel, “Faith Based Activism,” 522.

42 See the following Papal encyclicals: *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio; Quas Primas; Divini Redemptoris; Non Abbiamo Bisogno.*
It became a formidable organization, with thousands of members, including 407 police offers. It also became virulently anti-Semitic. Members of the Nazi Bund spoke at meetings, as did Catholic speakers who, according to Ronald Bayor, decried “Jewish involvement with Communism, the anti-Catholic position of the Jews during the Spanish Civil War and Jewish control of labor unions and jobs.”43 John Cassidy, one of the leaders of the New York Christian Front, described the movement: “We are a militant group of men…determined to use every means at our command to guarantee to the Christian people of America, that they shall never be subjected to the misfortune that befell their Christian brothers in Russia, Mexico, and Spain.”44 While the message resonated with many American Catholics the militantly anti-Semitic tone of the Christian Front did not.

In San Francisco, under the guidance of Archbishop John Mitty, Catholic Action adopted a very different form and tone. Mitty was appointed as Coadjutor of the Archdiocese in 1932, essentially serving as a co-bishop with Hanna during the final years of Hanna’s tenure as Archbishop. Almost immediately, Mitty began advocating for Catholic Action in San Francisco. In one of his first public speeches, he declared to an assembly of Catholic women that they had a duty “to bring the ideals and principles of Christ into every phase of human life” including politics. Women should work to “prevent over centralization and too much bureaucracy,” he said, and to thwart legislation that violated “fundamental Christian and American


44 Cassidy quoted in Bayor, Neighbors in Conflict, 99.
principles.”45 In short, they should “work unceasingly for both Church and country, for both Cross and Flag.”46 Throughout his term, Mitty continued to foster Catholic organizations and encourage them in their efforts to bring San Francisco in line with the principles of Catholicism. Thousands of men and women participated in the Catholic Action Movement in the city, first through informal actions and then as part of a formal, coordinated movement.47

Mitty found his primary vehicle for Catholic mobilization in the autumn of 1937, when he received a plan for Catholic Action from some of the leading members of the Catholic community. The plan called for existing Catholic organizations to be expanded and coordinated, training programs for priests to be established, student organizations to be created, and Catholic radio programs to be produced.48 The goal was three pronged: “individual sanctification,” “the sanctification of the home,” and “the sanctification of society.”49 To advance those goals, 250 leading laymen were invited to the Cathedral during the first week of 1938, where they formed a new association, The Catholic Men of San Francisco. Its first president, Sylvester Andriano, traveled to Rome to get the Vatican’s sanction for the new organization. Spiritual services and prayer played no small part in the movement, but, as activists sought to purify their communities, Catholic Action also extended into politics.

45 Issel, “Cross and Flag.”
46 Issel, “Cross and Flag.”
47 Issel, “Cross and Flag.”
48 Issel, “Faith-Based Activism,” 524.
Under its auspices, the Catholic Men coordinated their activities with Catholic fraternal organizations like the Knights of Columbus and the Ancient Order of the Hibernians. By 1941, eighteen hundred Catholics had joined Catholic Action Circles and the movement had become integrated into San Francisco’s seminaries and Catholic schools.  

Many of the attempts to purify the community revolved around issues of sexuality. According to Issel, Mayor Rossi signed “a spate of anti-smut and anti-prostitution ordinances” in 1937 and 1938 that originated from Andriano and his supporters. Like Catholic activists across the nation, San Franciscans also frequently talked about the need to expunge sexual content from the movies. Catholic leaders, the *Monitor*, and Catholic organizations also embarked on a campaign against birth control. Margaret Sanger came under especially fierce criticism. *The Monitor* even went so far as to refer to birth control as “race suicide.” Catholic activists did succeed in getting any mention of birth control expunged from the Hall of Science exhibit at the Golden Gate Exposition, a World’s Fair the city hosted in 1939.

Catholic activists also took up labor issues. In 1938, John Henning, who would serve as Undersecretary of Labor in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, joined with several other prominent local Catholics to create the San Francisco

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50 Issel, “Cross and Flag” and Issel, “Faith-Based Activism,” 525.

51 Issel, “Cross and Flag.”

52 For example, see *The Monitor*, 6 May 1939.

53 Issel, “Cross and Flag.”
chapter of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. Founded in 1937, the ACTU had chapters in Boston, Detroit, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, New York, and Newark. The chapters were united in a federation, but each branch operated largely independently, under the control of the local bishop.\textsuperscript{54} The San Francisco branch’s constitution called for “trade unionism built on Christian principles” and stressed workers’ rights and obligations. Archbishop Mitty strongly supported the organization as a counterweight to Communist influence within local unions. The vast majority of members in the early years belonged to the longshoremen’s union, although they only numbered a few hundred. By the mid-1940s, ACTU membership in some locals had became sufficiently strong for them to challenge the left-wing for offices. In Local 10, for instance, ACTU members won the presidency and vice-presidency.\textsuperscript{55}

Father Hugh Donohoe served as chaplain of the San Francisco ACTU. A native San Franciscan, Donohoe was raised in the predominately Catholic Mission District of the city, which was home to many members of the Catholic Action Movement. After receiving a Ph.D. under Monsignor Ryan at Catholic University, Donohoe returned to California and served, according to Issel, “as the archbishop’s chief spokesman on Catholic Action in general, and on issues of labor relations, social justice, and political socialization in particular.” Donohoe also ran the San Francisco Bay Area Social Action School for Priests, where he taught a course on the Labor Problem and perpetuated the liberal Catholic agenda for which his mentor was

\textsuperscript{54} Taft, 211.

\textsuperscript{55} Issel, “Cross and Flag.”
Donohoe was also strongly anti-communist; on one occasion Archbishop Mitty commissioned him to write an article on the dangers of Communism for a magazine which had been soliciting such an article from the Bishop.\(^5^7\) Donohoe thus exemplified the fine line that these Catholic labor leaders walked. He sought to support an active labor movement, but constantly feared the growing communist influence in society.

**The Anti-Communist Crusade**

At the same time that the Catholic Action movement was thriving in San Francisco, Catholics were also intimately involved with the city’s anti-communist movements. The two crusades were connected; as Catholics saw it, anti-radical efforts were key to “purifying” the city. The Catholic anti-communist crusade was led by the Knights of Columbus, who fashioned a “mobilization” plan to “combat the destructive forces and the ‘isms’ that are becoming so rampant, and which are undermining Christianity and the welfare of nations.”\(^5^8\) Catholic anticommunists allied with the American Legion. In many parts of the nation, the Legion was a Protestant organization, but in San Francisco the ties between the Catholic community and the Legion were strong. In fact, Archbishop Mitty served as the

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\(^{56}\) Issel, “Faith-Based Activism,” 527-528.

\(^{57}\) Mitty to Donohoe, 2 September 1938, folder: Catholic Lay Organizations 1938-39, Archdiocese of San Francisco Archives.

\(^{58}\) Quoted in Issel, “Cross and Flag.”
director of the California department of the Legion in 1935. The connection was not surprising: despite his moderation on many issues, Mitty was a fierce anti-communist who considered Soviet-style radicalism “a monstrous evil.”

Foreign policy lay at the heart of Catholic anti-communism in San Francisco. Events in Spain were of particular concern. One headline of The Monitor reported, “Orgy of Murder, Arson, Bestiality, Continues To Rage Unchecked In Spain.”

Frequently foreign news dominated the Monitor’s headlines, even during major local disturbances such as the 1934 strike. Most of the reports came from the National Catholic News Service, although a significant number of articles were also reprinted from Catholic journals in other parts of the nation. For instance, the Monitor published an article from The Catholic Chronicle of Toledo. The Church believed in being “neutral as far as government intervention is concerned,” read the article, but that they “would be ashamed to be neutral” when it came to judging the Loyalist regime, which had been denounced by the Holy Father and which had a “record of brutal and bloody persecution.”

The Monitor also published articles encouraging Catholic activism on foreign policy matters. The paper celebrated the Albany, New York diocese’s campaign against neutrality revision. “Communists and their sympathizers are campaigning

59 Issel, “Cross and Flag.”
61 “Orgy of Murder, Arson, Bestiality, Continues To Rage Unchecked In Spain,” The Monitor, 6 September 1936, 1, Archdiocese of San Francisco Archives.
tooth and nail to force Congress and the President to act in favor of the Spanish Reds,” declared the article. “It is up to Catholics to institute a counter drive to offset the highly financed campaign of the Communists. Every fair-minded American, whether Christian or Jew, owes it to his loyalty to the interests of religion and to our tradition of democratic principles to use every effort to block this grab by the servants of Stalin.” The Monitor also reported enthusiastically on Monsignor Fulton Sheen’s speech at a rally in Washington D.C. organized by the “Keep the Spanish Embargo Committee.” Monsignor Sheen declared that there were “two classes of people interested in lifting” the embargo: “international propagandists” and “loyal Americans who believe the Loyalist cause to be just.”

Criticizing the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Student Union, the League for Peace and Democracy, the International Labor Defense, and other organizations calling for repeal, Sheen questioned why these organizations “have condemned two of the three anti-American ideologies, namely Nazism and Fascism, but never” Communism.

Like many members of the Catholic Church, Sheen linked fascism and communism. “True Americanism,” he claimed, meant “unqualified opposition to all Totalitarian forms whether they be NAZI, FASCIST, or COMMUNIST.” He declared that totalitarianism was opposed to the basic American principle of inalienable human rights. In contrast to America where rights flowed from the individual, “over there” in Germany, Italy and Russia, rights flowed from the State.


and were rooted “in the race,” “in the nation,” or “in the class.” “An American is not the least bit interested in the fine points of distinction between the three dictatorial regimes,” Sheen insisted, “because they differ only in their methods of invading human rights, not in their aims.” Sheen was one of the Church’s most outspoken voices, opposing all forms of totalitarianism and refusing to make excuses for fascism while denouncing communism. By the latter part of the decade, it had become a truism among leading Catholic spokesmen that fascism and communism were abominable evils; both ideologies were also seen as alien to American sensibilities.

The debates about Spain often revolved around the idea that foreign influences were conspiring to twist American foreign policy. Many anticommunists argued that the Soviet Union was seeking to manipulate the United States into opposing Franco’s regime. Organizations calling for aid to Loyalist Spain were denounced as communist puppets. One Monitor article warned that “Russia Sponsors Company Placing ‘Lift Embargo’ Ads.” The article argued that “revelation of the source of these advertisements” was vital when considering the “lift the Spanish embargo” pressure being placed upon the U.S. government. “The bulk of such pressure has been definitely linked to Communistic and other radical organizations,” The Monitor declared.

Catholic activists in San Francisco mobilized to influence American foreign policy. In one widely circulated pamphlet issue by the Spanish Relief Committee, Catholic activists asked, “Democracy! Which Brand, Stalin or Jefferson’s?” In the

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foreword, Andriano, the local Catholic Action leader, stated that the Spanish Civil War was a battle “for the clashing ideals of the world,” on which “the future of civilization depends.” “Whether or not we realize it,” Andriano declared, “the truth is, we are all involved in the struggle.” The choice, he declared, was between “Order or Chaos, Christianity or Communism; Civilization or Barbarism; God or No-God.”

California conservatives praised the Catholic activists for their efforts. Catholic and non-Catholic anticommunists thus united to obstruct any American effort to aid the Spanish Loyalist government. *The Examiner*, for instance, published a remarkable article which declared, “Very often the Catholic Church has been the savior of civilization and its present efforts and activity is to save civilization again. All God-fearing, liberty loving Americans should support the Church and its sacred crusade.” For a secular newspaper to be declaring that the Catholic Church the “savior” of civilization was an extraordinary development. The article also celebrated the growing alliance in the United States between “the forces of law and order and religion…against destructive Communism and in opposition to the subversive forces which would support it here or elsewhere.” Perhaps unwittingly, the article provided further evidence of that alliance by carrying the torch of Catholic opposition to Loyalist Spain, decrying “the murder of priests and nuns… the destruction of the

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68 “Democracy! Which Brand Stalin’s or Jefferson’s?” folder: Communism 1936-37, Archdiocese of San Francisco Archives.

69 “To Save Civilization,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 13 July 1939, 8.

70 “To Save Civilization,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 13 July 1939, 8.
Catholic churches, [and] the violation of the altars.” By the middle of the decade, Catholics were clearly welcome in the right wing of American politics.

The anti-communist alliance solidified in the latter part of the decade. On May 1, 1939 The Examiner exclaimed, “Everyone knows” that the Pilgrims founded the United States in order to escape religious persecution in Europe. The editorial argued that the United States had been a bastion of religious liberty for three hundred years. Now, at a time when religion was again “being persecuted in a most brutal manner” by Communists worldwide, it was the duty of Americans to protect the nation from the “insidious spread of this persecution.” “If there ever was a time when Americans should unite in the cause of protecting religious liberty,” The Examiner continued, “it is now!” Archbishop Mitty responded in kind. “Our democracy depends upon religion,” he declared at the Young Man’s Institute in the summer of 1939. “When we see totalitarianism all about us,” Mitty proclaimed it was important to remember that the “Declaration of Independence [spoke] of certain natural, inalienable rights given to us by God, not by any dictators.” By fostering spiritual faith, Mitty said Catholics would “be doing our part to save America from dictators”.

The longshoremen, meanwhile, were taking actions of their own to help influence events in Europe. In 1936, only a week after promising to avoid work stoppages, union members refused to load iron that was headed to Italy, where it would presumably be made into weapons for the Italian army, which had just finished

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71 “To Save Civilization,” San Francisco Examiner, 13 July 1939, 8.

72 “Freedom to worship God,” San Francisco Examiner, 1 May 1939, CCCC.

conquering Ethiopia and was fighting in Spain. The following year the longshoremen shut down the port for an entire day to protest the U.S. government’s lack of support for Loyalist Spain. Some San Franciscans, already concerned about communist influence in the longshoremen’s union, saw this action as part of a grand communist-inspired conspiracy. That fear, in turn, intersected with national affairs to shape the course of San Francisco’s politics in the late 1930s.

In the spring of 1939, Martin Dies traveled to the West Coast to lead a series of Americanism rallies, which were supported and publicized by the Hearst papers and a variety of patriotic organizations. The previous year, Dies had made a national name for himself by chairing the newly developed House Committee on Un-American Activities. The Dies Committee had investigated allegations of Communist influence in the New Deal and in the labor movement. Dies had also been widely credited with helping to defeat Frank Murphy in Michigan’s 1938 gubernatorial race.

Dies began his tour in Southern California, speaking to an estimated 30,000 people at the Hollywood Bowl. The San Francisco Examiner wished that the “vicious social termites… unthinking day dreamers… mischievous demagogues… parlor pinks and visionary ‘intellectual’ reformers” had been there to hear Dies speak. If they had been, the paper declared, “They would have seen that no one is fooled by

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74 Larrowe, Harry Bridges, 130-1.

75 “Americanism Rally to Draw Huge Throng,” San Francisco Examiner, 4 May 1939, 6.
their empty protestations of democracy, by their cynical mummeries of ‘liberalism’ or by their transparent tactics of ‘using existing parties later to destroy them.’”

From Los Angeles, Dies traveled to San Francisco. *The Examiner* reported that Dies was met by a “thunder roar of cheers” from the raucous crowd of 15,000 who turned out at the San Francisco Civic Auditorium on May 4, 1939. Expectations must have been high, given that *The Examiner* had championed Dies as “the most sincerely spectacular patriot in the nation’s House of Representatives.”

The paper reported that Dies was going to “tell of his sleepless campaign to protect America’s democracy from invasion” and to warn against “the insidious political and social intrigue perpetually attacking democracy.”

