Progressive Dreams:

The Political Evolution of the International Workers' Order, 1930-1954

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Introduction

In 1951, Rockwell Kent, President of the International Workers Order, sent out a frantic plea for help. "The State of New York, through its insurance department, is currently seeking to liquidate the International Workers Order, a fraternal society with a record of twenty years of service to its members," he wrote in a pamphlet titled 'Call to an Emergency Conference.' "Only in Hitler [sic] Germany can we find parallels to this situation–the smashing of organizations and the confiscation of private property in order to control social, civic or political thought!"[1] Though this accusation bordered on hyperbole, Kent was trying to convey the belief that the state of New York had grossly overstepped its bounds in attacking the International Workers Order over their political speech–something the organization believed was protected.

Formed in 1930, the International Workers Order was a mutual benefit fraternal organization, meaning that workers could pay a reasonable fee each year and receive access to insurance–sick and death benefits, specifically. The Order was unique for its time in that it allowed anyone to join; during a period where most African Americans were barred from joining fraternal organizations, the IWO welcomed them. The IWO also promoted cultural connections, creating subsections for Italian, Croatian, Ukrainian members and more. This feature made the Order welcoming to immigrants as well as first-generation Americans who had not yet completely assimilated into American culture.

[1] International Workers Order, "Call to an Emergency Conference," W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2.

In the 'Call to an Emergency Conference,' Kent argued that the state of New York sought "liquidation solely on the basis of the Order's fraternal and civic program…because its civic program does not meet the approval of a political appointee…"[2] The civic program he spoke of was the IWO's rich history of advocacy. The IWO was different compared to many fraternal organizations in the way that it blended a commercial service, their insurance benefits, with politics and social reform. The Order sponsored and launched many campaigns for visibility of racial discrimination, African American equality, national health insurance, and aid to foreign countries. The IWO also sponsored speeches, talks, and dances along with a children's camp, child care, and a youth section. Overall, the IWO sought to provide more than just insurance benefits, and their political advocacy and social benefits were something they considered intrinsic to their organization.

The problem, however, was that they were being punished for their political advocacy by New York's Governor and Insurance Commissioner. In 1948, New York's Governor Thomas Dewey, who was also the Republican party's candidate for the 1948 election, appointed state Insurance Commissioner Alfred Bohlinger to investigate the International Workers Order's politics and finances. Bohlinger returned from the investigation with the conclusion that the IWO was actually a communist front. He recommended that New York should revoke the IWO's charter, which would cease their insurance payments to their nearly 160,000 members. The IWO appealed this recommendation, leading to a court case that stretched from December 1950 to April of 1951. During this court case, attorneys representing New York argued that the IWO was a communist front organization, which "violated its charter" of being a loyal American

[2] International Workers Order, "Call to an Emergency Conference," 2.

organization.[3] The IWO's attorneys argued otherwise, pleading that they provided invaluable services to Americans, and only sought to advance the rights of American workers. In June of 1951, the presiding judge decided that the IWO's arguments were unconvincing: he deemed them a hazardous organization, and authorized their liquidation.

The International Workers Order's story falls at the intersection of political freedom and national security. Many look at the story of their liquidation and see state transgressions or first amendment violations. Others see their liquidation as a necessary evil to protect American interests and society from the dangers of communist influence. Regardless of morality, there was some truth to the state's accusations of Communist activity. My examination of the IWO's political history reveals that though the fraternal organization did not operate under the title of Communism, they did offer support to communist candidates and propagated communist causes and ideas. The International Workers Order was an openly worker-centric organization and, as such, much of their political advocacy reflected this. From their earliest years of existence, they claimed that the Communist Party best represented their interests, and the Soviet Union was their ideal model for a worker-centric country. This examination, then, seeks to understand the state of New York's accusations in relation to the IWO's political advocacy.

The IWO's worker-centric approach can be sourced to the roots of fraternal organizations. Fraternal organizations were clubs that were organized around various religious or secular ideologies, and typically required a regular monetary payment for continuous enrollment. Many fraternal organizations operated as secret societies, revolving around rituals and recreation.

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[3] Alfred J. Bohlinger and Paul W. Williams, "In the Matter of the Application of the People of the State of New York, by Alfred J. Bohlinger, Superintendent of Insurance of the State of New York, Petitioner-Appellant-Respondent, for an Order Directing Him to Take Possession of the Property and to Liquidate the Business, and Dissolving the Corporate Existence of the International Workers Order, Inc., Respondent-Appellant-Respondent, Herman A. Seligson, Marjorie DaCosta, Jacob Holmstock, Zachar Shpak, Isidore Siegel, Earl Wheeler, and Walter Hagelberg for the International Workers Order Policyholders Protective Committee, Intervenors-Appellants-Respondents." Book. (S.l.: s.n., 1951-1952), 79.

But a prominent amount of fraternal organizations offered people insurance payouts. These organizations filled a need in American society; the United States did not have any welfare systems in place such as social security. Social relief came from charities in major organizations, usually provided by wealthy donors, but some state or local governments contributed to charities.[4] With fraternal organizations, Americans were afforded the option to provide their own security. The IWO specifically defined their operations as a "a mutual effort on the part of the working people to meet the vexing problems of their economic insecurity."[5]Additionally, the United States' was a country that propagated ideas of thrift and individualism. Fraternal organizations were an option to receive aid without guilt or embarrassment that might accompany charity.