According to *The Examiner*, “The Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish religions, whose very existence in this country is guaranteed by Americanism” were “prominently represented in the program” for the Dies rally. A Catholic priest, representing the Archbishop, delivered the invocation, symbolizing the center stage which Catholics were taking in the movement. Protestant and Jewish leaders also played prominent roles, a tribute to the interdenominational nature of this religious war on Communism.

76 “Whole Nation Should Echo This Faith in America,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 5 May 1939, 20.

77 “15,000 Cheer as Dies Denounces Reds, Nazis and Fascists,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 5 May 1939, front page.

78 “Americanism Rally to Draw Huge Throng,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 4 May 1939, 6.

79 “S.F. Awaits Americanism Speech by Dies Thursday,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 1 May 1939, CCCC.

80 “Americanism Rally to Draw Huge Throng,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 4 May 1939, 6.
The crowd was treated to a long speech from Dies, who began with a favorite rhetorical device of American politicians. Condemning the “the interminable quarrels and feuds of the Old World,” Dies proclaimed that “the great majority of the early immigrants to America came here to find religious and personal freedom” and not because of any desire for “economic security in the wilderness of America.” That had changed in “recent years,” Dies charged, as the country had been invaded by immigrants who had “come not to enjoy the blessings of democracy” but for less noble reasons. That new immigrant “brought with him Europe,” namely the “prejudices and the ideas of the Old World” and “the tendency to group together in racial or national blocs.” He didn’t mention that he represented a district in Texas where the Klan was famously strong. Nor did he see the irony in stereotyping all “new immigrants” in order to condemn their tendency “to group” others. In any case, Dies declared that new immigrants were “more European than American” and warned that “alien-minded groups and organized blocs within our midst” were a menace to the republic. These groups were “ever at work to try to tear down the structure of constitutional government and to build in its place some Fascists or Communist state.”

Dies excoriated both communism and fascism as “different cults of the same pagan religion.” But he was particularly interested in the Communist threat. “The Communists do not believe in God or religion and their first act in Russia was to

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81 “Foreign ‘Isms’ Attempt at Sabotage Bared,” San Francisco Examiner, 5 May 1939, CCCC.
82 “Foreign ‘Isms’ Attempt at Sabotage Bared,” San Francisco Examiner, 5 May 1939, CCCC.
83 “Foreign ‘Isms’ Attempt at Sabotage Bared,” San Francisco Examiner, 5 May 1939, CCCC.
destroy the churches and to prohibit people from worshipping God according to the
dictates of their own conscience….The Communists do not believe in home life or in
families. They have, therefore, destroyed the sanctity of the home. The children in
Russia belong to the states.” 84 Although Communists thus received most of his
attention, Dies warned of the broader threat posed by the “united front…of eight or
ten million radicals who range from ‘crackpots’ to outright Communists.” 85

Dies also criticized liberal activists who he claimed were advocating
“measures which are in principle communistic or fascistic.” Liberals, he claimed,
were “doing their best to transform us into some form of Socialism or Fascism” by
“transferring the rights of the people to the Federal Government and making a huge
bureaucracy out of our Government.” 86 Labor activists were just as dangerous. Dies
boasted that his committee had exposed the truth about Communist domination of
labor unions. 87 He concluded his message with a call to action, encouraging those in
the crowd to “combat the enemies in our own country.” 88 His attacks on liberals and
radicals clearly resonated with many San Franciscans. The Board of Supervisors
soon passed a resolution commending Dies, Hearst, and the “Stand by America”
movement, which the Board claimed combated “those forces which would ruin and

84 “Foreign ‘Isms’ Attempt at Sabotage Bared,” San Francisco Examiner, 5 May 1939, CCCC.
85 “Foreign ‘Isms’ Attempt at Sabotage Bared,” San Francisco Examiner, 5 May 1939, CCCC.
86 “Foreign ‘Isms’ Attempt at Sabotage Bared,” San Francisco Examiner, 5 May 1939, CCCC.
87 “Foreign ‘Isms’ Attempt at Sabotage Bared,” San Francisco Examiner, 5 May 1939, CCCC.
88 “Foreign ‘Isms’ Attempt at Sabotage Bared,” San Francisco Examiner, 5 May 1939, CCCC.
destroy all American principles of individual initiative and right.” The State Legislature, likewise, passed a resolution commending Dies and inviting him to speak to the legislature while in California.

Just a few days later, former presidential candidate Al Smith came to town and picked up on the message of Americanism. Smith arrived in San Francisco during the Golden Gate Exposition, a world’s fair promoted by San Francisco to stimulate tourism. As the honorary “Mayor of Treasure Island,” Smith presided over the fair for a day. Declaring that he was against “all sorts of isms” except for Americanism, the Happy Warrior said, “We wish from Washington the very minimum of government. Ours is a union of states, each having its own rights – not like Rome, Berlin or Moscow.” Smith also attended the “Catholic Day” at the Exposition on May 7th, when “more than 12,000 Catholics gathered to hear speakers “tell of the linked history of California and Catholicism” and the contribution that Catholics had made to the state’s history.

The San Francisco media echoed the anti-bureaucratic sentiments of Dies and Smith. The Examiner denounced the way that “bureaucratic authority drifts into dangerous fields assuming unconveyed powers as it grows, and by progressive stages attempting to put itself above all other authority.” The Examiner warned, “When bureaucrats assert independence from and defiance of the American Congress they

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91. “‘Happy Warrior’ is Made Mayor for Day,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 7 May 1939, 22.

92. “12,000 Join Catholic Rites at Exposition,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 8 May 1939, 1.
have in the fullest sense divorced themselves from the final and only REAL authority that exists in this democratic nation – THAT OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.”

When the American Bar Association held its annual conference in San Francisco a short time later, the paper reported, “Behind the scenes at the American Bar Association yesterday….was a growing comment about the ‘invasion’ of the traditionally conservative association by the bright young men of the New Deal.”

**The Alien Menace**

Fears of subversion intersected with concerns about aliens. During the Depression, California made several efforts to expel those who were considered economic competitors to American citizens, the most prominent efforts targeting Filipinos and Mexicans. That Filipinos were legally American nationals did not seem to matter. Mobs throughout California attacked Filipino-Americans in the early years of the 1930s, and, in 1935, the federal government provided funds for the repatriation of Filipinos willing to leave the mainland United States. Congressmen Richard Welch of San Francisco and California Senator Hiram Johnson petitioned for the program to be extended for two years. Meanwhile, Los Angeles witnessed a fierce repression of Mexican immigrants during the early 1930s; more than 13,000

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Mexicans, some of them legal immigrants, were repatriated by 1934, with local governments often paying their transportation costs.⁹⁶

There were far fewer Mexican immigrants in San Francisco, so the city government did not implement the same policies, although the anti-alien rhetoric of Southern California certainly penetrated the Bay Area. According to historian William Mullin, San Francisco was initially more generous in its approach to unemployment relief and “sought to assist even migratory workers.”⁹⁷ Yet with 500 or 1,000 migrants flocking into California every day, San Francisco too began to crack down on immigration. Government officials complained that state and local governments should not have to pay the costs of feeding foreigners and that their homelands should bear the burden of supporting them. Other citizens complained about newcomers stealing jobs and relief funds from natives in need. One letter to the editor of The Examiner, from “A Woman in San Francisco,” questioned how the government could afford to keep “large alien families of Mexicans on relief.” The letter was vitriolic:

> Just think, these aliens, who hate us, sitting around all day or riding, as they all have cars, while a white girl slaves for them, it does seem unbelievable, but the truth. Do you blame them to laugh at us? The Government refuses to let a white man earn enough to live, but will keep these people in luxury. While receiving these large relief checks they are working, using another name. Most of them are working in their country on fruit, but come down payday to get their relief check.⁹⁸

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⁹⁷ Mullins, Depression and the Urban West Coast, 73.
⁹⁸ “Aliens on Relief,” The Editor’s Mail Box, San Francisco Examiner, 29 July 1939, CCCC.
The letter’s references to “white slave girls” and “aliens, who hate us” were clearly indicative of a deep-seated racism. The letter also revealed an inherent distrust of big-government liberalism. The sentiment was widespread. State lawmakers pushed for legislation “to remove from the State relief rolls thousands of aliens who constitute a burden on California.” Under the proposed law, *The Examiner* reported, “The State Relief Administration would be authorized to use state funds in returning ‘indigent or dependent aliens to the country of which they are citizens.’” The legislature passed the bill in the spring of 1939.100

The anti-alien rhetoric of the late 1930s was so prevalent that it was turned against groups who were not immigrants at all. Even refugees from the Dust Bowl of the Great Plains came under fire as alien intruders. California politicians believed the refugees from other states were subverting the economy and government relief programs of California. Some even suggested that the migrant farmers be sent back to their home states. The anti-alien theme so saturated the social-political environment of San Francisco it even influenced Catholic critiques of birth control. In an article entitled, “Make California Safe for Japan,” *The Monitor* warned that France’s primary problem was that its birth rate paled in comparison to that of Germany. “Let La Sanger have her way,” continued *The Monitor*, “and no number of guns will keep the Orient out of California.”101 In essence, *The Monitor* argued that birth control, and lower birth rates, would leave America vulnerable to invasion from

99 “Purge of Voters on Relief Voted,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 4 April 1939, 6.

100 “Anti-Alien Relief Bill Passed,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 19 June 1939.

Asiatic hordes, who allegedly reproduced at a more rapid rate. The paper thus
couched the debate about birth control in terms of the “yellow peril,” a rhetorical
device which had deep roots in San Francisco’s history.

The labor movement also came under attack as an alien movement. After the
1934 strike, San Francisco business leaders denounced the strikers as communists and
foreigners. On February 4, 1935, Commissioner of Immigration Daniel MacCormack
reported that out of 448 people arrested during labor disputes nationwide in 1934,
only 118 were foreigners, only 14 were deportable, and only one was a radical.\textsuperscript{102}
The Industrial Association of San Francisco immediately demanded a recount. The
Association insisted that 262 of those arrested in San Francisco alone were aliens and
13 were “active communists” while there were “22 members of radical
organizations.”\textsuperscript{103}

In this highly-charged environment, Harry Bridges became a flash point for
the anti-alien sentiment growing among many Americans. Almost as soon as he rose
to prominence in the labor movement, efforts began to deport Harry Bridges from the
country. Bridges was born to middle-class parents in Australia in 1901: his father
was a real estate agent, his mother a devout Catholic who sent Harry to Catholic
schools. At ages 15 Bridges had left home to go to sea, motivated he said by the
adventure stories of Jack London. As he traveled from port to port, Bridges became

\textsuperscript{102} “448 Arrested in Strikes – But Only One is a Radical,” news clipping, Bridges, Harry Renton –
Naturalization Div File la 131 [1/2], NARA, San Francisco.

disillusioned with the poverty he saw and became radicalized.\textsuperscript{104} In 1921 he briefly joined the IWW. At some point he also discarded the Catholic faith of his youth, although his explanations as to why were inconsistent. Settling in San Francisco in 1922, Bridges failed to file his citizenship papers by the required deadline because of a mix-up at the court house, a mistake that put him in a precarious position when he became a target of anti-communist activists.

After the 1934 strike, conservatives immediately began to pressure the federal government to deport Bridges. As protests and demands for deportation flooded into Secretary Perkins’ office in Washington, she began to send out requests for proof that he was, in fact, a Communist. The San Francisco police examined Bridges’ record quite closely but could not find any evidence to condemn him, admitting to Perkins that “he either is not a Communist or he has so carefully guarded his utterances that there is no legal ground for his deportation.”\textsuperscript{105} Internal memoranda detail their “constant effort to obtain evidence that would in any way connect the alien with radical organization,” but with no success.\textsuperscript{106} Still, the effort continued unabated for years. Paul Smith, a newspaperman who claimed to have heard civic leaders discuss the possibility of making Bridges “disappear” later estimated that $6 million was spent on the effort to deport Bridges.\textsuperscript{107} While no one in San Francisco came up with convincing evidence, immigration officials in Seattle and Portland, Raphael Bonham

\textsuperscript{104} Nelson, \textit{Waterfront}, 112.

\textsuperscript{105} Quoted in Larrowe, \textit{Harry Bridges}, 139.

\textsuperscript{106} Thomas Donoghue, Immigrant Inspector, to District Director, 2 February 1935, box 5, file: 19030/1-1 Bridges, Harry –S.F, Arrival File la 134, NARA, San Francisco.

\textsuperscript{107} Starr, \textit{Endangered Dreams}, 220-1.
and Roy Norene, provided Perkins with affidavits swearing Bridges was a Communist. Bonham and Norene also provided a copy of a membership card for Harry Dorgan, allegedly the Communist alias of Bridges, whose mother’s maiden name had been Dorgan.\(^{108}\) Perkins recognized one of the affidavits as coming from a notorious opponent of organized labor and noted the evidence was “mostly hearsay, vague and indefinite,” but had little choice but to follow up.\(^{109}\)

The Roosevelt administration struggled to determine what to do with Bridges. The President ordered the investigation to proceed and said that Bridges was to be deported if the evidence supported the accusations, but he warned federal officials against making leaps of imagination.\(^{110}\) The proceedings, however, were sidetracked by developments in another deportation case. Earlier in the decade, immigration officials had attempted to deport an immigrant named Joseph Strecker on the grounds that he had briefly been a member of the Communist Party. But federal courts blocked the deportation and the case made its way up the Supreme Court, which was asked to decide whether past membership in the CP was in fact grounds for deportation.

While Perkins waited for a Supreme Court ruling, Bridges’ critics became restless. In February 1938, Senator Royal Copeland (D-NY) flatly declared, “The Labor Department has enough evidence on Harry Bridges to make a prima facie case

\(^{108}\) Larrowe, *Harry Bridges*, 140.


for his deportation.”¹¹¹ “Surely,” Copeland claimed, “the American labor movement has enough talent among its native born and naturalized citizens without embracing aliens.”¹¹² Copeland also called for a Senate investigative committee to study “subversive activities at sea.”¹¹³ As the pressure mounted, Perkins issued a warrant on March 2, 1938, for Bridges to be arrested and deported. The following month, however, she stopped the deportation proceedings, deciding to wait until after the Supreme Court ruled on the Strecker case.

Anticommunists in the American Legion denounced Perkins for using her “position of authority” to shield Bridges. The San Francisco Examiner parroted the Legion’s charge: “Inasmuch as Dame Perkins runs the Department of Labor and runs it on an emotional and almost hysterical basis, the ‘someone in the position of authority’ can be none other than the great lady herself.” Her sympathy toward Bridges was demonstrated, the paper told its readers, by “the aid and comfort she has given Alien Bridges whenever he seemed cornered.” Dripping with anti-New Deal hatred, and couched in highly gendered language, the Examiner thus linked the dual threats of bureaucrats and aliens in a powerful rhetorical attack on the Roosevelt administration. The Legion and Examiner began to urge the Senate to renew its investigation of Bridges, since the Labor Department was not prosecuting him.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Quoted in Larrowe, Harry Bridges, 141.
¹¹⁴ “Who Shields Bridges?” San Francisco Examiner, 2 May 1938, 10.
The call for deportation became a touchstone for conservative Congressmen opposed to the recent wave of labor militancy, with the House Un-American Activities Committee joining the crowd critiquing Perkins for shielding Communists. The pressure reached the highest levels of the Executive Branch. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes noted in his diary that James Farley, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, unsuccessfully called for Bridges to be deported whether he was a Communist or not because the American people wanted him deported and to do otherwise would ruin the Democratic Party. Farley believed that it would be devastating among both Southern Democrats and urban Catholics, for the party to be seen as the protector of alien radicals.\footnote{Ickes, Secret Diary, vol. 2, 550.}

While Farley may have correctly judged the temperament of many Americans, Catholic leaders in San Francisco were adopting a far more subdued attitude regarding Bridges.\footnote{Issel, “Cross and Flag.”} Mitty was recruited to the anti-Bridges cause by anticommunists who sent him memos detailing Bridges’ alleged communist activities, yet the Archbishop remained silent on the issue.\footnote{“Memorandum in re: Harry Bridges” and “Bridges Must Go,” file: Communism 1936-37, Archdiocese of San Francisco Archives.} His silence speaks volumes about the Church’s approach to labor relations. Although the hierarchy never supported Bridges, they refused to redbait, thus continuing to walk that fine line that the Catholic Action Movement was based upon. Most prominent Catholic laymen similarly withheld their support for the anti-Bridges campaign. Catholic labor activist John Shelley told a reporter “that even if Mr. Bridges is a Communist he is being
attacked not for that reason but because, in Mr. Shelley’s words, ‘he has done a job for labor.’” Shelley even turned the anti-communist attack on its head, using the dictatorship discourse to promote labor unity. Noting “the despotism of dictatorship in power or gaining power in other great countries,” Shelley called for AFL members and CIO members to “unite in the face of a common enemy.” To be sure, there were Catholics who disagreed with such sentiments. Some Catholics were prominently involved in the state’s branch of the American Legion, which was leading the charge against Bridges. The Knights of Columbus, Ancient Order of Hibernians, and Catholic Men had all collaborated extensively with the Legion on matters of anticommunism, so it does not take a leap of imagination to conclude that many of the city’s Catholics sympathized with the Legion’s actions regarding Bridges, even if Catholic leaders remained silent. Still, much of the Catholic community followed the archdiocese’s example.

Under tremendous pressure from anticommunists in Congress and the media, Perkins eventually decided to put Bridges’ case before an impartial judge. She settled upon James Landis, dean of Harvard Law School and former head of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Two local labor lawyers, Richard Gladstein and Aubrey Grossman, served as Bridges’ primary defenders, with help from Carol King, arguably the nation’s foremost expert on deportation law. King’s presence inflamed the anti-Bridges forces in San Francisco. Before she even arrived in town,

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rumors circulated that King was the daughter of Emma Goldman.\textsuperscript{121} Once the trial began, the Hearst media issued a steady stream of criticism, alternately portraying her as unduly masculine and as a shrill, hysterical woman.\textsuperscript{122} King’s associations with radical causes dating back to the Red Scare of 1919 also served to fuel the conspiracy theories floating around San Francisco. The Monitor, however, did not participate in this rumor mongering. In fact, at no point in during the trial did the Monitor cover the proceedings at all. During one of the biggest, most controversial events in the city’s history, the Catholic press maintained a deliberate silence.

As the trial unfolded, it became clear that the prosecution’s case was less than rock solid. Many prosecution witnesses left gaping holes in their testimony or raised serious questions about their credibility. Landis described one witness, for instance, as a “self-confessed liar” who demonstrated little “regard for an oath.”\textsuperscript{123} Bridges, meanwhile, defended himself effectively from the witness stand. The San Francisco Chronicle wrote, “For those who would like to keep Bridges a mythical monster…the deportation hearing may turn out to be the worst thing that ever happened.”\textsuperscript{124} Although he freely admitted that he collaborated with the Communist Party to oppose Mayor Rossi’s reelection and to stymie a proposed law to restrict picketing, he denied

\textsuperscript{121} Ginger, Carol Weiss King, 262.

\textsuperscript{122} Larrowe, Harry Bridges, 148.

\textsuperscript{123} Landis report, 17 and 19.

\textsuperscript{124} Quoted in Larrowe, Harry Bridges, 191
he was a Communist and insisted that a strong labor movement would forestall the development of Communism.\textsuperscript{125}

During the trial, the American Legion arrived in San Francisco for its annual convention. In response to all of the testimony coming from American Legion officials, Bridges had said during the trial that he wanted to purge Legion elements from his union. Legion officials used their convention as an opportunity to rap Bridges in the press and denounce the influence of alien radicals in American society. California’s Commander, Henry Watters, began the barrage by declaring that it was “most regrettable that an alien, at a time when he is being accused of un-American activities, should go so far as” to threaten “loyal Americans.”\textsuperscript{126} The national Commander, Stephen Chadwick, denounced Bridges’s “brazen effrontery” and argued that the statements proved that Bridges’s “mind is incompatible with our American institutions and way of life.”\textsuperscript{127} Chadwick declared, “If our existing laws are insufficient to deport him, we should change them,” asking, “How long are we going to tolerate termite sabotage of those who have elected to be aliens among us? Must we sit by while aliens living among us ridicule and mock and abuse our liberties?”\textsuperscript{128}

The Legion convention exposed the fault lines among California’s power elite. Archbishop Mitty, speaking to the assembled Legionnaires, praised the

\textsuperscript{125} Larrowe, \textit{Harry Bridges}, 182.

\textsuperscript{126} “Bridges’ Threat to Purge Vets Lashed By Legion Chief,” \textit{San Francisco Examiner}, 11 August 1939, 1.

\textsuperscript{127} “Legion Chief Raps Bridges, Boosts Peace,” \textit{San Francisco Examiner}, 12 August 1939, 1.

\textsuperscript{128} “Legion Chief Raps Bridges, Boosts Peace,” \textit{San Francisco Examiner}, 12 August 1939, 1.
organization and stated that the principles of the Legion were “the same principles” as those espoused in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Governor Olson, in contrast, denounced the Legion’s “Americanism” and anti-communist activities, criticized the Legion’s involvement in partisan politics, denounced the Legion’s cooperation with the Dies Committee, and spoke of the Legionnaires being “misused” and misled by their leaders, who were in turn following directions from figures like Dies and Hearst. While Olson was speaking to the assembly, Watters leapt to his feet to declare that “the American Legion will battle Communists and un-American activities as long as they both exist!” The Examiner reported that the two thousand Legionnaires in attendance then rose to cheer on Watters, leaving “no doubt as to their resentment of the Governor’s interference.”

When the trial was suspended for Labor Day, another war of words erupted in San Francisco. Celebrating the holiday, Bridges marched with an estimated thirty thousand union members through the streets of San Francisco and spoke alongside Governor Olson at a rally. Across town, Mayor Rossi, speaking on Treasure Island at the AFL festivities, launched a thinly veiled attack upon Bridges and his supporters. Frequently mentioning the ominous international situation, including the “marching feet, rumbling guns and droning planes,” Rossi denounced the “efforts of subversive influences, radical and un-American leaders, and outright communists.” He said such “voices of discontent” were “spreading vicious doctrines which assail the

129 “Archbishop Praises Ideals of Legion,” San Francisco Examiner, 14 August 1939, 1.

130 “Olson raps Legion, Gets Torrid Reply,” San Francisco Examiner, 15 August 1939, 1.

131 “Olson raps Legion, Gets Torrid Reply,” San Francisco Examiner, 15 August 1939, 1.
fundamental principles” of American society. In contrast to such leadership stood the AFL, “an impregnable wall against” such sinister influences in American society. “Conservative Labor’s representatives,” had earned “the sincere approval and respect of the American people,” Rossi said.132

In December 1939, Landis finally released his report on the Bridges case, ruling “the evidence does not permit the finding that Harry R. Bridges is either a member of the Communist Party or affiliated with that party.”133 Landis declared that he paid great attention to “improper inducements made to witnesses” and he subsequently proclaimed his “complete rejection of the testimony of certain witnesses.”134 He found that it was not sufficient to prove, as the credible testimony had, that Bridges “had not hostility towards the Communist Party.” Landis further declared that “opposition to ‘red-baiting’ is not the equivalent of proof of Communist membership.”135 Even though Bridges was sympathetic towards many Communist goals, the defendant had made it clear that he did not approve of revolutionary violence and instead sought to work through the democratic process. Even if his associations with the communists might therefore “be regarded by others as


134 Landis Report, 8 and 132.

135 Landis Report, 132
reprehensible or unfortunate,” it fell “short of the statutory definition of affiliation.”

In a surreal turn, *The Examiner* reported on Landis’s findings with the following headline: “Bridges a Radical, Landis Concedes in Lengthy Report.” *The Examiner* published cherry-picked excerpts from the report which noted Bridges’s cooperation with Communists. While the paper admitted that Perkins would probably cancel the order to expel Bridges as a result of the report, the front-page article noted that “there was a great deal of speculation in the capital as to whether the findings were conclusive” and explained that several Congressmen still wanted to expel Bridges.

*The Examiner* was not the only conservative voice keeping the deportation torch alive. Even after Landis issued his report, prominent figures in San Francisco continued to insist Bridges was a Communist. Mayor Rossi publicly denounced Bridges as a Communist. He decried “Bridges’ leadership of a portion of the waterfront workers, which seems to derive a sadistic pleasure from hatred and destruction.” “Five years ago,” Rossi stated, “Harry Bridges, an alien who brought to this country with him a consciousness of class distinction, inaugurated a regime in one section of the labor the primary tenet of which was bad faith…and the indiscriminate use of the strike as a weapon.” In doing so, Rossi claimed, Bridges

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136 Landis Report, 133.

137 *San Francisco Examiner*, 31 December 1939, 1.

was giving San Francisco a bad name.\textsuperscript{139} Rossi called for unions to choose wise leadership and pointed to Mike Casey, recently deceased leader of the Teamsters, as an exemplary union leader. “Mike Casey, not Harry Bridges,” Rossi declared, “was the benefactor of the waterfront workers in 1934.”\textsuperscript{140} Casey was an active member in Catholic Action circles. Despite Rossi’s attempt to portray them as diametric opposites, Casey had continued to engage in an effective working relationship with Bridges up to the end.

Bridges soon became the center of a national debate once again. In 1940 Congressman A. Leonard Allen of Louisiana introduced a bill in Congress authorizing Secretary Perkins to expel Bridges, “whose presence in this country the Congress deems hurtful.”\textsuperscript{141} The bill passed the House 330-42. Perkins did not have to deal with the bill, however, as Roosevelt stripped the Immigration Service from the Labor Department’s portfolio and placed it under the control of the Justice Department. The Attorney General, Robert Jackson, was hesitant to go after Bridges so shortly after the San Francisco trial. But the passage of the Alien Registration Act of 1940 (a.k.a. the Smith Act) had seemingly changed the rules of the game by including a clause meant to facilitate the deportation of radicals. The Alien Registration Act was nominally created to address the specter of foreign subversives

\textsuperscript{139} Rossi statement, \textit{Journal of Proceedings of Board of Supervisors}, Monday 22 January 1940.

\textsuperscript{140} Rossi statement, \textit{Journal of Proceedings of Board of Supervisors}, Monday 22 January 1940.

\textsuperscript{141} Quoted in Larrowe, \textit{Harry Bridges}, 220.
from the Axis nations, but one sponsor of the Act declared that “the bill specifically aimed at the deportation of Harry Bridges.”

After a period of bureaucratic wrangling, Jackson’s successor, Attorney General Nicholas Biddle, ordered in the spring of 1942 that Bridges be deported. Bridges appealed and the case made its way through the federal courts. Finally, in 1945, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that Bridges should not be deported. Justice Frank Murphy, who knew what it meant to be a target of red-baiting, wrote a concurring opinion in which he declared that the Bridges case “will stand forever as a monument to man’s intolerance of man” and a time when “the immutable freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights” were “openly and concededly ignored.”

Conclusion

The dynamics in San Francisco was similar to those in Boston and Detroit in several respects. Like Catholics in Boston and Detroit, San Franciscans viewed local events through the lens of international developments. The Archbishop, the Mayor, prominent figures in the American Legion, and Catholic activists all liberally sprinkled allusions to the dangers abroad into their speeches about the city’s problems. These references were not simply rhetorical tools, although they were undoubtedly utilized as ammunition at times, but rather sincere expressions of fear. To many Catholics and non-Catholics alike the dangers that the city faced in the 1930s seemed linked to global threats.

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142 Sam Hobbs (D-Al) quoted in Larrowe, Harry Bridges, 222.

143 Quoted in Larrowe, Harry Bridges, 246.
San Francisco’s Catholics also maintained a persistent distrust of liberalism. To be sure, Roosevelt won San Francisco in a landslide in each election in the 1930s, just as he did in Boston and Detroit. But Roosevelt’s popularity did not carry over to other liberals. San Franciscans generally remained skeptical of the left wing of the Democratic Party and consistently supported moderate, at times even conservative, Democrats in primary campaigns. The city also consistently reelected Mayor Rossi, a Republican hated by unionists like Harry Bridges.

San Francisco’s story was different from Detroit and Boston in that there was a much greater national influence upon local politics in San Francisco. To a certain extent, the Bridges case, since it centered on immigration and naturalization issues, was bound to become a federal issue. It is nonetheless striking to see the extent to which a seemingly local conflict between a San Francisco labor leader and business leaders quickly became a national concern. Senators from New York and Alabama introduced the key bills to remove him from the country. Martin Dies, a Congressman from Texas, not only intervened in local politics, as he had done in Michigan, but became something of a local hero and political leader. That a Congressman from Texas became a rallying point for Californians upset with radical subversion, growing bureaucracy, and labor agitation demonstrates the ways in which national politics increasingly intruded upon states and localities in the late 1930s.

Another key difference between San Francisco and the other cities studied is that San Francisco was home to a stronger Catholic Action Movement. While there were Catholic Action groups in Boston and Detroit, San Francisco’s movement was far more vibrant. For a number of reasons it was easier for such a movement to
develop in San Francisco. The city had a strong tradition of Progressive government. It did not have Boston’s history of ethnic warfare. The city also lacked the kind of massively powerful reactionary corporations that dominated Detroit, where Ford and GM wielded tremendous power. In addition, San Francisco Catholic leaders perhaps felt that they could let down their guard, as federal authorities assumed prominent positions as guardians against subversive influences. For a combination of reasons, then, it was possible for Catholics in San Francisco to follow a middle way, opposing radicalism but seeking to uphold the values of the labor encyclicals. In Detroit, many Catholics set out on the same path, but there they could not sustain a middle way. In San Francisco, Catholics were more successful in avoiding the extremes. That Catholic leaders succeeded in staying neutral in the Bridges trial, while passions raged and controversy swirled, is indicative of their success.
CHAPTER FIVE: ISOLATIONISM

By the end of the 1930s, a singular discourse had solidified among many of President Roosevelt’s opponents. Fears of subversives and aliens were widespread. Fascism and Communism had been lumped together into one amorphous threat to American liberties. And many Americans were convinced that American involvement in the European war would lead to the destruction of American democracy and the rise of an American dictatorship. Not all Americans, of course, bought into this discourse. Indeed, by mid-1940 a majority of Americans had become convinced of the need to aid Great Britain in its struggle against Hitler’s Germany; many were even willing to risk war if necessary.¹ Still, a significant number of very vocal Americans made their opposition to American involvement crystal clear.

The “isolationist” movement has been much studied in the years since Pearl Harbor. Both historians and contemporary commentators paid a great deal of attention to the America First Movement and leading isolationists such as Charles Lindbergh and

Senator Gerald Nye.\(^2\) In the narrative of American history, isolationism is generally explained as a product of American revulsion to the Treaty of Versailles, outrage over the revelations of the Nye committee, and the traditional American policy of focusing on the Western Hemisphere. These accounts tend to focus on the opinions of rural, Midwestern, and Western isolationists, both conservatives and progressives.\(^3\) Relatively few of those studies have analyzed Catholic opposition to American involvement in the war. To the extent that they do, Catholic attitudes are usually dismissed in a passing reference to Catholic Anglophobia.\(^4\) In fact, the Catholic opposition was more complex than a simple distrust of Great Britain; it was based on many of the issues explained in previous chapters.