In the late 19th to early 20th century, millions of immigrants entered the country, mainly from Eastern and Southern Europe, alongside millions of African Americans that migrated up to northern cities. Job prospects were a large draw for these groups, and they soon found themselves in industrial jobs, working sectors like steel, mining, farming and more. The industrial sector had demanding working conditions, and these workers were at high risk for sickness and illness, leaving them vulnerable to wage and job loss. The IWO as a fraternal organization offered immigrants to alleviate some of these economic vulnerabilities. It also gave immigrants a way to maintain a sense of community with one another, as well as support each other in their transition to living in America. The IWO offered sections based on nationality, describing it as a way for immigrants to "[band] together in given communities since as strangers

[4] David T. Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State* (NC, Chapel Hill: 2000), 18.
[5] "National Groups in America," Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 17, 6.1.

to the new country, they were pushed into insecure conditions of living."[6] The national sections also offered a way for immigrants to celebrate and preserve their "language and cultural heritage and jointly fight for their common interests."[7] This intention signified that the IWO was committed to honoring their members' various cultures, rather than encouraging them to abandon them in favor of assimilating into American life.

While the IWO was officially formed in 1930, it was founded out of another fraternal organization called the Workingmen's Circle. The Workingmen's Circle (WC) was created specifically for Jewish workers in 1892 by two craftsmen. By 1900, it became a national organization, and was formally licensed by the State of New York in 1905.[8] The Workingmen's Circle grew rapidly, going from 5,000 members in 1905 to 15,000 a decade later. Over time, different political factions developed within the Workingmen's Circle: a socialist and communist faction. The conflict between the two factions was marked by member expulsions, resolution disagreements, and protests. Finally, it resulted in the Socialist faction gaining the upper hand, and formally expelling all members who promoted the Communist Party line. These members held a convention in March of 1930, formally deciding to create the International Workers Order.

The IWO was organized in a federalist way, with individual lodges formed across the country and executives working out of New York City. Members in a locality or area could apply for a lodge charter and were overseen by state committees. Local lodges elected officers and had an auditing committee to ensure proper use of member funds. Lodges were required to have at least two general body meetings per month, where they collected dues, checked in on the

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[6] "History of the IWO," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 17, 1.6.
[7] "History of the IWO," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 17, 1.16
[8] Thomas Walker, Pluralistic Fraternity: the History of the International Workers Order (New York: Garland, 1991),

status of sick and injured members, and initiated new members. Because the Order also offered cultural and recreation benefits, they allowed members to have social memberships. These memberships only cost $1 per month, and gave members access to all the social events without having to pay for insurance. The Order's Constitution and By-Laws, which detailed how lodges were meant to operate and how insurance would be paid out, were binding to all members. Members could even be expelled for "acting contrary to the Constitution, By-Laws, principles or interests of the Order."[9] However, the Constitution and By-Laws do not reveal how closely individual lodges had to promote or follow specific policies or political rhetoric.

The IWO was led by a General Secretary, the most notable being Max Bedacht, who was a contender for the Communist Party leadership in the early 1930s. Throughout its existence, the IWO's leadership underwent several structural changes, but the General Secretary always maintained several other executives– a treasurer, an executive council or board, and eventually a board of several vice presidents.[10] Some of the IWO executives, General Secretary Rubin Saltzman and President William Weiner, held membership with the Communist Party (CPUSA).[11] These direct Party connections likely contributed to prevalent inclusion of communist rhetoric and policy.

Though several executives held CPUSA membership, that did not necessarily mean that the IWO's general membership subscribed to the same ideology. The IWO executives were vehement about allowing members from any political background to join, believing that they were "all loyal members of the Order, whatever our religious or political beliefs, whatever our

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[9] "Constitution and Bylaws," Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 29, 1a.73.
[10] Walker, *Pluralistic Fraternity,* 124-126.
[11] Arthur J. Sabin, R*ed Scare In Court: New York Versus The International Workers Order,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, 14.

race or nationality." During the court case that determined the IWO's dissolution, the defense repeated claims that "never exceeded between more than 3 percent and 5 percent."[12] Earl Browder, a CPUSA president, testified to a congressional committee that he was surprised to find the number of card-carrying communists at 3%, much lower than even he expected.[13] Despite the prevalence of communist rhetoric and policies executives propagated, the disconnectedness of the lodge system meant that local branches were not always in direct contact with leadership. This was why the IWO relied so heavily on the *Daily Worker* and later the *Fraternal Outlook,* their sponsored newspapers, and national conventions– to communicate policy and advocacy focuses. The decentralization of the IWO's lodges means that there must be a degree of nuance in approaching their communist-adjacent policies. Robin D.G Kelley, in *Hammer and Hoe*, argued that the Alabama Communist party's local members transformed the organization to fit their racial and financial needs, seeing it as a way to serve the local community and their issues.[14] Regardless of the prevalence of communist ideology, the IWO's insurance and social programming served thousands in the working class community, providing financial support and social connection. The 'Communist Question' must be evaluated looking at the benefits the Order provided on an individual level.

The nature of their records and archival material make uncovering members' individual experiences more difficult. I consulted the University of Michigan and Cornell's Kheel Center for documents on conventions and politics, as well as correspondence within the organization. But, because of the IWO's decentralization, most records left by individual members likely are

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[12] Bohlinger and Williams, "In the Matter of the Application of the People of the State of New York, by Alfred J. Bohlinger, Superintendent of Insurance of the State of New York…," 617.
[13] Bohlinger and Williams, "In the Matter of the Application of the People of the State of New York, by Alfred J. Bohlinger, Superintendent of Insurance of the State of New York…," 328.
[14] Robin D.G Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama communists during the Great Depression* (United States: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015),

location specific–meaning records from, for example, a lodge in Michigan stayed in Michigan. This thesis, then, works primarily with what was gathered and left with other IWO leadership records.

Despite the challenges of the IWO's record-keeping, a few scholars have contributed works that reveal the organization's history and experiences. There are only three books written about the IWO, and all three serve as a foundation for this thesis. The first was Thomas J.E Walker's *Pluralistic Fraternity,* a book served as an encyclopedia of the IWO. Walker tracks the Order's early origins with the Workingmen's Circle in its first half along with notable events, internal politics, and the Order's decline. The second half focuses on the history and membership of the different ethnic groups the IWO was composed of. The next was Arthur Sabin's *Red Scare in Court,* a legal analysis, tackling the convoluted and dramatic end to the IWO. It tracks the arguments, witnesses, and political contexts that surrounded the trial. Most impressively, Sabin includes interviews from the key participants in the trial or their close relatives, providing their perspectives of what occurred in hindsight. The most recent scholarship on the IWO was Robert Zecker's *Road to Peace and Freedom,* which attempts to answer what threat, if any, the IWO posed to the U.S government throughout an exploration of its social and political pursuits. Zecker's book examines the member's experiences much more closely than Walker or Sabin does, which was an invaluable perspective to this thesis.