Standard accounts of pre-war isolationism often gloss over another story as well. The isolationist movement brought together a broad coalition of Americans: Catholics

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and Protestants, Republicans and Democrats, Progressives and Conservatives, businessmen and labor leaders. Prominent isolationists included “Mr. Republican” Robert Taft, Progressives such as Philip LaFollete and Hiram Johnson, and Democrats like Burton Wheeler and David Walsh. These people were unified by their opposition to war and by the discourse of fear described in this dissertation, the fear that American liberties would be destroyed and a dictatorship would emerge which would threaten religious, social, and political liberties. In many ways, their isolationism seems to have been as deeply rooted in their distrust of New Deal liberalism and the federal bureaucracy as it was in the geopolitical issues involved in war. To be sure, these concerns were not the only motivation for isolationists. Many were motivated by economic concerns,\(^5\) moral considerations such as pacifism, and an assortment of other issues, but, for a large group the fear of domestic subversion formed the core of their approach to foreign policy.

This discourse was not limited to Catholics. By the late 1930s, prominent Protestant leaders were reaching common cause with Catholic anti-communists. In his 1939 Christmas Eve address, Gerald L.K. Smith, a fundamentalist minister from the Midwest who had preached in Louisiana and had been an apostle of Huey Long, delivered a sermon that touched on all of the major concerns of Catholic leaders. “Each year,” Smith thundered, “finds the world with fewer and fewer people able to celebrate in freedom the birthday of the One who came to earth to bring freedom. Dictatorship is jealous.” Smith continued,

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We need not go to Russia, we need not cross the ocean to find those forces which blaspheme the Church….Every priest of the Catholic Church knows what their people have suffered in Mexico, and I am proud, though a Protestant, that I was one to lend encouragement and support to the Knights of Columbus when they went to Washington to petition President Roosevelt to make an appeal to the Mexican government to stop the persecution of Christians in Mexico.

But, Smith insisted, one did “not need to go to Mexico to find….the forces of Lenin attempting to destroy the Church.” Quoting from a report of the Dies Committee, Smith condemned Communists in America, citing a rally in Madison Square Garden as a clear threat to Christians in America.⁶

That Smith was boasting of cooperation with the Knights of Columbus was extraordinary. He came from an anti-Catholic family, had actively preached against Al Smith’s candidacy in 1928, and employed a Klan organizer as his chief assistant.⁷ By 1940, Smith openly acknowledged regret for the anti-Catholic “characteristic of Protestants” in the previous decade and declared that he had developed “great respect” for the Catholic Church.⁸ He repeatedly demonstrated that respect by consistently citing the reports of Catholics authorities as they pertained to Communists, particularly in Mexico and Spain.⁹ In one remarkable statement, Smith proclaimed to Dominican nuns that “the great mother church has done more than any other single force on earth to stem

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⁹ 8 October 1941, folder: Radio Broadcasts: 1941: October, box 6, Gerald LK Smith Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
the tide of atheistic communism.”¹⁰ In another speech Smith cited as evidence of the righteousness of America First the fact that “both cardinals of the Catholic Church in America agree with Colonel Lindbergh.” In response to critics who decried America First members as traitors, Smith expressed astonishment that anyone could dare think that “Cardinal O’Connell is a ‘traitor.’”¹¹ The very idea was unthinkable to Smith, although ten years earlier it had been considered a given by many Fundamentalists, Smith included, that Catholics could not be loyal Americans. Prominent Catholics reciprocated the good will. Among those who endorsed Smith and his organization, the Committee of 1,000,000, was Senator Walsh, who wrote, “I was very much gratified to get the report of the activities and accomplishments of the Committee of 1,000,000.”¹²

For Smith and his allies, the threat to America came not only from Communism, but also, in Smith’s words, “certain sophisticated intellectuals and breast-beating liberals and so-called ‘progressives’.”¹³ The threat was as much from subversives masquerading as “preachers, school teachers, labor leaders and politicians,” as from foreign powers.¹⁴

¹⁰ Smith to Dominican Sisters, 11 October 1939, folder: Religious, box 6, Gerald LK Smith Papers, Bentley Historical Library.


¹² 1 October 1941, Gerald LK Smith Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

¹³ 7 January 1940, folder: Radio Broadcasts: 1940: Jan., box 5, Gerald LK Smith Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

Smith repeatedly berated the Roosevelt administration’s failure to deport Harry Bridges in radio addresses focusing on the Soviet attack on Finland.\textsuperscript{15}

There were also signs of ecumenical efforts developing among mainstream leaders, as they sought a coordinated response to the growing global threats. In 1938, Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel of New Orleans, speaking as chair of Department of Lay Organizations of National Catholic Welfare Conference, called for a “United Front of Christians.”\textsuperscript{16} Simultaneously, \textit{The Presbyterian}, official newspaper of the Philadelphia Presbyterian Church, called for Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, to work together to combat the growing totalitarian threat. \textit{The Michigan Catholic} echoed and endorsed these sentiments. “Ruthless dictators invariably strike at religion and the Church as the final bulwark of human liberty,” declared the paper. “It is only natural, then,” the paper said, “if adherents of various faiths, while preserving intact their doctrinal positions, unite in a common religious front against totalism – also known as totalitarianism.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{The Contours of Isolationism}

The word “isolationist” is misleading because, in some cases, so-called isolationists were quite willing, at times even eager, to advocate intervention in other nations. We have already seen the discrepancy in relation to Mexico, where many so-


\textsuperscript{17} “Religious Front Against Totalism,” \textit{Michigan Catholic}. 17 November 1938.
called isolationists proposing massive American intervention in the country's affairs in the early 1930's. We see the same pattern in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

In 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Finland. Many Americans, including many leading isolationists, declared their sympathy for the Finns. Senator Prentiss Brown (D-MI) Michigan, for one, proposed that a $20 million dollar loan be given to the Finns. The Hearst media supported the loan, although it opposed any official “war loan.”\textsuperscript{18} Hamilton Fish, a leading isolationist, and John Dingell of Michigan pushed the bill through the House, and attempted to remove provisions which prohibited the financing of weapons sales. Dingell dramatically declared, “Finland needs things to protect herself….because they are fighting to stop the Antichrist and the hosts of hell.”\textsuperscript{19} Fish made the startling proposal that such money be spent at President Roosevelt’s discretion.\textsuperscript{20} Fish’s willingness to grant the President leeway to intervene in a foreign war contradicted his basic isolationist principles. He and other anti-communist isolationists did not seem to recognize any such contradiction, however.

While empathy for the Finns was clear, hatred against the Soviet Union was even more intense. In December, Senator Arthur Vandenberg (R-MI) proposed a resolution calling for the President to investigate whether the Soviet Union had violated the terms of the U.S.-U.S.S.R. agreements of 1933. If so, Vandenberg proposed, the American ambassador should be recalled from Moscow immediately.\textsuperscript{21} Beyond declaring his

\textsuperscript{18} Doenecke, Storm, 78.
\textsuperscript{19} “Loan for Finland Is Voted By House,” New York Times, 29 February 1940, 1.
\textsuperscript{20} “Loan of $60,000,000 to Finns Predicted,” New York Times, 11 January 1940, 12.
\textsuperscript{21} Doenecke, Storm, 80.
“deep moral indignation over the brutal rape of Finland,” Vandenberg announced that the Soviet invasion “puts the world upon final notice that Soviet policy is as treacherous as it is ruthless” and clearly demonstrated “to what extent Soviet duplicity and brutality can go.”

Vandenberg concluded, “I would close America to all subversion, inside and out….whether Fascist, Nazi, Communist or anything else.”

A few months later, Boston Congressman McCormack introduced a similar, but more aggressive, bill in the House, which sought to cut off funding for the American ambassador. McCormack’s bill went down to decisive defeat, but supporters, including Fish and Dingell, encouraged him to introduce it again and force a roll call vote so that those voting against would be “put on the record.”

Roosevelt opposed the measure, but McCormack forged ahead, flouting the President’s will. Even a year later, politicians would refer to the slaughter of Finns when debating the possibility of Lend-Lease for the Soviets. Senator Bennett Clark (D-MO), for example, denounced the idea of the “Russian bear – with its claws still dripping from patriotic Finnish blood—receiving $5 million worth of machine tools.”

Many of those who were sympathetic to Finland were not nearly as empathetic when it came to the Western powers facing attacks from Nazi Germany. In May 1940, Germany invaded France, defeating the nation in a little over six weeks. Britain was

22 “Statement by Senator A.H. Vandenberg,” 5 December 1939, roll 6, Vandenberg papers, Bentley Historical Library.

23 “Statement by Senator A.H. Vandenberg,” 5 December 1939, roll 6, Vandenberg papers, Bentley Historical Library.


25 Quoted in Doenecke, Storm, 215.
soon engulfed in a vicious war on the seas and in the skies. What began as a war between British and German bombers soon deteriorated into a year-long series of German bombings raids on British cities. On the worst night of German bombing, 1,436 people were killed and 1,792 were seriously wounded.\(^{26}\) The fire raining down from the sky was far less threatening to the continued existence of a British nation, however, than the threat at sea. By the spring of 1941, the Germans were sinking roughly 400,000 tons of British shipping every month, threatening the island nation with starvation. As German submarines picked off British ships, the British resorted to the old practice of creating convoys, so as to better protect the ships from U-boats. The convoys were hardly immune from submarine attacks, however. In one night in April 1941 10 of 22 ships conducting convoys were sunk by German submarines.\(^{27}\)

Yet even at this perilous point in the war, many American isolationists remained critical of America’s World War I allies. American critics admonished France for not doing more to help Poland and Czechoslovakia, for unduly punishing Germany after World War I and thereby helping Hitler's rise to power, and for adopting a Popular Front government in the 1930s, which critics claimed weakened French defenses and society. *The Chicago Tribune* argued, for instance, that “the war was lost” when “M. Blum, a peace loving socialist, began the French New Deal with a combination of radicals, communists, and saboteurs.”\(^{28}\) Governor Thomas Dewey (R-NY), an aspiring presidential candidate, echoed those sentiments, arguing “it was the Popular Front that

\(^{26}\) Doenecke, *Storm*, 184.

\(^{27}\) Doenecke, *Storm*, 177.

\(^{28}\) “When France Lost the War,” *Chicago Tribune*, 31 July 1940, 10.
sapped the vitality of France and left her defenseless.”^29 Most of the anti-interventionists, however, focused on the British Empire rather than France.

Eminent historian Justis Doenecke has argued that anti-interventionists sought “to ‘balance’ positive accounts of Britain’s leadership, diplomacy, and heritage with negative ones, in the hopes that such ‘modification’ would create a more cautious foreign policy.”^30 “To Sheridan Downey (D-CA), for example,” Doenecke explains, “Britain had threatened the safety of the United States more than any other country; by contrast, Germany had never sought to interfere with American rights.”^31 While some anti-interventionists may have scripted their statements for propaganda value, it is undeniable that many were quite sincere in their anti-British sentiments. Notre Dame alumnus Senator David Worth Clark (D-ID) thundered, “Paint me a picture of 6 years of persecution of the Jews, the Catholics, and the Protestants of Germany, paint it as gory and as bloody as you please, and I will paint you one 10 times as brutal, 10 times as savage, 10 times as bloody in the 500 years of British destruction, pillage, rape, and bloodshed in Ireland.”^32 Father James Gillis, editor of Catholic World, seemed only slightly less impassioned when he declared the British Empire to be “an impossible organization, created and sustained by monstrous injustice.”^33 Anti-British Americans pointed to British atrocities in Ireland, India, and even the Arab world to call into

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^30 Doenecke, Storm, 189
^31 Doenecke, Storm, 191
^32 Quoted in Doenecke, Storm, 207.
^33 Quoted in Doenecke, Storm, 203.
question Britain’s status as a victim. In one of the most ironic examples, *Social Justice*, by this point openly anti-Semitic, spoke sympathetically of the “the poor Jews” of Palestine who, Coughlin’s journal claimed, were terribly oppressed by the British government.  

Despite the opposition, by the autumn of 1940, the administration had begun to take firm steps to meet the growing Nazi threat. On September 3, Roosevelt announced the destroyers for bases deal with Great Britain. Britain, desperate for naval vessels which could augment her much-threatened convoys, asked for forty or fifty World War I-era destroyers from the United States. Believing the public opinion would not tolerate a gift, Roosevelt agreed to swap the destroyers for long-term leases on naval bases in British territories such as Bermuda and Newfoundland. Although most analysts now agree that the United States received more than it gave in the deal, anti-interventionists vigorously condemned the deal. David Walsh, Chairman of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee, was one of its fiercest critics. Roosevelt personally wrote to Walsh to plead for his support, but Walsh warned that the deal would be considered “excessively war-minded” and would cause Democrats to “lose many votes” if it passed.  

Henry Cabot Lodge raised similar concerns on national radio. “If the Executive can do these things without action by Congress,” Lodge said, “can he not also declare war without Congress?” Lodge warned that the policy was a step toward a war that would threaten

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34 Doenecke, *Storm*, 205.

35 Walsh to Roosevelt, 16 August 1940, folder 4, box 5, series I, Walsh Papers, Holy Cross University Archives.
“everything we prize” as Americans.\textsuperscript{36} Even some Catholic supporters of the idea echoed the sentiment. The liberal Catholic weekly \textit{Commonweal} declared that it had “No Opposition” to the destroyers deal, but nonetheless raised the issue of dictatorship: “Party dictatorship certainly appears to be in the cards the world is busy playing, and perhaps the best course now is to prepare the salutary opposition and defenses that will be able to survive and regenerate the coming centralist bureaucratic states.”\textsuperscript{37}

Lodge’s delivered his address under the auspices of the recently formed America First Committee, formed in September 1940 in response to the spreading war. The Committee was formed by Yale law student R. Douglas Stuart and included a wide range of figures: journalist John Flynn, former director of the National Recovery Administration Hugh Johnson, Progressive standard bearer Philip La Follette, and conservative businessmen such as General Robert Wood of Sears and Colonel Robert McCormick of the \textit{Chicago Tribune}. The organization eventually grew to more than 800,000 members, with much of its strength centered in the Midwest.\textsuperscript{38} The organization opposed the idea of American intervention in Europe and endorsed aid to the Allies only to the extent that it would not threaten to entangle the United States in the war.

America First made a deliberate effort to reach out to American Catholics. Historian Wayne S. Cole explains, “The America First Committee appealed for the support of Catholics in opposing intervention on the side of Communist Russia. It cited an encyclical in which Pope Pius XI said: ‘Communism in intrinsically wrong, and no

\textsuperscript{36} Quoted in Doenecke, \textit{Storm}, 375.

\textsuperscript{37} “Mr. Roosevelt and His Boats,” \textit{Commonweal}, 13 September 1940, 417.

\textsuperscript{38} Summary in Doenecke, \textit{Storm}, 381. See also Cole, \textit{America First}. 

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one who would save Christian civilization may collaborate with it in any undertaking whatsoever.”

The movement also made a specific effort to reach out to Father Coughlin’s followers, providing strict instructions to East Coast branches, according to historian George Flynn, that members should not “criticize Coughlin because of the support his followers were giving the cause.”

This support was put to the test when General Wood turned away some Coughlin supporters from a rally, allegedly stating, “We don’t want you people at America First meetings. You people confuse the issue.”

When *Social Justice* published an account of the incident, Coughlin’s followers responded furiously. In Pontiac, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, the entire membership of the America First chapter was said “to have resigned en masse in protest.” In Boston, the vice-chairman publicly supported Coughlin and his followers, while another leader of the Boston chapter declared that Coughlin’s followers were the chapter’s “best friends.”

The Boston chapter, and other Boston-area chapters, also filed official protests against Wood. Clearly, America First contained a significant number of Coughlinites.

The same month that America First was formed and the destroyers deal was announced, Roosevelt signed into law the first peace-time draft in American history.