My own analysis seeks to build on the exploration these three works have started. The first chapter spans from 1930-1935, and addresses how the IWO supported the working class during the Great Depression whilst exploring the height of their communist connections. The second chapter explores the Order's support of Roosevelt and the Front while exploring their complicated stance on the Second World War and the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Finally, the third chapter

examines how the cold war context helped make the IWO into a pariah, while also contextually addressing the state of New York's allegations against the IWO. This thesis hopes to properly articulate the causes and issues that were important to members of this organization, while trying to understand why the IWO had been characterized as a communist front. The IWO offered much more than just insurance; it offered community, empowerment, and a channel by which workers could take action for causes they supported.

Chapter 1: The Early Years, 1930-1935

In a 1930 editorial, with less than two weeks until Christmas, Tom Stout reassured his readers that the United States' economic situation warranted no cause for concern. Stout, a former congressman from Lewistown, Montana, wrote, "We think that we should now stop our complaining and proceed energetically with our affairs under the assumption that times are due to improve."[15] He substantiated his claims with arguments that while President Herbert Hoover and Congress had been ineffective since the recession began, they would soon double their efforts to solve the United States' economic problems. Plus, with Christmas right around the corner, holiday shopping would give a much-needed stimulus effect to businesses across the country. "The process of recovery," Stout asserted, "is about to begin and will continue slowly but steadily until we have again attained a reasonable state of well-being."

Though Stout was the picture of optimism in his editorial, the International Workers' Order had a different opinion. In an article summarizing their inaugural convention, the IWO claimed the Great Depression was an "economic crisis which had no equal in the United States."[16] Formed in 1930, the same year Stout's editorial was published, the nascent organization faced many challenges precipitated by the U.S' worsening economic condition, "preventing thousands of workers from joining our Order due to the fact that they did not have the dollar which is required for the required fee for a doctor's examination."[17] Moreover, some members who had decided to join were unable to keep up with their bills and had to drop the

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[15] Tom Stout, "Depression Cannot Long Continue," *The Wolf Point Herald* (December 12, 1930), 2.
[16] Rubin Saltzman, "The First Convention of the International Workers Order," *The Daily Worker* (May 30, 1931), 3.
[17] Saltzman, "First Convention," 3.

organization. All of this to say, the Great Depression heighted the IWO's obstacles in launching their organization.

Yet, in the same article, the IWO marveled at what they accomplished: recruiting nearly twelve thousand members and organizing 225 branch lodges within the first eleven months of operation. They'd wasted no time in delivering aid to their members, handing out over $22,000 (roughly $400,000 in 2024) in benefits to their new members. Finally, despite the depression, they'd collected $7,000 for a Dressmaker's strike and $25,000 for *The Freiheit,* an Order-endorsed newspaper. These accomplishments and statistics, the Order asserted, were publicized not "to point out how wealthy [they were], but to establish "that the International Workers Order [was] fully able to accomplish its task as a fraternal organization."[18]

The first eleven months highlighted above was a snapshot of the Order's initial years. The Order sought to root itself firmly in the world of insurance and fraternal organizations; there was no hesitation in recruiting and dispersing benefits to members. Motivated and purposeful, however, the Order's work revolved around progressing the leftist causes they believed would alleviate the deep problems that had caused the Great Depression. Just as they leapt into their insurance goals, they also went to work promoting political platforms. While informed by the U.S' financial circumstances, the Order's own commitment to leftist and working class issues– their dedication to proletarian fraternalism, their pursuit of comprehensive health insurance, and their educational endeavors–characterized their early years as some of their most radical and Communist-adjacent.

Championing the Working Class and its Issues

[18] Saltzman, "First Convention," 3.

While the IWO might have characterized the Great Depression as a period of challenges, the Communist movement characterized the early 1930s as a period of opportunity. Though they were founded in 1919, the Communist Party of the United States was plagued by internal upheaval during their first years of existence, as political conflicts back in the Soviet Union caused rifts to emerge amongst members. The internal upheavals proved to be troublesome for their membership retention, and the lack of organizational stability delayed progress and advancement for their causes. But, as the Great Depression dawned, the communist movement seemed to have been granted their greatest wish: an opportunity to ignite a revolution and overthrow capitalism. A revolution, the Communist Manifesto stated, could not simply occur in *only* the Soviet Union; because of globalization, revolutions had to occur in all countries– especially the United States. Thus, the Great Depression, or what the CPUSA characterized as an apparent failure of capitalism, seemed to be the moment that might ignite workers to choose a revolution and abandon capitalism.

During this time, the CPUSA's affairs were not independent from the communists abroad. In fact, Harvey Klehr, author of *The Heyday of American Communism,* found that the CPUSA was dominated by the Communist international's agenda.[19] For example, during the internal upheaval of the 20s, as discussed above, the Soviet Union's Comintern had expelled members and selected CPUSA leaders. To facilitate communist revolution, the Comintern drafted slogans and developed policies specifically for the CPUSA. The Comintern also designated which individuals and organizations were to be condemned as fascists or social fascists, and which were to be allies. Many of the CPUSA's directives came from abroad

[19] Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books Inc Publishers, 1998), 10.

because, as Harvey Klehr bluntly states, "the Soviet Union was the spiritual homeland of American Communists."[20]

Unlike the CPUSA, the International Workers Order is believed to be independent of Soviet control. Archives containing the IWO's records contain no evidence affirming Comintern control, as Zecker, Sabin, and Walker assert in their books on the IWO. However, like the Communist Party, the IWO saw the Great Depression as an opportunity to enact systemic change in the United States. Their literature, policies, and conventions reflected efforts to spark this change– much of it drawing criticism later on by the U.S Attorney General Tom Clark Specifically, some of their policies and literature evoked resemblance or near-identical initiatives to the Communist party.

Though there is no evidence of the IWO being Soviet-controlled, several members of their leadership were open and proud Communists. Max Bedacht, for example, co-founder of the CPUSA and a Comintern-contender for its leadership, laid out his desires for radical change in his lengthy autobiography. "The Communist revolution will come to us in the United States, too," he declared, "but it will and can only come when the people of the country want it."[21] Bedacht, one of the primary sources of the Order's literature and propaganda, was born in Munich, Germany. He found some of the inequities and troubles, being raised by a single mother, in his childhood to be evidence of what he thought was society's meaning: "Humans don't count. Only profits do." [22] As a child, Bedacht worked for a brickmaster, and then went on to organize strikes for a barber union, followed by a sympathy strike for chocolatiers in Switzerland. He credited all these things with developing his working class consciousness. Until

[20] Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, 10.
[21] Max Bedacht Manuscript, 1967, Collection 6224, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 1, 18.244.
[22] Max Bedacht Manuscript, Collection 6224, Box 1, 27.3.

he was expelled in 1949, Bedacht considered his involvement with the founding and running of the Communist Party to be his greatest endeavor; he had been involved in nearly everything, short of officially running the party. From his life and autobiography, one can see just how dedicated Bedacht was to Communist and worker-centric causes, ideologies that were present in the work he did for the IWO.

Bedacht would become the IWO's secretary only a short time after leading their propaganda team, and remained in the position for 13 years. In his autobiography, Bedacht describes his path to the IWO, and how he began "[carrying] out a campaign to broaden and build the Order"--where "agitation and organization work was required."[23] Bedacht issued numerous pamphlets to current and potential members, such as "Labor Fraternalism: the Fraternal Principles and Programs of the IWO" and "Unity of the Fraternal Movement." Bedacht credits the explosive growth of the Order to himself, boasting that the organization grew rapidly under his building and recruitment work. It is almost certain that Bedacht's strong personal convictions bled through and influenced his agitation work– and the IWO's writings. The involved position of an active and prominent communist was the type of evidence the Insurance Commissioner and the Attorney General used to gauge how involved the IWO was with the CPUSA.

The IWO's literature from the early 1930s advocated more abstract, more theoretical beliefs that had Marxian qualities. These principles differed from their more concrete, policy driven literature they would issue later on. The IWO's guiding principle was ensuring that their activities revolved around the theory of proletarian fraternalism, or policies that were pursued solely for the workers' benefit. Max Bedacht defined proletarian fraternalism as "the practice of

[23] Max Bedacht Manuscript, Collection 6224, Box 1, 27. 316.

worker solidarity" when addressing issues such as poor working conditions or inadequate living qualities.[24] The IWO planned to achieve this by "[replacing workers'] fading confidence in capitalism and its leadership with a growing confidence in themselves and their own proletarian leadership."[25] Because the Order's work revolved around proletarian fraternalism, their mission was to purely represent the working classes' interests–and, above all, to eliminate economic insecurity. In the Order's earlier period, much of the literature and language that Bedacht and other agitators published seemed to focus on class conflict, stratified societies, and abstract theories such as proletarian fraternalism. This language and literature likely reflected the desperate and disillusioned times of the Great Depression period; but, it also could have been a result of the radicalized and more openly communist affiliated leadership's philosophies trickling down through their agitation.

Additionally, during the earlier period, the IWO had an exceptional interest in using their literature and rhetoric to establish working class identity and unity. Through their work, IWO tried to convey a commonality between those in their audience: insecurity. Insecurity, Bedacht wrote, was what defined the working class. Barriers that separated workers–race, color, nationality, beliefs–were nonexistent and man-made.[26] Writings like these defied the rugged American individualism that defined workers for so long by establishing a common identity. It also thwarted the American racial and gender stratifications that perpetuated division amongst the working class. This sense of commonality and unity implicitly threatened facets of American society, but it also sought to empower the working class to pursue change.

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[24] "A New Worker's Stronghold: What Is the IWO and Why Every Worker Should Join It," 1930, Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 49, 2.7.
[25] "5 Years of IWO," 1935, Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 48, 14.10.
[26] "A New Workers' Stronghold," Collection 5276, Box 49, 2.5.

Finally, the IWO was also an open supporter of Communist Party candidates–something that would be very concerning to the Attorney General. Though the organization repeatedly stressed that members were not obligated to support one political party over another, the Order did assert that the CPUSA was closely aligned with their goals. They encouraged each and every worker to vote for the party candidates, because the Communist party "is the only party that fights for workers' interests" and the "only organization that helps workers against the capitalist struggle."[27] The Order also actively campaigned for the Communists, going from door to door and reaching out to Americans in cities like Detroit, Cleveland, New York, and more. Nearly every branch had contributed funds to the Communist campaigns, including the $25,000 for the Communist Party's *Daily Worker*. The *Daily Worker*, published in Chicago, was the official organ of several radical left-wing groups, but it mainly supported the CPUSA.

In addition to their support of the CPUSA, the IWO also saw the Soviet Union as the model for all modern countries, and saw its existence as a benefit to the working class. For the Order, the USSR was the only country that was designed and operating for the working class; the Soviet system eliminated the exploitation of the working class, and allowed its people to find true happiness.[28] The IWO heaped praise onto the USSR for its genuine democratic nature, its lack of unemployment, its universal and total insurance–things that eliminate insecurity. As such, they portrayed it as a picturesque, ideal country with "no crisis" and a standard of living "that is continually improving."[29] The IWO leadership extended their support beyond the executive members, later writing that the Order's members should find that support of the USSR was a natural and positive function.