Some isolationists, including Charles Lindbergh, supported the proposal, believing it a

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necessary step in building up the nation’s defensive capabilities. Given that defense preparedness was one of the central themes of most isolationist organizations, that approach made sense, yet opposition arose among many anti-interventionists, often in the charged language of the 1930s. Columbia historian Harry Elmer Barnes argued that conscription was “the first step to American fascism” and that the recruits would serve Roosevelt as much as “Hitler’s storm troopers.” Meanwhile, according to George Flynn, “The Catholic press experienced a moment of unity as, from the Boston Pilot to the Inland Catholic of Spokane…editorials rang with the same tone of denunciation.” Moreover, Flynn declares, “the bishops of the country…condemned the idea of a peacetime draft as totalitarianism.”

Hamilton Fish introduced an amendment calling for the draft to be delayed while efforts were made to raise a volunteer army. His proposal drew the support of many public figures, including John McCormack who, as floor leader, again departed from the Roosevelt line. Fish’s amendment passed the House, but it died in the Senate and conscription was implemented. Still, the draft continued to be a point of concern for many Americans. The following spring, when Roosevelt mentioned plans to keep the draftees in service longer than a year, the length of time originally planned, Senators Nye and Downey charged that FDR’s policies were turning the “nation into an armed camp,”

45 Quoted in Doenecke, Storm, 115.

46 Flynn, Romanism, 74.

warning that the nation would face “collapse and revolution” if it continued down that path.48

As Hitler rampaged across Europe in 1940, fears of subversion within the United States reached a fever pitch. Yet even at that late date much of the fear revolved around the Soviet Union rather than Germany. Senator Vandenberg wrote in April of 1940, “This problem of dealing with Communistic treachery inside the United States is no longer merely academic in its possibilities of hazard….We want no vipers in our bosom, yet we have them….I hate to think of how much hell Mr. Stalin could raise in the United States if he just gave the word to all his dupes in the United States.”49 A month later Vandenberg wrote, “I believe the national defense also requires drastic action against a new treachery described as the ‘fifth column’….We should clear the track of all subversive activities.”50 Evidently many politicians agreed, for in June 1940 Congress passed the Smith Act. The Act called for all aliens in the United States to register with the appropriate authorities and empowered the government to deal with “fifth columnists,” including Harry Bridges, whose failed deportation helped spur the passage of the bill. The act was accompanied that same month by a bill, introduced by California Congressmen Jerry Voorhis, requiring all organizations under foreign leadership to register with the appropriate authorities. Some politicians thought the proposition did not go far enough and suggested a return to the Sedition Act of 1918. Rep. Hatton Sumners

49 Vandenberg to Mr. Harry Gray, 20 April 1940, roll 3, Vandenberg Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
50 Vandenberg, 25 May 1940, roll 6, Vandenberg Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
(D- TX) reportedly spoke of a law which would “make illegal the voicing of opinions that would please a foreign principal.”

Such acts exposed an inconsistency within isolationist rhetoric. One of the core objections to any war, or any measures that might lead to war, was that combat would empower the federal government, destroy civil liberties, and lead to dictatorship. Yet the Smith Act, the Voorhis bill, and even the rhetoric of Vandenberg showed a clear disregard for civil liberties and a clear willingness to flex the muscle of the federal government. To be sure, some isolationists opposed such acts. Liberal isolationists and socialists like Norman Thomas found the Smith Act to be a “vicious, fascistic measure,” were appalled by the abuse of civil liberties, and pointed to these measures as indicative of hysteria. Yet many isolationists, including many Catholics, were willing to accept the laws. After all, fear of subversion and aliens had deep roots.

Even as America First grew in size and isolationists became increasingly vocal, polls showed that a majority of Americans believed by late 1940 that to the United should aid England, even if doing so risked war with Germany. The polls seemed to reflect Roosevelt’s efforts to court isolationists, particularly in the Midwest. One of Roosevelt’s most important allies in this endeavor was William Allen White, the powerful Kansas newspaper editor and lifelong Republican. FDR asked White how to “get the American people to think of conceivable consequences without scaring the people.” In May 1940,

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51 Doenecke, Storm, 273.
52 Quoted in Doenecke, Storm, 274.
53 Cole, Isolationists, 365.
54 Roosevelt to White, quoted in Cole, Isolationists, 366.
White became the chairman of the newly formed Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, which served as a powerful voice for Roosevelt’s policy in the debates of the next year and a half.55

Such was the context of the 1940 election, when Roosevelt ran for an unprecedented third term. His decision to run led to difficulties with many Democrats who had their eyes on the Oval Office, including Joseph Kennedy and FDR’s former right-hand man James Farley. Roosevelt’s campaign also mobilized his ideological enemies. Virtually every major isolationist (Burton Wheeler, Gerald Nye, Arthur Vandenberg, Robert Taft, Hamilton Fish, and William Borah) threw his hat into the ring at some point, as did several lesser known figures. Eventually, however, Wendell Wilkie emerged with the Republican nomination, in part, it seems, because the isolationists split their votes.

An internationalist, Wilkie stood for a foreign policy far more in line with Roosevelt’s than with the isolationists. His nomination therefore distressed many of his fellow Republicans; Hiram Johnson said Wilkie’s support for the conscription bill had been akin to slapping “every one of us in the face, who were thinking American and acting American.”56 Johnson supported Wilkie as the lesser of two evils, however, as did many other isolationists. Despite the fact that Wilkie denounced Father Coughlin’s anti-Semitism, Social Justice also endorsed Wilkie.57 Still, as historian Ronald Bayor points

56 Johnson quoted in Doenecke, Storm, 161
57 Doenecke, Storm, 161.
out, “There was the feeling, which even the Irish Coughlinites expressed, that the two candidates were not very different.”

Roosevelt campaigned aggressively, making the war issues the centerpiece of much of his campaign. Declaring that it had never been his intention to seek a third term and that he had in fact looked forward to peace and retirement, he asserted in his acceptance speech that conditions had changed and “my conscience will not let me turn my back upon a call to service.” Roosevelt warned that the war was “not an ordinary war” but rather “a revolution imposed by force of arms, which threatens all men everywhere.” Roosevelt denounced “appeaser fifth columnists who charged me with hysteria and war-mongering.” Even though Wilkie’s foreign policy was similar to Roosevelt’s, some in the Roosevelt campaign, including Vice Presidential nominee Henry Wallace, suggested that Wilkie was Hitler’s preferred candidate. Some even suggested Wilkie might be a German agent since his ancestors were Germans. For his part, Roosevelt portrayed the election in apocalyptic terms. Americans, he said, faced a choice:

It is not alone a choice of Government by the people versus dictatorship. It is not alone a choice of freedom versus slavery. It is not alone a choice between moving forward or falling back. It is all of these rolled into one. It is the continuance of civilization as we know it versus the ultimate destruction of all that we have held

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60 19 July 1940, DNC Address.

61 19 July 1940, DNC Address.

62 Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict*, 146.
dear—religion against godlessness; the ideal of justice against the practice of force; moral decency versus the firing squad; courage to speak out, and to act, versus the false lullaby of appeasement. 

Roosevelt thus co-opted the rhetoric of his opponents, portraying his cause as defending religion, morals, and justice in the face of totalitarian dangers, while simultaneously smearing his opponents as appeasers.

While these messages seemed to appeal to many Americans, Roosevelt was continually peppered with questions about the possibility of war and the dangers that it would entail. In response, Roosevelt gave perhaps his most famous address from the campaign in Boston, bluntly declaring, “While I am talking to you mothers and fathers, I give you one more assurance. I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again: Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars.” His pledge seemed to assuage the concerns of many Americans, even as most isolationists viewed it as a bold lie.

Roosevelt won a significant victory in 1940, but the election trends were not as encouraging as the electoral college results might suggest. He defeated Wilkie by almost five million votes and won a land-slide victory in the electoral college (449-82), taking thirty eight states. Yet his showing was not nearly as strong as it had been four years earlier. Whereas he had taken almost 61% of the vote in 1936, he won less than 55% in 1940. The drop was even more severe among Catholic voters. Historians Charles Trout

63 19 July 1940, DNC Address.
65 Doenecke, Storm, 163.
and Gerald Gamm have shown that in Boston Irish and Italian support for Roosevelt declined dramatically from 1932 to 1940, a pattern hidden by changing demographics and the registration of new voters. Trout shows that “Italians in Wards 1 and 3 [of Boston] had given Hoover just 3,849 votes in 1932, but eight years later Willkie amassed 12,604,” cutting “Roosevelt's share of the total by more than 18 percent.” In Irish South Boston the Republican vote tripled and “eroded the President's portion by 11.9 percent.”

By 1940, Gamm explains, “One-quarter of the Irish lower class cast ballots for Wilkie.” The statistics show that many Catholics had become disenchanted with Roosevelt; in fact, ethnic Democrats who voted for Wilkie often continued to self-identify as Democrats and vote accordingly in other elections. Among Catholic voters in Boston, Roosevelt actually acted as a drag on the party in 1940. Similar trends can be found in other cities. In New York, according to Ronald Bayor, the Irish vote dropped 16.8% for Roosevelt and the drop among Italians was even more significant.

Meanwhile, Vandenberg, Johnson, and Walsh, leading isolationist senators, won decisive victories in Michigan, California, and Massachusetts respectively in 1940.

**Lend-Lease**

Shortly after the election, tensions between interventionists and anti-interventionists came to a boil. On December 8, 1940, Winston Churchill informed

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68 Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict*, 149.
Roosevelt that England would no longer be able to afford American weapons. A week later, Roosevelt announced his intention to “lease or sell” supplies to Britain, using the famous analogy of loaning a hose to a neighbor whose house was on fire. Roosevelt declared, “The best defense of Great Britain is the best defense of the United States, and therefore that these materials would be more useful to the defense of the United States if they were used in Great Britain, than if they were kept in storage here.” Later that month, Roosevelt elaborated on his message, calling for the United States to become “the great arsenal of democracy.”

On January 10, 1941, the lend-lease plan was introduced into Congress. According to historian Wayne Cole, “not since repeal of the arms embargo in the fall of 1939 had non-interventionists worked so hard to try to defeat an administration proposal.” Some anti-interventionists argued that American arms would be used by British soldiers against natives in India. Others claimed that American arms manufacturers would be unable to meet the demands of both England and America, a claim that would prove laughable in the years to come. Probably the most common complaint, however, focused on the amount of power the act would give the President. Senator Walsh declared, “It seems to me the real pith of the bill and its most portentous aspect lies in its granting of virtually unlimited authority to the President.” America First spokesman William Castle phrased his concerns in a more inflammatory manner,

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69 Doenecke, *Storm*, 166.


stating lend-lease “signs away our freedom, creates a dictatorship…as it permits the
President to ignore such laws as he pleases and thus to make war.” While the Catholic
hierarchy was by no means unanimous in its opposition, prominent leaders like Cardinal
O’Connell spoke out against the bill.74

During the debate anti-interventionists denounced the bill as putting the United
States on a path to war. Without denying “the extreme perils to democracy and to
freedom throughout the world,” Senator Walsh said, “this bill when viewed in the
perspective of all attendant circumstances is an absolute committal to a war as Britain’s
ally” and therefore unadvisable.75 Walsh continued, “But with respect to those who
profess truly to desire escape from war and who profess truly to desire preservation of the
democratic form of government, who profess truly to oppose American dictatorship,
however beneficent and well-intentioned such a dictatorship may be, how they in good
conscience can support this bill is to me incomprehensible.”76 For his part, Vandenberg
took the aggressive step of warning Southerners that if they voted for cloture, he would
retaliate by resuscitating the anti-lynching bill.77 Despite their best efforts, the anti-
interventionists failed to stop lend-lease, which was signed into law on March 11, 1941.


76 *Congressional Record*, 3 March 1941.

Roosevelt responded harshly to his critics.\textsuperscript{78} During the campaign, he consistently denounced his opponents as “appeaser fifth columnists”\textsuperscript{79} and warned of “certain forces within our own national community, composed of men who call themselves Americans but who would destroy America.”\textsuperscript{80} “By the time Roosevelt began his third term,” Cole explains, “isolationists were widely viewed as narrow, self-serving, partisan, conservative, anti-democratic, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi, fifth columnist, and even treasonous. That image distorted the truth, but it formed nonetheless.”\textsuperscript{81} Isolationists denounced Roosevelt as an aspiring dictator, while Roosevelt and his supporters likewise denounced isolationists as Fascist sympathizers. Throughout 1941, the administration built upon that charge, calling for “national unity” and suggesting that, in the words of Cole, “dissent from the administration’s foreign policies was not really consistent with patriotism or loyalty.”\textsuperscript{82} “Ironically,” Cole concludes, “in 1941 interventionists used arguments in attacking isolationist fifth columnists that were much like those used by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy in attacking liberal internationalists and communist subversives a decade later.”\textsuperscript{83}

Non-interventionists chafed at FDR’s accusations. \textit{Catholic World}, for instance, took issue with the way Roosevelt charged opponents with appeasement, “Clever word

\textsuperscript{78} Cole, \textit{Isolationists}, 428

\textsuperscript{79} Cole \textit{Isolationists}, 397.

\textsuperscript{80} Cole, \textit{Isolationists}, 401.

\textsuperscript{81} Cole, \textit{Isolationists}, 411.

\textsuperscript{82} Cole, \textit{Isolationists}, 480.

\textsuperscript{83} Cole, \textit{Isolationists}, 456.
‘appeasement.’ Clever but vicious. A world of opprobrium rides on the back of ‘appeasement.’ Scorn, contempt, imputation of cowardice, a hint and more than a hint of stupidity. Say the word ‘appeasement’ and there leaps to the imagination the poor old Neville Chamberlain…with his silly umbrella.”

*Catholic World* also bemoaned the fact that “intelligent observers who suggest that the warring nations might settle their economic and psychological difficulties amicably are labeled…‘Fifth Columnists’, ‘traitors.’”

Roosevelt did not merely rely upon rhetoric in his battle with non-interventionists. Recently, historians have shed new light on the FBI surveillance program that Roosevelt authorized during this time. With Roosevelt’s approval, the FBI engaged in an extensive campaign of illegal wiretapping. When Attorney General Robert Jackson attempted to stop the practice, Roosevelt reversed him. The President wrote to Jackson, “I am convinced that the Supreme Court never intended any dictum in the particular case which it decided to apply to grave matters involving the defense of the nation. You are, therefore, authorized . . . to secure information by listening devices direct to the conversation or other communications of persons suspected of subversive activities.”

In several cases, Roosevelt authorized wiretaps against administration critics on the thin precept that they were attempting a military overthrow of the United States, accusations

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that no evidence substantiated.\textsuperscript{88} Meanwhile, anti-interventionist letters to the White House, particularly those expressing support for Lindbergh, were sent to the FBI, which investigated the background of the authors and compiled a report for the White House.\textsuperscript{89} The FBI also kept detailed files on the America First Committee, its leadership, and its meetings, and passed them along to the White House, which called for further inquiry into the money behind the organization.\textsuperscript{90} Historian Charles Croog explains, “Roosevelt was able to use Hoover to collect information about the activities of his political opponents who lawfully dissented from Roosevelt's policies. Clearly, Roosevelt encouraged Hoover to exploit the ambiguity of the Bureau's mission, once thanking him for "many interesting and valuable reports" and a "wonderful job."\textsuperscript{91} These efforts would not become publicly known for many years, some coming out as a result of the Church Committee investigation of 1975 and others only seeing the light of day as a result of Freedom of Information Act requests in the twenty-first century. If they had been known, they would have confirmed many of the fears of Roosevelt’s critics about the growing might of the federal government, violations of civil liberties, and state repression.