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[27] "A New Workers' Stronghold," Collection 5276, Box 49, 2.12.
[28] "A New Workers' Stronghold," Collection 5276, Box 49, 2.11.
[29] "A New Workers' Stronghold," Collection 5276, Box 49, 2.10.

To sum up this section, the IWO's policy cannot be confirmed to be determined by an outside entity in the way the CPUSA's policy was handed down by the Comintern. However, the Order's politics–being proletarian centric, idolizing the USSR, and supporting Communist-candidates and amenities–did appear to be adjacent to the CPUSA or even based on Communist principles. These facets marked the Order's early years as its most radical and left leaning period. These policies would not last long, as America's ever-changing political dynamics demanded the organization become more moderate and palatable to the everyday man, as well as anti-radical politicians.

Getting the Order Started

The Great Depression was impactful beyond simply shaping the IWO's political pursuits. Fraternal organizations that focused on insurance benefits generally thrived throughout the 1910s and 1920s, steadily gaining new members. The Great Depression, however, reversed this; recruitment that had steadily peaked in the 20s plummeted. Members who had once put their wages towards insurance now had to pull back their spending as the depression deepened families' struggles. As Tom Stout's editorial earlier in this chapter indicates, there had certainly been bouts of financial insecurity before, such as the sharp year-long depression in 1920 that followed the first world war. However, David T. Beito in *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State* points out that it was the duration, not the caliber of the depression that impacted families the most; workers watched their savings and loans dwindle, and the effects of the depression persisted throughout the decade until manufacturing took off during the second world war.[30]

The IWO appeared to face similar issues that other fraternal organizations did. In their first Convention, Order stated that upwards of 1400 members had dropped their membership due

[30] David T. Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State* (NC, Chapel Hill: 2000), 223.

to financial reasons. Despite this, the IWO managed not only to survive the Great Depression, but also to thrive. Within their first year, they secured 12,000 members and 241 new branches.[31] Their successes can be attributed to two tactics: amalgamation and ideology. The IWO was keenly interested in combining forces with other fraternal organizations such as the Russian, Hungarian, and Slovak mutual aid societies. The Hungarian Workingmen's Society joined in 1932, with the Russian and Slovak societies merging with the IWO the following year.[32] These societies had activities and goals similar to the IWO's, but combining forces allowed them to pool money, resources, and people together, still providing benefits but refreshing recruitment numbers as some members dropped. Second, as Beito mentions, ideology acted as a glue that kept workers invested in the IWO. The ethnic ties of the language branches and the ideological mission remained as much of a motivator as the insurance benefits did.[33]

For workers who did keep their membership, the IWO's health plan likely provided a security that reassured them during such an uncertain time. One member of Slovak Branch 2003 had a child that came down with serious illness; instead of shelling out precious funds for necessary medical care, this member managed to pay just a few measly dollars for medicine and effective care.[34] This member's friend, meanwhile, paid $60 and took a longer time to heal. To the IWO, this anecdote exemplified the level of security they strived to provide workers. The IWO sought to ensure adequate medical care was accessible, even to those who were not wealthy. They also desired care that would not be "shoddy" or haphazard, but compassionate and comprehensive.

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[31] Rubin Saltzman,"Report to the first convention of the International Workers Order" (New York, 1931), 24.
[32] Thomas Walker, Pluralistic Fraternity: the History of the International Workers Order (New York: Garland, 1991), 16.
[33] Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State,* 128.
[34] Sadie Doroshkin, "How the IWO Cares for Its Members," the Daily Worker (January 6th, 1934), 11.

For a yearly salary gauged on their membership numbers, the IWO recruited and staffed their own medical centers with quality doctors. The IWO offered access to their doctors for $0.35 per month, as well as specialized hospitalization rates for members who wanted to go to city hospitals. Members also had benefits that went beyond ordinary rates of $4 to $10 for a 15 sick benefit payout; for 26 weeks, the IWO paid families $20 in benefits.[35] These benefits also applied to temporarily or permanently disabled workers, and in the latter case, workers oftentimes received a $300 payout for the loss of limbs or eyes in workplace accidents.[36]

While cheap and easily accessible insurance provided much needed relief, not everyone supported the type of health benefits the IWO offered. Some physician associations, such as the American Medical Association, banded together against fraternal organizations who provided their own medical care, complaining it would cause a "loss of both income and independence" for other practitioners.[37] For-profit insurance companies also took issue with the IWO; one article written by Chester A. Hanson in *The Awakener* accused the Order of being "illegal, un-American, and subversive" because corporate insurance companies could not compete with the IWO's rates.[38] The mere fact that these low-cost health plans caused so much outrage from physicians and insurance companies perhaps speaks to their success.

Despite the success of their benefits practice, the IWO was not content. In a time of great financial peril, the United States lacked even the most basic of safety nets: universal insurance. Many Americans neglected their physical health in the name of penny pinching; what little money they had might've gone to a loaf of bread or some vegetables to feed their families. One father in New York sent a letter to Franklin Roosevelt about his family's health, writing, "now I

[35] "5 years of IWO," Collection 5276, Box 48, 14.33.
[36] "5 years of IWO," Collection 5276, Box 48, 14.34.
[37] Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*, 116.
[38] "5 years of IWO," Collection 5276, Box 48, 14.32.

have one child sick. I asked for a doctor… and the doctor came and said they were not getting enough to eat."[39] Another pregnant woman had a baby on the way soon with "no money for the hospital" to birth them in.[40] The IWO's insurance policies may have helped thousands of workers throughout the Great Depression, but with these stories of continuing widespread suffering, it appeared the country had been left to fend for itself.

"Sickness, temporary or permanent disability, unemployment…[all] stop the flow of the source of life for the worker and those whose lives and existence depends on his earnings. The system tells the worker, '"You cannot eat if you cannot work."'"[41] For the IWO, the fact that so many of their membership was attracted to affordable insurance indicated just how broken American society was. Social security and universal insurance was "growing more and more into a most immediate necessity for the toiling masses" and the "fortifying or replacement of fraternal efforts with social efforts."[42]

The fight for universal health insurance began in earnest at the IWO's second Convention in 1933. Issuing a formal resolution, they cited the unemployment of 16 million Americans, the threat of elderly starvation, the need for support for working mothers in the form of maternity benefits and more as reasons to pass social safety nets.[43] At the same time, the IWO lamented, capitalists managed to generate profits even during tremendous times of suffering, like the Great Depression.[44] The Convention of 1933 established the preliminary principles of universal insurance advocacy, advocacy that would intensify as the depression persisted.

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[39] Robert McElvaine, *Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press: 1981), 170.
[40] McElvaine, *Down and Out in the Great Depression*, 63.
[41] Max Bedacht, "Unity of the Fraternal Movement," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 48, 4.15
[42] "Unity of the Fraternal Movement," Max Bedacht, 1934, Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 48, 4.15.
[43] "5 years of IWO," Collection 5276, Box 48, 14.52.
[44] "5 years of IWO," Collection 5276, Box 48, 14.52.

With the resolutions from their Second Convention in mind, the Order quickly got to work carrying out campaigns and distributing literature about bills to citizens and other fraternal organizations. The Communist Party was leading the efforts for universal health insurance with H.R 7895, an effort which the IWO heartily supported. H.R 7895, while rather unknown in the 21st century, was seen as the premiere and radical way of which the left could implement social safety nets in America. The bill was complete with unlimited benefits, no limits on payments based on one's nationality or race, taxing the rich for the money to fund social security, and guarding the designated funds from any other use.[45] Aiming to create a united front in front of the rest of the country, the IWO's Executive Council organized a national convention about universal insurance; Max Bedacht reported that about 250 fraternal organizations were represented by nearly 500 delegates–a stunning turnout.[46] Through the mobilization of these organizations, members would distribute leaflets along with resolutions demanding that Congress pass H.R 7598. Key to the event's success was the IWO's leadership, as it would lead by example and demonstrate how a fraternal organization centered around working class issues operated.

Indeed, there was heavy support for H.R 7598, but the IWO was also vocal about condemning the Wagner-Lewis bill. The bill would have collected federal taxes from employers, which would then be distributed to states to create an unemployment fund. Though there was discussion of whether this bill would even be considered constitutional, there was extensive congressional discourse surrounding it, and it was even endorsed by FDR in 1935.[47] For the IWO, this bill was totally inadequate, namely because they doubted the taxes could even be

[45] "5 years of IWO," Collection 5276, Box 48, 14.54.
[46] Max Bedacht, "IWO Social Insurance Campaign Gets Underway," Daily Worker (April 30 1934), 4.
[47] Edwin Witte,"Social Security," Social Security History https://www.ssa.gov/history/ew25.html.

collected in the first place. “Since the rich refuse to have much collected from them, the funds upon which the actuarial figures are based must of necessity be totally inadequate,” the IWO wrote.[48] They believed the taxes would not be utilized until many years after the current depression, and then would run out after only a few weeks. The solution, they said, was to obtain any money needed by any possible means; this was to be done with H.R 2827, or what was known as the Lundeen Bill. The bill was complete with equal access to all workers no matter race or gender, 8 weeks of maternity leave before and after birth, comprehensive sick and elderly benefits, and unemployment insurance that was equal to or more than local wages. It was seen as the premiere solution to solving the insecurity, with the IWO remarking that “enemies of the bill are the enemies of the destitute 14,000,000 American families.” [49]

Equally insufficient to the IWO was corporate insurance, or insurance provided by one’s employers. Throughout the late 19th and early 20th century, employers in mining, lumber, railroads offered medical care through prepaid clinics. In 1940, nearly 10% of Americans were insured; in 1950, nearly half were.[50] The Second World War precipitated this change, as workers pursued group insurance through collective bargaining.[51] Despite the growth of this method, the IWO disapproved of corporate insurance, too, seeing it as a way to “tie the worker more closely to the employer, to make them more dependent upon the employer, to combat their efforts for the improvement of their conditions and, in the event of a union existing, weaken their ties of the workers to the union.”[52] Overall, while employer based insurance might have helped individual

[48] “5 years of IWO,” Box 5276, Box 48, 14.52.
[49] “Musicians Endorse Lundeen Bill,” Montana Labor News (Butte, MT: April 11 1935), 1.
[50] Laura A. Scofea, “The Development and Growth of Employer-Provided Health Insurance,” *Monthly Labor Review* 117, no. 3 (1994), 6.
[51] Scofea, “Development and Growth of Employer Based Insurance,” 6.
[52] International Workers Order, *Proceedings of the 4th National Convention*, (New York City, 1938), 139.

workers, the IWO was unable to accept a solution that weakened the bargaining power of the working class.

And the IWO wasn't alone in their desire for more comprehensive solutions. The rise of Democrat Huey P. Long in politics signaled that many Americans, especially those in the South, were willing to push the boundaries of moderate politics. Long, the former Louisiana governor, was a firestarter within the U.S Senate as he frequently stirred up controversy. He had a penchant for filibuster, and was often a headache for opponents and allies alike at the capital. But, even as Roosevelt pulled together legislation meant to dig the United States out of its economic chasm, Long was often condemning it as inadequate. For Long, the New Deal gave the government opportunities for gross abuse of power, but yet still could not curb the elite's exorbitant wealth. In letters to the President, Americans made their discontent with the United States' economy and society clear. One writer complained that the elderly were denied a "$200 a month pension, something that would give the old age a little pleasure for the last few years they have to live."[53] Another letter writer advocated for an overhaul on the taxation system, clearly unhappy with the acute suffering of the poor and working class. "Now these rich that have more land than they should have more houses than they can live in…" he wrote, "tell me why shouldn't they be taxed so the men and women who have starved to make that wealth should have a share of it in their old age."[54]

Education

At first glance, educational experiences offered by a fraternal organization like the IWO is something to celebrate. Mathematics, literacy, finances–these are all topics that could improve workers' education and skills, enhancing their quality of life and improving their

[53] McElvaine, *Down and Out in the Great Depression*, 187.
[54] McElvaine, *Down and Out in the Great Depression*, 190.

competitiveness, thereby opening up better jobs. However, after investigating the practices, materials, and ideology used by the IWO paints a different picture of the organization's aspirations for the working class. Examining their education practices in detail reveals that the IWO was not interested in making workers more competitive to employers; instead, they hoped for workers to become more class conscious and radicalized.