The debates raged on throughout the spring and summer of 1941. In April, Roosevelt announced the U.S. occupation of Greenland and the beginning of “neutrality patrols” to seek out German submarines and warn British ships of potential attacks.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{88} Charles, “Informing FDR,” 219.
\textsuperscript{89} Charles, “Informing FDR,” 220.
\textsuperscript{90} Charles, “Informing FDR.”
\textsuperscript{91} Croog, "FBI Political Surveillance."
\textsuperscript{92} Doenecke, Storm, 178-9
That same month, Roosevelt announced his intention to buy or lease European ships that were idle in New York Harbor, taking German and Italian ships without their consent.\textsuperscript{93} Denouncing isolationists in May, Roosevelt declared them to be “the enemies of democracy in our midst – the Bundists, the Fascists, and the Communists, and every group devoted to bigotry and racial and religious intolerance.”\textsuperscript{94} In July, Roosevelt sent U.S. forces to occupy Iceland. Robert Taft declared, “If the occupation of Iceland is defense, than any act the President cares to order is defense.”\textsuperscript{95} America First’s John Flynn, unsurprisingly, denounced FDR’s actions as “the beginning of the end of Constitutional Government in the United States.”\textsuperscript{96} Catholic World probably captured the sentiments of millions when it explained, “Constitutional restrictions on the power of an executive are necessarily ignored at such a time, and what Socialistic minded government officials have not been able to accomplish in peace may very well be achieved in war.”\textsuperscript{97}

**The Question of Aid to the USSR**

On June 22, 1941, German forces attacked the Soviet Union. Caught off guard, Soviet forces were overwhelmed by the coordinated power of the German armed forces.

\textsuperscript{93} Doenecke, *Storm*, 180.


\textsuperscript{95} Doenecke, *Storm*, 229.

\textsuperscript{96} Cole, *Isolationists*, 432.

\textsuperscript{97} John V. Connorton, “Will American Go to War?” *Catholic World*, January 1941, 402.
Twelve hundred Soviet aircraft were destroyed in the opening hours of the attack. Roughly 60% of Soviet supply dumps fell into German hands within weeks. And more than six million Soviet soldiers were captured or killed in the first six months of fighting. Stalin seemed to teeter on the verge of a nervous breakdown, escaping to his dacha and refusing to respond to any messages sent to him, leaving the Soviet Union temporarily leaderless. But he quickly recovered from the initial shock, as did the Soviet army which began a prolonged war against the German invaders.

The question that plagued American politicians was whether to support Stalin and the Red Army. Given the deep-seated antipathy that most Americans felt for the Soviet Union, many probably agreed with Senator Harry Truman who declared, "If we see that Germany is winning we ought to help Russia and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible." Roosevelt, however, was more inclined to agree with Churchill, who famously responded to Operation Barbarossa by saying, “If Hitler invaded Hell I would make at least a favourable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons.” While Roosevelt said both privately and publicly that “Russian form of dictatorship” was as bad as “the German form of dictatorship,” he made a decisive decision “that the immediate menace at this time to the security of the

98 Richard Overy, Russia’s War (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 76.
99 Overy, Russia’s War, 76.
100 Overy, Russia’s War, 117.
101 Overy, Russia’s War, 78.
103 Cole, Isolationists, 433.
United States lies in the threat of Hitler’s armies.”\textsuperscript{104} Public opinion suggested that most Americans accepted Roosevelt’s argument that Germany was a greater threat than the Soviet Union. A Gallup poll in July found that 72\% of those polled hoped for Russian victory and only 4\% for German victory.\textsuperscript{105}

Many isolationists, and many Catholics, did not see things that way. Ninety percent of Catholic clergy, according to one poll, opposed the idea of US aid for the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{106} Hamilton Fish, a Yankee aristocrat from New York who nonetheless became the darling of Catholic anti-communists, declared that it was “preposterous to think of America being aligned with Soviet Russia and Joseph Stalin as our pal and comrade, with his hands dripping with blood of murdered priests and nuns.”\textsuperscript{107} Speaking in San Francisco, Charles Lindbergh denounced “the idealists who have been shouting against the horrors of Nazi Germany” but “are now ready to welcome Soviet Russia as ally.”\textsuperscript{108} The Soviet Union’s “record of cruelty, bloodshed, and barbarism,” Lindbergh claimed, “is without parallel in modern history.”\textsuperscript{109} Bennett Clark (D – MO) was more biting when he mocked the idea of aiding “Bloody Joe” and denounced the idea “of American boys being sent to their death singing ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’ under the

\textsuperscript{104} Roosevelt to Fulton Oursler, in Cole,\textit{Isolationists}, 433. See also Roosevelt to American Youth Congress in Doenecke, \textit{Storm}, 212: USSR is “a dictatorship as absolute as any in the world.”

\textsuperscript{105} Doenecke, \textit{Storm}, 224.

\textsuperscript{106} Doenecke, \textit{Storm}, 219.

\textsuperscript{107} Fish in Cole, \textit{Isolationists}, 435.


bloody banner of the hammer and the sickle.” Rev. Dr. John O’Brien, a professor at Notre Dame, declared, “The American people can’t be driven by propaganda, trickery, or deceit into fighting to maintain the Christ-hating despot, Stalin.” Gerald L.K. Smith asked, “Do the politicians in Washington think we are foolish enough to join hands with the same Stalin who organized the forces of Spain and slaughtered the ministers of Christ in Spain?” Smith declared, “We consider Hitler and Stalin as two plagues, and we refuse to support, ally ourselves with, or give comfort to either one.” He insisted that “an alliance with communistic, atheistic, church-burning, God-hating, Christ-killing Russia is an alliance with the Devil himself.” Representative Edith Nourse Rogers, from Boston, introduced an amendment seeking to block all aid to the Soviet Union until the Soviet government issued a guarantee of religious freedom inside the Soviet Union and an end to communist propaganda in America. Her amendment failed to pass, and Lend-Lease was extended to the Soviet Union. By the fall of 1941, the United States had moved beyond being the “arsenal of democracy” and was supplying weapons to the United Kingdom, China, and the Soviet Union.

112 “Must We Embrace Stalin?” folder: Radio Broadcasts: 1941: Undated, box 5, Gerald LK Smith Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
113 2 July 1941, folder: Radio Broadcasts: 1941: July, box 6, Gerald LK Smith Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
114 16 July 1941, Gerald LK Smith papers, Bentley Historical Library.
115 Doenecke, Storm, 219.
By this point, Roosevelt had begun an effort to win over Catholic isolationists, sending prominent figures out to give speeches to Catholic organizations. Frank Murphy, by now a justice on the Supreme Court, made a series of statements endorsing the administration's policy. He said that the Nazis were claiming to defend ‘Western Christian Civilization against the godlessness of Soviet Russia’ in order “to divide and confuse opinion in this country, especially among the people of the Catholic faith.”

Murphy attempted to expose the “hypocrisy” of the German regime’s claims, quoting German officials who sought the “total annihilation” of Catholicism. He then quoted an encyclical Pius XI had published in 1937 which warned of “the threatening storm clouds of destructive religious wars” developing in Germany. Catholic accounts, claimed Murphy, painted a “picture of the closing of churches, monasteries, convents and schools on invented assertions and flimsy pretexts; of the regimentation of Catholic youth and the abolition of their youth organizations; of the elimination of Catholic Social Action Societies and publishing homes, the surveillance and supervision of priests, and the destruction of business establishments.” The pattern was repeated in Nazi-occupied Poland, where “hundreds of priests” had been murdered and “thousands of others” imprisoned. “From this record and from other evidence,” Murphy concluded, “it should be abundantly clear to anyone that under Nazi rule no religion would remain free” and therefore it was imperative that democracy triumph.

Murphy also finagled an invitation to the Knights of Columbus annual convention, where he urged the group to support the

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Soviet Union as the lesser of two evils in the fight against Nazi Germany. Murphy declared, “We stand against Communism as a thing that is completely out of accord with our freely chosen way of life. But we should not permit this to blind us to our interest and….in present circumstances, any nation resisting the might and aggression of Nazi Germany is advancing our interests as well as its own.”

Murphy’s speech sparked a sharp response. One Knight, for instance, urged the convention to issue a statement disowning “Murphy of the Synagogue.” Such an anti-Semitic remark clearly illustrate the prejudice that existed in some quarters of the Catholic community, but they also demonstrate that some Catholics viewed Nazi aggression to be something that only affected Jews. Father Coughlin responded to Murphy’s speech by admonishing him for violating Pope Pius XI’s prohibition against cooperating “with Communism in any manner whatsoever, even if your house is burning down.”

Archbishop Edward Mooney received letters from constituents such as Mary Otto of Detroit who declared, “It seems to me that the Catholic Prelates are strangely silent on this most important question against our going to war to win it for Communism….As a Catholic mother of several sons and a member of the League of Catholic Women, I wish to voice my protest. American boys must not be sent to death in this war for either Nazism or Communism.”

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118 “The Real Menace to Christianity,” roll 145, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

119 Quoted in Bayor, Neighbors in Conflict, 111.

120 “Coughlin to Miss Eleanor Bumgardner,” 3 September 1941, roll 145, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library. Coughlin’s words, not the Pope’s.

121 Mary L. Otto to Mooney, 18 September 1941, folder 9-3, Mooney Collection, Archdiocese of Detroit Archives.
In an essay entitled “Democracy and Religion,” Senator Walsh laid out his explanation for “trends and movements now tending to undermine and destroy Democracy here in America.”\(^\text{122}\) Walsh’s explanation was five-fold: “Concentration of wealth”, “concentration of power – undermining the constitution”, “irreligion”, “class hatreds”, and “internationalism.”\(^\text{123}\) In talking about wealth, Walsh sounded very much like a New Dealer, condemning “greed and selfishness, especially of organized capital that has too often enslaved the workers and impoverished the masses” in clear “violation of God’s laws.”\(^\text{124}\) In the other four areas, however, Walsh’s concerns seemed focused chiefly against New Deal liberalism. He claimed that “concentration of power in our Federal Government” was destroying the connection of people to their local governments and “without this local power and authority…we cannot hope for the preservation of democracy.” Of even greater concern was the growing threat to religion in American society. “When and where religion is threatened and undermined,” Walsh claimed, “some other form of government – other than democracy—is sure to arise.” Quoting Fulton Sheen, he declared, “To leave religion out of public affairs is like plucking the eyes out of a head.”\(^\text{125}\) Although he tip-toed around the topic of class hatred, he was extraordinarily critical of internationalists who, he claimed, were “either totally oblivious or sadly indifferent to the dire possibility that in trying to save…other governments, we become contaminated with their imperialistic or communistic philosophies and lose


\(^\text{123}\) Ibid, 14.

\(^\text{124}\) Ibid, 14.

\(^\text{125}\) Ibid, 21.
forever our priceless democratic heritage.‖\textsuperscript{126} It is hard to imagine a position farther removed from Murphy’s.

By the autumn of 1941, Hitler’s forces had conquered virtually all of Europe and were routing British forces in Africa. As events unfolded overseas, Americans engaged in one last fierce round of debates. In doing so, both sides increasingly relied upon the same discourse, of religion and democracy under siege. In an October radio address, Roosevelt reached out to those who continued to be skeptical of the need for war. The president claimed to have a document detailing a German “plan to abolish all existing religions – Catholic, Protestant, Mohammedan, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jewish alike.” The document, Roosevelt, explained, exposed Hitler’s plot:

The property of all churches will be seized by the Reich and its puppets. The cross and all other symbols of religion are to be forbidden. The clergy are to be forever liquidated, silenced under penalty of the concentration camps, where even now so many fearless men are being tortured because they have placed God above Hitler.

In the place of the churches of our civilization, there is to be set up an International Nazi Church- a church which will be served by orators sent out by the Nazi Government. And in the place of the Bible, the words of Mein Kampf will be imposed and enforced as Holy Writ. And in the place of the cross of Christ will be put two symbols—the swastika and the naked sword.

The god of Blood and Iron will take the place of the God of Love and Mercy. Let us well ponder that statement which I have made tonight.\textsuperscript{127}

Roosevelt’s statement seems to have been carefully cultivated to appeal to the fears of American Christians, Catholics and Protestant alike.\textsuperscript{128} Such rhetoric undoubtedly

\textsuperscript{126} ibid, 21.

worked, as polls showed that 63.5% of Americans supported Roosevelt’s foreign policy. Yet anti-interventionists continued to push their own case against American involvement in the war.

War Arrives

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese Navy attacked Pearl Harbor, killing 2,323 Americans and destroying or severely damaging much of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. Soon thereafter, Germany and Italy declared war against the United States as well. The United States thus found itself in the war that anti-interventionists had sought to avoid for more than a year and half. After Pearl Harbor, the vast majority of anti-interventionists declared their support for the conflict, which in Vandenberg’s words was “forced upon us by Japan.” But the administration continued to try to discredit and isolate the pre-war anti-interventionists. Lindbergh, for instance, was blackballed by the administration, which not only declined his offer of serving in the Air Force but exerted influence to prevent private contractors from hiring him in any capacity.

Father Coughlin was silenced as well. While the administration considered ways of charging Coughlin with treason or sedition, Roosevelt decided to first seek a solution through non-governmental channels. Using Leo Crowley, chairman of the Federal

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128 Many Jewish Americans already seemed to have been convinced of the need to fight Hitler. Some Americans, meanwhile, seemed to think of it as merely a Jewish problem. Perhaps that is why Roosevelt focused on portraying Nazism as a threat to Christianity.


130 Quoted in Cole, Isolationists, 506.

131 Cole, Isolationists, 509-514.
Deposit Insurance Commission, as a go-between, Roosevelt reached out to Archbishop Mooney, the Vatican’s apostolic delegate, and prominent Catholic leaders like Cardinal Spellman of New York to determine a solution to the Coughlin problem. In the face of possible prosecution, Coughlin agreed with Mooney to stop all political activities. The postal service, meanwhile, announced that it would no longer deliver Social Justice.\footnote{Cole, Isolationists, 536 and Charles Warren, Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, the Father of Hate Radio (New York: Free Press, 1996), 266-7.}

Coughlin continued to have a small but dedicated group of followers. In Boston, his Christian Front remained active throughout the war, harassing Jews in the city. The attacks occurred with such frequency that air raid wardens began patrolling the streets of Jewish neighborhoods to protect the residents from the Christian Front.\footnote{Warren, Radio Priest, 279.} A reporter for the magazine PM described anti-Semites going “Jew-hunting” in the streets of Boston while reporter from the Boston Herald, working undercover, reported scenes of rabid anti-Semitism.\footnote{Warren, Radio Priest, 279.} At one rally, Francis Moran, the local leader of the Christian Front, was reported to have called to the crowd, “Who are the blood suckers plotting to send our boys to die in England?” The crowd shouted in reply, “The Jews!”\footnote{Quoted in Warren, Radio Priest, 280.} At a New York Christian Front rally, six hundred people reportedly listened as a speaker announced, “We are friends of Father Coughlin in his silence, and we will be friends of Father Coughlin when he again speaks over the air…he will be stronger than ever.”\footnote{Warren, Radio Priest, 283.} New York also witnessed violence like that in Boston. According to historian Ronald Bayor, “A large
number of youths belonging to” Irish street gangs “were arrested for vandalizing synagogues and attacking Jewish boys.” Mayor LaGuardia responded by offering a $500 reward for any information regarding anti-Semitism while Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant leaders created an interfaith organization to combat such violence. In the grand scheme of things, the violence was limited. Most of Coughlin’s followers abandoned him in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor and he never again became a prominent national voice, although some dedicated followers continued to make a pilgrimage to his church during and after the war to listen to his sermons about the danger of communism.

While few Catholics endorsed the violence of the Christian Front, many remained concerned about the Soviet Union. Anticommunism was particularly strong among Irish Catholics in Massachusetts. A week after Pearl Harbor The Pilot stated, “Herr Hitler who had wretched from education its loyalties to God and transformed them to his nation, his party, his very self, is execrated for the greed and tyranny and brutality of leadership. Yet, the more vocal of our educators seem equally to ignore God and to hope for a democracy which will somehow thrive on loyalty to itself.” A week later, The Pilot returned to the theme, “What needs to be emphasized….is that when American and Russian interests in our defense production no longer happen to coincide…Stalin will still have his strangle-hold on our national fate.” World War II was, according to the Pilot,

137 Bayor, Neighbors in Conflict, 157.
140 The Pilot, 13 December 1941.
“our greatest opportunity to remove the Communist time bomb from our national defense effort.”

In March 1942, the keynote speaker at an Evacuation Day celebration, the Coughlinite Father Edward Curran also focused on the communist, rather than the fascist, threat. He declared, “There are internal enemies in the United States of American today. One hundred and sixty-six years ago our internal enemies were those who wished the continuation of foreign rule in America. Today the internal enemies are those who would repeal the Constitution, entrap the Bill of Rights, destroy freedom of speech and surrender America to the worldwide atheistic revolution of communism.” Curran received a round of applause from the Irish of South Boston for these statements. Even at the peak of the Axis threat to the United States, it seems, the threat of communist subversion was at the forefront of Catholic consciousness in Massachusetts.

Those sentiments were not limited to Boston. On January 8, 1942, just one month after Pearl Harbor, Senator Vandenberg wrote to a constituent who was concerned with the communist menace, “Your questions regarding ‘communism’ have not been ‘too hot to handle’….I have always been anti-communist all my life and I shall continue to be anti-communist all the balance of my life.” Demonstrating the continued importance of pre-war concerns, Vandenberg also asserted, “I have always favored the deportation of [Harry] Bridges and I still do.” “As for the gallant Finns,” Vandenberg concluded, “I

141 The Pilot, 20 December 1941.

see no reason in the present circumstances for reversing our traditional American attitude” even though the Finns were fighting as allies of Nazi Germany by 1941.143

The issue of religious freedom remained central to Catholic Americans throughout World War II. In 1942, Archbishop Mooney, as director of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, forwarded to the White House “The Bishop’s Statement on Victory and Peace.” In their statement, ten bishops, including Mooney and Mitty, declared the Allied war effort to be a war against those seeking “to bring about a slave world – a world that would deprive man of his divinely conferred dignity, rejected human freedom and permit no religious liberty.” “This conflict of principles,” the bishops declared, “makes compromise impossible.” Reasserting traditional concerns, the bishops declared that “Secularism cannot write a real and lasting peace;” “exploitation cannot write a real and lasting peace;” and “totalitarianism, whether Nazi, Communist or Fascist, cannot write a real and lasting peace.” Only the spirit of Christian dignity, they argued, could bring about a real and lasting peace. To that end, the bishops expressed “our deepest sympathy to our Brother Bishops in all countries of the world where religion is persecuted, liberty abolished, and the rights of God and man are violated.” The bishops also declared that “the war has brought to the fore the conditions that have long been with us” and that the time had come to respect the “full benefit of our free institutions and the rights of our…colored fellow citizens” in America. The bishops addressed long-standing concerns about the violation of American rights during war by asserting that “free men must surrender many of their liberties” during war, but do so in the knowledge “that our

143 Vandenberg to Mr. John Milliken, 8 January 1942, roll 6, Vandenberg Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

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country has been the defender, not the destroyer, of liberties and has in the past always reestablished the full measure of peacetime freedom, on the conclusion of hostilities.\textsuperscript{144}

Roosevelt heartily agreed with the bishops’ statement and in fact, made religious freedom a central part of his own wartime rhetoric.\textsuperscript{145} When Roosevelt enumerated his famous “Four Freedoms” address, freedom of religion was second on the list. Throughout the war, American propaganda promoted the idea that the United States was fighting to defend religion from the menace of totalitarianism. During his last campaign, Roosevelt spoke in Boston on the topic of religious freedom. The President began by discussing a speech he delivered in Boston in 1928, when he had been campaigning for Al Smith. Referencing the “religious intolerance” that Smith faced and calling it “a menace to the liberties of America,” Roosevelt portrayed the war as a continuation of Smith’s fight against religious intolerance.\textsuperscript{146} “Today, in this war,” Roosevelt declared, “Murphys and Kellys” are fighting side by side with “the Cabots and the Lowells” for the cause of “a country and a world where men and women of all races, colors and creeds can live, work, speak and worship – in peace, freedom and security.”\textsuperscript{147}

Despite the rallying to the flag effect that war usually brings, many Americans seemed to retain a deep skepticism of New Deal liberalism; 1942, therefore, was not a

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\textsuperscript{144} “The Bishops’ Statement on Victory and Peace,” President’s Personal File 18: Catholic Matters, Roosevelt Papers, Roosevelt Library.

\textsuperscript{145} Roosevelt to Mooney, 17 November 1942, President’s Personal File 18: Catholic Matters, Roosevelt Papers, Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library.

\textsuperscript{146} “Address of the President, Fenway Park, Boston, Mass. November 4, 1944,” folder: 1569, box 84: 1558-1566, Franklin Roosevelt Speech Files, Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library.

\textsuperscript{147} “Address of the President, Fenway Park, Boston, Mass. November 4, 1944,” folder: 1569, box 84: 1558-1566, Franklin Roosevelt Speech Files, Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library.
\end{flushright}
good year for New Dealers running for re-election. In November, Michigan’s Prentiss Brown lost his Senate seat to Judge Homer Ferguson. Ferguson ran “on a strict, anti-New Deal platform,” depicting Brown as “rubber stamp of the administration.” Throughout the campaign, Ferguson promised to uphold his “right to criticize” the President if elected. Ferguson defeated Brown in a close race.\(^\text{148}\) Also in 1942, Culbert Olson, who ran on a platform of support for Roosevelt and the New Deal, lost the Governor’s race in California to Earl Warren. To be sure, Warren did not run on an anti-New Deal platform, but rather as a progressive Republican in the mold of Hiram Johnson. Warren supported labor unions and backed Roosevelt’s wartime efforts, but he was also conservative on crime issues, social issues, and of course on Communism. According to Warren’s biographer Jim Newton, “The New Deal offended his sense of propriety.”\(^\text{149}\) Warren’s program held enough appeal that he cross-registered in both Democratic and Republican primaries and won 41% of the Democratic votes, while Olson polled just 52% of his own party members.\(^\text{150}\) In the general election, Warren won in a landslide.\(^\text{151}\)

It should also be remembered that both men, Olson as Governor and Warren as Attorney General, presided over the internment of Japanese-Americans, the radical culmination of California’s long-simmering concerns about alien subversion.

\(^{148}\) “Anti-New Deal Plea Sums Up Ferguson Case,” \textit{Detroit Times}, 1 November 1942, box 26, Prentiss Brown Papers, Bentley Historical Library.


\(^{151}\) Burke, \textit{New Deal for California}, 226.
Epilogue

After the war, leading isolationists saw their careers go in a wide variety of directions. Senator Vandenberg reinvented himself as an internationalist, becoming one of the leading voices in American foreign policy. He even served as a delegate to the conference that drafted the United Nations charter, where Vandenberg advocated that the American delegation “stop this Stalin appeasement.” Wayne S. Cole argues that Vandenberg’s sudden shift was not really a conversion at all. Rather, his “anti-Soviet” policies and “militant nationalism” were consistent both as an anti-interventionist prior to the war and as a Cold Warrior after the war. In contrast, some other anti-interventionists continued to press their case well into the Cold War era, objecting to the growth of the national security state and warning about the possible damage that the Cold War might inflict upon civil liberties. Many other isolationists, David Walsh among them, did not survive the post-Pearl Harbor backlash against isolationists. In 1946, Walsh lost his seat to Henry Cabot Lodge. Lodge had also been an anti-interventionist of course, but he resigned his seat after Pearl Harbor to fight overseas. Returning as a veteran, Lodge defeated Walsh and became a leading Cold Warrior in the Senate, before eventually serving as American Ambassador to a variety of locations, including Vietnam, the United Nations, and West Germany, as well as special envoy to the Vatican.


By Catholic standards, Lodge was a latecomer to anti-communism. For decades, the Vatican, as well as American Catholics, had been warning of the dire threat that atheistic communism posed to the free world. American Catholics, even those considered “isolationist,” had long advocated intervention in nations like Mexico, where Communism seemed to be threatening religion and the Catholic way of life. During the Cold War the majority of Americans subscribed to this point of view. Many historians of American Catholicism argue that the Cold War thus ushered in a new era of mainstream acceptance for Catholics in American politics. It was, says historian Charles Morris, “arguably, the first time that a national political consensus had come to track closely a long-held and identifiably Catholic view.”

154 While Catholics often jumped whole-heartedly into the Cold War, politicians in Washington attempted to build national support among the general population for a Cold War against the Soviet Union. Towards this end, they utilized frequent comparisons between the Soviet government and the Nazi regime that Americans had so recently fought and struggled against. In their well-known article, historians Thomas Patterson and Les Adler described the discourse of the early Cold War as revolving around the threat of “Red Fascism,” thus linking the two ideologies together as an amorphous “totalitarian” menace. Patterson and Adler explain that while Americans “were well acquainted with Germany; they were less familiar with unpredictable Russia. The analogy between the two European nations provided frightened Americans with the assurance that they knew what to expect from Russia.” Interestingly, such a process was the reverse of the movement that developed among Catholics in the 1930s. In the Catholic community, Communism was the known threat and Fascism became discredited in large part by its perceived similarity with the Soviet regime, particularly after the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed. Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, “Red Fascism.”

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed three Catholic communities during the turbulent decade of the 1930s, when American Catholics struggled to respond to the Great Depression, international crises, and a variety of local issues. By breaking down the boundaries that often separate religious, political, diplomatic, and ethnic history, this study sheds new light on the events of a crucial decade in modern American history. At its core, this dissertation captures the complexity of the worldview of American Catholics, who were liberal on some issues and conservative on others, who often praised Roosevelt while disdaining his inner circle, who viewed domestic issues through the lens of foreign events and viewed foreign events through the lens of domestic issues.

In their attempt to make sense of the worldwide chaos, Catholics often perceived connections between seemingly disparate events, thereby linking local, national, and international events into a coherent pattern. As a result, many Catholics saw their communities as battlegrounds, sites of conflicts that had their roots in the larger world. Left-wing teachers, sit-down strikes, local elections, and deportation debates all seemed to raise the specter of threatening, secular world. A community of twenty million people is invariably diverse, yet clear patterns are evident in this analysis.
This study reveals the fragility of the New Deal coalition that President Roosevelt knitted together during the Great Depression. For years, historians wrote of a liberal consensus that reigned from the Great Depression through the Great Society, eventually coming apart due to the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. While commentators and historians have traditionally seen events like the 1967 Detroit race riot and the busing riots in Boston as the crucial pivot point when the New Deal coalition shattered, this study illustrates the vulnerabilities of liberalism in Boston, Detroit, and San Francisco at a much earlier time. Cracks in the foundation of the New Deal Coalition were evident from Roosevelt’s first term. They continued to lie at the base of the Democratic coalition, even if they were glossed over in the post-war order.

In particular, this study illuminates several areas of conflict between the ideals of modern liberalism and the values of American Catholics. Catholics in Boston were generally opposed to feminism, paranoid about state intervention in the family, and deeply skeptical of liberal intellectuals. Catholics in Detroit were worried about communist influence in the labor movement and skeptical of union involvement in the political realm. Catholics in San Francisco were deeply skeptical of leading left-wing figures like Harry Bridges. Although San Francisco’s Catholic community largely rebuffed a reactionary response to social problems, they never accepted a liberal approach to such problems and instead sought solutions through Catholic Action. In each city, therefore, Catholics remained skeptical of a powerful, secular, federal government.

Beyond its relevance to understanding the rise and fall of the New Deal order, this study also makes a number of other contributions to our understanding of modern American history. It sheds light on the complex nature of isolationism during the 1930s.
The Catholics in this study were isolationist, in that they blocked efforts to punish Mussolini for his actions in Ethiopia, advocated neutrality during the Spanish Civil War, and opposed American entry into the war in Europe during 1940 and 1941. But Catholics advocated American intervention in some instances (Mexico) and strategic neutrality in others (Spain). While they supported the American war effort during World War II, they remained deeply skeptical of America’s allies. And after the war, Catholics advocated strong American action to combat communism abroad, while simultaneously criticizing the United Nations and the new, post-war, international organizations. When viewed as a whole, it is clear that American Catholics were not advocating isolationism, in that the term means the United States should avoid any interactions or involvement in the world. Rather, Catholics advocated a unilateral internationalism. They called for the United States to combat communism and promote religious freedom, while resisting multilateral alliances and international organizations which threatened to constrain and corrupt the United States.

This dissertation also analyzes the Catholic community during a period of transition. American Catholics, who had traditionally been outsiders, were increasingly accepted in mainstream politics and society in the 1930s. While Franklin Roosevelt made an unprecedented effort to include Catholic politicians in his cabinet, and succeeded in wedding many American Catholics to the Democratic Party, conservatives wooed Catholics as well. Some Catholics eventually began to make common cause with conservative forces in America, uniting with them around the issue of anticommunism. Martin Dies became a political ally of many Catholics during the 1930s, which was remarkable given that Dies represented a strand of nativist, fundamentalist conservatism.
that American Catholics had generally found repugnant. In the chaotic environment of the 1930s, however, Catholics embraced Dies as an ally against a common foe, communism. In that respect, the Catholic response was varied as well. Some Catholics seemingly celebrated both Dies and Roosevelt. Other Catholics began to move firmly into the conservative orbit as they joined this anticommunist alliance.\textsuperscript{1} While the more virulent anticommunists, like Joe McCarthy, have often been depicted as Republicans lashing out at Democrats or fiscal conservatives lashing out at liberals, the Catholic anticommunists in this study were motivated mostly by concerns about the increasingly secular culture of American society.

This dissertation also therefore makes a contribution to our understanding of anticommunism in American politics. Whereas many studies of anticommunism focus on the two Red Scares after the world wars, the inter-war years provided a fertile period for the development of anticommunism. Many of the structures and methods of the McCarthy Era had their roots in the New Deal Era when anticommunist networks developed at the local level, in locations like Boston and Detroit. Far from being a top-down phenomenon, these anticommunist networks were dynamic exchanges in which local and national agencies and organizations interacted in variety of ways, sometimes constraining and other times feeding each other. Loyalty oaths, which became infamous during the era of McCarthyism, were a point of contention in Boston in the 1930s. Fear of communist subversion in labor unions was present from the moment the CIO was created. Efforts to deport suspected communists, such as Harry Bridges, began during

\textsuperscript{1} It is worth noting that many of the conservative leaders of the mid-twentieth century, including William F. Buckley Jr. and Phyllis Schlafly, were Catholics.
the 1930s. What this study demonstrates, therefore, is that Cold War-era McCarthyism was rooted in the 1930s.