The IWO's educational efforts did not involve traditional subjects. Workers, instead, confronted problems within American society in a form of consciousness raising. First coined by Kathie Sarachild revolving around second-wave feminism, the idea was to discuss issues and topics that women faced, almost in a venting-like manner. The IWO had their own early version of this strategy where, instead of mathematics or reading, workers would learn about and discuss topics such as wages, insurance, and healthcare in the United States.

Bedacht laid out his philosophy for the IWO's education in one of his pamphlets. "Abstract knowledge does not do anybody any good. It certainly does not do the masses any good," he wrote, "education, translated into action, is a source for the mass."[55] Based on his writings, education was meant to provide a foundation for future leftist movements and activism. This foundation was something the public education system could not provide. Workers who had gone through the American education system were the "products of [a] capitalist education" and, because it was inundated with the prevailing ideology of "rugged individualism," it was nearly impossible for Americans to develop a social consciousness. Those who did were criticized for showing signs of "Un-Americanism." Thus, an IWO education was meant to lay a foundation, but also create a social consciousness. Faced with the problems of low english literacy, and not

[55] "The Organizer and His Problems," Max Bedacht, Collection 5672, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives Box, 48, 4.3

wanting to host boring lectures on potentially highly intellectual subjects, the IWO circulated working class press, sold proletarian literature, and organized reading circles.[56]

The Order didn't stop at just educating working adults. Knowing that the youth would be the labor movement's future, they sought to provide workers' children an earlier foundation than some of their parents. They argued that children had become "laden with the ideas and viewpoints of the enemy class, drummed into them from years of contact with the boss-controlled educational system."[57] Though enlightening children about the realities of their society was framed as a humane act, there was clearly a sense of self interest towards their politics, arguing that a proletarian education ensured children would be an "integral part of the class of its parents."[58] Several schools for Jewish Workers' children had been established during the Workingmen's Circle era; however, once the IWO was formed, the executive committee proposed that the order and these schools combine forces to provide broader services.

To achieve this, the IWO would take Max Bedacht's dislike of abstract knowledge and apply it to the youth. Organizing their member's children into groups aged nine and above, Bedacht was hopeful that the "desire of the children for play and for knowledge into a level for a clear working class education."[59] Believing that "while the children play, they learn," IWO designed recreation activities intended to replicate living and employment conditions of the working class.[60] Older kids in the youth sections had more intellectual activities; they would have a speaker come in and address a relevant topic, followed by group discussion. Other times they would have presentations, mass singing, socials, or indoor sports.

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[56] "5 years of IWO," Box 5276, Box 48, 14.116.
[57] Rubin Saltzman, "Educational Activity," Daily Worker (April 28th, 1934), 20.
[58] "5 years of IWO," Box 5276, Box 48, 14.79.
[59] "5 years of IWO," Box 5276, Box 48, 14.79.
[60] "5 years of IWO," Box 5276, Box 48, 14.79.

At times, the Order's working class education could border on propaganda. The Order designed their own specific curriculum and learning materials for the schools, resulting in five published textbooks by their first convention. Few copies of these materials exist today, but the 1934 textbook lines up with the IWO's beliefs and principles on education discussed above, meaning it is likely not out of the ordinary. Their 1934 textbook for third year students provides some insight into how political the curriculum of the IWO schools were. The following is a verse titled "In the School," addressing the IWO's teachings about the public school system.

> In the school, they tell children about princes and princesses, but not about children who don't have what to eat…
> In the school– nice stories about millionaires, but bad, nasty talk about Pioneers…
> They teach in school that all people are equals, so why are there rich people and poor people?
> The school is a friend of the bosses and the millionaires. The school is an enemy of the workers and pioneers.[61]

Another selection highlights the IWO's pro-Soviet stance:

> ...So children read new stories, their eyes shine and burn, children learn from other books, about the Soviets and Lenin.
> About a sickle and a hammer, and about a banner with a red star, workers' children are brighter, and they become pioneers.[62]

Overall, the IWO's schools demonstrate the type of tactics they pursued to propel their political agendas–long term solutions; the children's schools would have little immediate value, but the IWO hoped these teachings would lay a solid foundation for a working class committed to progressive beliefs.

Conclusion

The desperation of the Great Depression provided an urgent backdrop during which the International Workers Order began their work. Although the IWO faced hurdles, particularly in

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[61] "Workers School Textbook," 1934, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 5276, Box 48, 38.7.
[62] "Workers School Textbook," Box 5276, 38.13.

sustaining membership, they ultimately found an ideologically committed audience that readily joined their cause. In addition, the political endeavors during this five year period spoke to just how radical the organization started out as. Between the support of communist candidates and the Soviet Union, working class centered schooling, and all-encompassing insurance legislation, the IWO saw these endeavors as the ticket to widespread changes–changes they believed would have a positive impact on the suffering of the ‘30s.