Despite the strains in the New Deal Coalition that this dissertation described, urban Catholics remained a core constituency of the Democratic Party until the late 1960s. It was not until 1972 that a majority of Catholics voted for a Republican presidential candidate.\(^2\) A variety of factors explains the continuity. Cracks in the coalition were glossed over by the economic prosperity of the 1950s.\(^3\) Tradition also played a role in wedding many voters who were skeptical of liberalism to the Democratic Party. For Catholic Americans in cities such as Boston, party identification was a deep-rooted, multi-generational construct. In other places, such as California, where the Democratic Party had been a side-show until the New Deal, many people seemed to feel a deep, long-lasting, and personal commitment to Roosevelt and the New Deal. This dynamic had been obvious in the 1930s, as many of the administration’s fiercest critics had gone out of their way to avoid criticizing Roosevelt and instead blame the New Dealers who surrounded him. In addition, many Americans continued to support the post-war liberal policies of the Democratic Party until the 1960s because they believed that they, and their families and friends, benefited from them.\(^4\)


Perhaps the biggest factor in sustaining Catholic loyalty to the Democrats, however, was the fact that the ideology and the policies of the Democratic Party had changed by the late 1940s, excluding many of the elements that Catholics had found so objectionable in the 1930s. The New Deal, as historians Alan Brinkley and Nelson Lichtenstein have pointed out, shifted its focus over time, becoming more conservative. Radicals no longer had a home in the Democratic Party in the immediate post-war years, as Harry Truman shunned the left wing of the Party. By 1948, Henry Wallace was forced to run for the presidency as a Progressive Party candidate, drawing support from many of the New Dealers who Catholic Democrats found most repugnant in the 1930s. In other ways too, Truman moved the Party in a direction that Catholics Democrats had long advocated, purging the government of suspected communists, being the foremost example. Suddenly the Democratic administration was seriously investigating domestic subversion, an issue which had long preoccupied Catholic Democrats.

Perhaps even more important in shaping the post-war Democratic Party, however, was the Cold War consensus on foreign policy. As the Democratic Party fully embraced anticommunism, the dynamic of the 1930s was fundamentally changed. Catholics were no longer torn between opposition to Democratic foreign policy and support for Democratic domestic policy; for once, their interests seemed aligned. They could finally support a Party platform which furthered their economic interests while also pledging to fight the global scourge of atheistic communism. Even their concerns about atheism would be addressed, as the pledge of allegiance was changed in the early Cold War to indicate that the nation was fighting “under God” and the nation underwent a religious
revival. The Democratic Party, and indeed the nation, seemed to become exactly what many Catholics had advocated in the 1930s.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Democratic coalition that Roosevelt had knitted held together. Blacks and whites, Catholics and Protestants, working-class union members and intellectual elites all joined together in significant numbers to ensure Democratic dominance nationally, and locally in most major cities throughout the 1960s. Massachusetts became the greatest symbol of the Democratic coalition, becoming a virtual one-party, staunchly Democratic state in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Where ethno-religious diversions had once fiercely demarcated the political boundaries of Massachusetts, now Yankee intellectuals from Harvard mingled in the Democratic orbit with Irish Catholic, working-class voters from South Boston. In 1952, John Kennedy was elected to the Senate, seemingly with as much support from Cambridge intellectuals as from working-class Catholics. Eight years later, he became the first Catholic President of the United States. That dynamic would continue to play out for decades, as the Kennedy family became the princes of Massachusetts politics.

Anticommunism also continued to develop at the state level in the post-war years. In 1946, for instance, California lawmakers created the Tenney Commission. The following year, Michigan created its Committee on Un-American Activities. Massachusetts was surprisingly late getting into the game, but in 1950 the Korean War swept away the resistance and the state legislature created an investigative committee, the Bowker Committee.\footnote{M.J. Heale, \textit{McCarthy's Americans} (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 181.} The committees have often been viewed as pale imitations of their
federal counterparts, but they built upon rich traditions of anticommunism and fears of subversion.

Meanwhile, national politicians like Richard Nixon, William Jenner, Pat McCarran and, of course, Joseph McCarthy became heroes to many Catholics. In Boston, McCarthy’s support continued to be strong even after the disastrous Army-McCarthy hearings, in which McCarthy was denounced as having “no sense of decency.” During the anticommunist crusades of the early Cold War, Catholics were able to overcome the old, nativist fears that Catholicism was incompatible with Americanism. During the Cold War, being Catholic was proof of one’s anticommunist credentials and therefore proof of one’s loyalty to America. As Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan later put it, “To be an Irish Catholic became prima facie evidence of loyalty. Harvard men were to be checked; Fordham men would do the checking.”

Meanwhile, changing technology brought television to the forefront and television gave Catholic anticommunism a fresh face. While Coughlin remained off the airwaves during the Cold War, Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen became a television sensation. Sheen was a fairly prominent radio personality in the 1930s, serving as one of the leading Catholic critics of Communism and Fascism. In the post-war years, Sheen’s television show, Life is Worth Living, became iconic, won an Emmy, drew tens of millions of

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6 Historian Donald Crosby has argued that Catholic support for McCarthy has been exaggerated, but his data does show strong support for McCarthy among Catholics in virtually all demographic groups.

7 Massachusetts Senator John Kennedy deliberately avoided casting a vote on the censure issue so as to avoid alienating his constituents. Donald Crosby, God, Church, and Flag (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 174-5.

viewers, and attracted an audience that was at least 25% non-Catholic. Sheen used the show to promote anticommunism, now cast in an ecumenical light. Against Communism, Sheen argued “Jews, Protestants, and Catholics should unite against a common foe.” With that call, Sheen continued the trend that developed in the late 1930s and early 1940s towards cross-denominational cooperation between Catholics and Protestants, and sometimes even Jews, on matters of anticommunism.

Others trends from the 1930s also continued in the post-war years. Subversion in schools, for instance, remained a subject of much concern. In Michigan, Matthew Callahan, State Senator from Detroit, “introduced a resolution calling for an ‘investigation into alleged communistic activities at Wayne University.’” In California, the Tenney Committee began a series of investigations of local schools in 1946, fought to ban subversive books, and continually threatened to punish the University of California for harboring radicals, until the University adopted a loyalty oath in 1949. A bill submitted in Massachusetts by Democratic State Senator Paul McCarthy in 1950 proposed to revoke the charters of colleges that did not purge their staffs of

10 Smith, “‘Everything That Rises,” 24.
11 Smith, “‘Everything That Rises,” 44.
12 M.J. Heale, McCarthy’s Americans, 110.
Communists. In Boston, Harvard and MIT continued to serve as whipping boys for anticommunists well into the 1950s.

Meanwhile, labor leaders in Detroit, and elsewhere in America, adjusted to the exigencies of the Cold War. In the post-war years, the UAW engaged in a bitter struggle between its left-wing and right-wing factions. Walter Reuther, a committed Socialist, emerged as the leader of the anticommunist faction of the UAW in the late 1930s and continued to serve in that capacity in the post-war years. Among Reuther’s strongest supporters were members of the American Catholic Trade Workers. Although the ACTU stood opposed to socialism and secularism, they collaborated with Reuther to fight Communist influence in the organization and shared a vision for the union that was relatively similar to Reuther’s. With ACTU support, Walter Reuther’s anticommunist faction succeeded in taking control of the UAW; Reuther purged the union of Communists in the late 1940s. Several ACTU leaders became members of the UAW executive board and shaped union policy throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

Harry Bridges too continued to be a target of anticommunists in the post-war years. Despite the fact that both Judge Landis and the Supreme Court ruled against his deportation, officials continued to push for his deportation in the years after the war. In 1948, the government attempted to deport Bridges on the grounds that he had perjured himself when, upon becoming an American citizen in 1945, he stated on his immigration

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15 Historian Ellen Schrecker’s *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), demonstrates that this was a nationwide phenomenon in the post-war years.
form that he was not a communist. The jury ruled against Bridges, but the Supreme Court overturned the verdict in 1953 by a 4-3 margin. Government authorities filed a civil suit against Bridges, but again the federal court ruled in his favor. The judge declared that the “Government has failed to prove the allegations of its complaint as to the respondent’s alleged membership in the Communist Party by clear and convincing evidence.” He continued to serve as a favorite target of the House Un-American Activities Committee throughout the 1950s.

While Catholics generally remained loyal Democrats throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, the break came in the late 1960s, when they began to flee the Democratic coalition in significant numbers. Race was undeniably a major breaking point. The challenges civil rights leaders posed to segregation in northern suburbs, the rising visibility of black nationalists, and the urban riots of the late 1960s all created a climate of fear. Historians have noted that in the 1960s and 1970s many white ethnics turned against the “rights based liberalism” which was at the core of the post-war Democratic Party, and which seemed to many voters to be more concerned with promoting the cause of African Americans than working class whites. Many white Americans also began to see the liberal economic programs of the Democratic Party as no longer serving them, their families and friends. Instead, they believed that taxes raised from hard-working whites were being squandered on minorities.

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18 Larrowe, Harry Bridges, 340.
These explanations, however, do not tell the whole story. While the racial conflicts of the post-war years undoubtedly served as the spark that touched off the crisis in the Democratic Party, they lit a fuse that had been in place for decades. Not only was the awkward alliance of northern African Americans and Southern whites torn asunder, but other long-standing concerns, such as those of Catholics were also inflamed. A discourse that had developed during the 1930s on issues such as protecting the family and neighborhoods from liberal bureaucrats once again rose to prominence in the 1960s, albeit with a different aim.

This rhetoric was present in the famous busing riots which struck Boston in the 1970s. When Judge Arthur Garrity decreed that Boston’s school system would have to desegregate, riots and protests broke out throughout the city. Many Irish Catholic Democrats led the way, lashing out both violently (against the buses and prominent liberals such as Senator Ted Kennedy) and silently (by suddenly pulling their children out of the Boston public schools and sending them to Catholic schools instead). It is easy to hear the echo of the anticommunist hearings of the 1930s in the busing disputes of the mid-1970s, when Judge Garrity was dismissed as a “phony liberal” and attacks on “liberal elites” and “limousine liberals” abounded. Garrity and other “liberal, activist judges” became the new “dictators” of sorts in the public discourse, symbols of an oppressive government.

Other issues in the 1960s and 1970s also played a role in the anti-liberal backlash. The Democratic Party’s embrace of feminism seems to have turned off some Catholic voters.20 In the 1970s abortion would also become an increasingly hot-button issue, one

20 Prendergast, Catholic Voter, 224.
which motivated many Catholics to leave the Democratic Party. Meanwhile, as anti-Vietnam War activists became a prominent voice in the Democratic Party, many of the 1930s concerns about liberals being soft on communism were resuscitated. But the expansion of the federal government during the era of the Great Society also inflamed concerns about the growth of federal bureaucracy and the dangers of class conflict.

One example of this began to emerge from San Francisco, where John Shelley served as mayor in the 1960s. Shelley was an Irish Catholic from the predominantly Catholic Mission District. He was active in Catholic Action organizations and was one of the “principle organizers” of the San Francisco chapter of the ACTU. 21 His interest in labor led Shelley to become president of the San Francisco Labor Council in 1937 and to remain active in the labor movement for the rest of life, at one point serving as president of the California Federation of Labor. Shelley was elected to the state Senate in 1938, ran for Lieutenant Governor a few years later, and was elected to the House of Representatives in the late 1940s. He capped his career in 1964 by becoming the first Democratic mayor of San Francisco in fifty-four years. In many respects Shelley seems like the quintessential New Dealer, but like many Catholics, he remained skeptical of many aspects of liberalism. In 1965, Shelley joined with Sam Yorty, the Mayor of Los Angeles and a noted anticommunist, in order to introduce a resolution at the Conference of Mayors condemning Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty as “fostering class struggle.” 22

21 William Issel, “Faith-Based Activism in American Cities: The Case of the San Francisco Catholic Action Cadre,” Journal of Church and State, (Summer 2008), 532.

Despite his commitment to organized labor and his New Deal roots, Shelley, like many other Catholic Democrats, remained skeptical of big-government liberalism. While his criticism of Johnson’s might seem reactionary, it was firmly rooted in the attitude of American Catholics towards modern liberalism. While race, reproductive issues, the Vietnam War, and the War on Poverty all played undeniably major roles in splintering the New Deal coalition in the 1960s and 1970s, such issues exacerbated pre-existing tensions that existed within the Democratic Party generally and among Catholic Democrats in particular. When the Democratic Party’s liberal coalition cracked open in the 1960s and 1970s, it did so along fault lines that had existed since the heyday of the New Deal.
1. MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

Archdiocese of Boston Archives
   Cardinal O’Connell’s Papers
   Knights of Columbus

Archdiocese of Detroit Archives
   Archbishop Mooney Collection

Archdiocese of San Francisco Archives
   Alien Registration
   Catholic Action
   Catholic Filipino Club, San Francisco
   Catholic Industrial Conference and National Catholic Social Action Conference
   Catholic Lay Organizations
   Catholic Men of San Francisco
   Catholic Welfare Conference Proposal
   Communism Files
   Golden Gate Exposition
   Italian Catholic Federation of California
   Knights of Columbus Files
   Labor
   Legislature
   Monitor
   National Council of Catholic Women and National Council of Catholic Men
   Political
   Social Action School for Priests
   Sons of Italy
Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA
   Culbert Olson Papers
   Hiram Johnson Papers
   Sheridan Downey Papers

Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI
   Arthur Vandenberg Papers
   Father Charles Coughlin Radio Addresses
   Frank Fitzgerald Papers
   Frank Murphy Papers
   Gerald L. K. Smith Papers
   Patrick H. O’Brien Papers
   Prentiss Brown Papers

Boston Public Library
   Massachusetts Political Archive

California State Library, Sacramento, CA
   California State Exposition and Fair Records
   California Un-American Activities Committees records, 1935-1977
   Earl Warren Papers

Catholic University of America Archives
   Congress of Industrial Organizations
   John A. Ryan Papers:
      National Catholic Welfare Council (NCWC) Mexico Files

Charles E. Young Research Library, Los Angeles, CA
   Carey McWilliams Papers, 1894-1982

College of Holy Cross Archives, Worcester, MA
   David Walsh Papers
   James Michael Curley papers

Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY
   Democratic Party National Committee Papers
   Franklin Roosevelt Office Files
   Franklin Roosevelt Speeches
   Harry Hopkins Papers
Henry Wallace Papers  
James H. Rowe Papers  
James Roosevelt Papers  
President's Personal File  
President's Secretary's File  
R. Walton Moore Papers

Houghton Library, Harvard University, MA  
Jay Moffat Papers

Cordell Hull Papers  
Harold L. Ickes Papers  
James Farley Papers  
James Landis Papers  
Josephus Daniels Papers  
Thomas Corcoran Papers  
William McAdoo Papers

Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA (MHS)  
Civil Liberties Union Massachusetts (CLUM) Collection  
Edith Nourse Rogers  
Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. Papers  
Leverett Saltonstall Papers  
Joseph Ely Papers

North Baker Research Library, San Francisco, CA  
ACLUnorthern California Branch Record, 1916-1978

National Archives, San Francisco, CA (NARA)  
RG – 85 Bridges INS INV Files

National Archives, Washington, D.C. (NARA)  
State Department Records

Pusey Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA  
James B. Conant Papers

Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles, CA  
Harry Bridges Legal Collection
Richard Gladstein Papers

State Library of Massachusetts
Paul Dever Papers

Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI
American Catholic Trade Union (ACTU) - Detroit
American Federation of Teachers
Civil Rights Congress of Michigan
Congress of Industrial Organizations, Executive Board
Homer Martin Papers
Maurice Sugar Collection
Richard Frankensteen Papers
Walter Reuther Collection

2. NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

The Atlantic Monthly
Boston Globe
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The Monitor
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3. GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

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*Record of Boston City Council*

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5. COLLECTIONS OF PRIMARY DOCUMENTS


6. MONOGRAPHS AND EDITED COLLECTIONS


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University of Minnesota Press, 1962.


Patterson, James T. Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the


7. ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

Alba, Jamie Garcia De. “Apostle of the Dock: Archbishop Edward J. Hanna’s Role as Chairman of the National Longshoremen’s During the 1934 San Francisco


Diggins, John P. “American Catholics and Italian Fascism.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 2, No. 4 (October 1967): 51-68.


Gerstle, Gary. “The Crucial Decade: The 1940s and Beyond.” *The Journal of


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