Chapter 2: In Pursuit of Unity, 1936-1945

In the summer of 1942, an advertisement appeared in *The Michigan Chronicle.* Frank McDonald, president of IWO lodge 742, wrote an article explaining what the IWO was. The first few sections were the usual spiel; McDonald rehashed how the IWO provided generous benefits, provided a source of joy, and was open to anyone no matter their background. However, in the latter half of the article, McDonald declared that the IWO assumed the obligation of "preserving and extending our democracy and, in this period, destroying Hitler and Hitlerism."[63] McDonald explained that by eradicating what he called the "enemy of mankind: fascism," the IWO could secure more economic security for the people of America.[64] Although the beginning of McDonald's article was highly reminiscent of the IWO's Early Years–a focus of the Order's working class solidarity and support–his discussions of fascism and preserving democracy signified a shift in their political advocacy and support. The IWO took up the anti-fascism and war-support mantles in hopes of preserving their interests: nations like the USSR, Jewish peoples' safety, and democracy. However, their commitment to these endeavors and the Nazi-Soviet Pact signified their allegiance to CPUSA principles.

While the United States faced their own domestic problems, things were shifting internationally. Fascist regimes first came to prominence in the 20s, when Mussolini's democratic rule began sliding farther and farther right. In Germany, democracy slowly eroded under the Nazi Party, giving the future Chancellor a wide leash to enact new laws and changes. The Empire of Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, and expansionism and nationalism ran rampant

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[63] "The International Workers Order," *The Michigan Chronicle* (June 06, 1942), 14.
[64] "The International Workers Order," *The Michigan Chronicle*, 14.

throughout the rest of the decade, until the Japanese launched a full scale invasion of China in 1937. Countries like Germany, Italy, Japan and others were having governmental shifts that marked a transition to a less democratic government–one that leftists perceived as a threat. This threat, the rise of fascism abroad, prompted new shifts in the American political climate.

From their inception, sharp divisions had existed between the American Socialists and the Communists; both groups had different images for a non-capitalist society, and thus had different aims and goals for their groups. For the communist oriented IWO, socialists were "most brutal in defense of capitalist policies" and workers who bought into socialism "renounces the struggle against capitalism and enslaves both himself and his class."[65] However, this distinction began to drop away in 1934 and 1935, as the two groups united once fascist danger in Europe became unavoidable. This union, informally known as the Popular Front, was backed by the Comintern; it included the support of FDR and his policies, as a precaution to the burgeoning fascism that potentially could take root in the U.S.

This truce between the Communists and the Socialists came to include the IWO. In the earlier part of the 1930s, the IWO had been critical of the Roosevelt administration and their plans for economic recovery. IWO executives, especially Max Bedacht, believed that FDR and his followers were ignoring solutions that radicals had been advocating for since the onset of the Great Depression. "New Dealers don't have to go through the contortions of thinking up new mysterious devices for a positive solution to the problem on hand…" Max Bedacht complained in *the Daily Worker*. "Since the Brain Trusters have uselessly racked their brains for 5 years, they might listen to the proposal of these workers."[66] The solution, he wrote, had already been invented: unemployment insurance. All things considered, Bedacht and the Order's executives

[65] "What is the International Workers' Order, and Why Every Worker Should Join It," Box 49, 2.9.
[66] Max Bedacht, "Workers' Bill Provides Real Jobless Insurance," Daily Worker (November 17, 1934), 5.

had a critical view of FDR's competency, believing he danced around more comprehensive and radical options towards solving unemployment.

However, just a few years later, they changed their position and made their support of Roosevelt and his international policies explicit. "At the present moment, our full support is behind President Roosevelt's relief and recovery program, a program in the interests of the people, against the economic and political sit-down strike of Wall Street," they wrote at their fourth convention in 1938.[67] Their shift in opinion can in part be attributed to Roosevelt's policy successes. The Second New Deal, enacted between 1935-36, was meant to address more systemic issues that the depression had exacerbated, like the need for emergency work relief. For years, the IWO had been clamoring for Social Security, and Roosevelt's administration finally delivered–albeit, they believed, only partially. Although they were happy for this bit of progress, the Order was adamant that "the present law does not sufficiently provide for the needs of those socially insecure," which was why the United States needed a more expansive law such as the Lundeen Bill.[68]

In addition to Roosevelt's economic plan, the IWO also easily fell into step with the Popular Front's anti-fascism stance. Opposing Hitler was a natural function of the Order, considering their membership was a third Jewish, provided by a section called the Jewish People's Fraternal Order. In fact, General Secretary and President of JPFO Rubin Saltzman, commended FDR on his opposition to "Nazi atrocities against the Jewish people," and hoped that his administration would follow up with an embargo against Germany.[69] For the IWO, the Nazi anti-semitism was not a problem for the Jewish portion of their membership, but instead

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[67] International Workers Order, *Proceedings of the 4th National Convention*, (New York City, 1938), 11.
[68] International Workers Order, *Proceedings of the 4th National Convention*, 137.
[69] "R. Saltzman's Letter to Franklin Roosevelt," International Workers Order (IWO) Records #5276. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Box 29, 4.1.

was “a problem for all members of the Order” due to their commitment to eliminating discrimination. This culminated in a 1938 resolution against fascist aggression, where the IWO denounced Hitler’s move into Austria, while urging the collective protection against fascism from all democratic countries.[70]

But the IWO was also committed to anti-fascism beyond just verbal condemnation. The Spanish Civil War erupted in the summer of 1936, just as IWO and other leftists began to get cozy with progressives such as Roosevelt. A conflict between fascist supporters and democracy loyalists, the Spanish Civil war was the first big test of the Popular Front’s commitment to democracy. The Comintern had declared their intent to intervene through arming the loyalist army, seemingly cementing the CPUSA’s alignment to the cause.[71] IWO members and executives decided they too would join other radicals who “responded to the needs of the Spanish people in their life and death struggle for democracy against facism.”[72] The IWO reported collecting $50,000 from their members to send over to the loyalists, even as some still recovered from the lingering aftershocks of the depression. They knit a collective 5,000 sweaters to clothe the fighters; some of which were their own members, who joined the several hundred Americans who joined the loyalist fight in Spain to preserve democracy.

Despite their evidently committed gestures to anti-fascism and FDR’s presidency, the IWO abruptly halted their support after a few short years. Their desire to leap into battle and become defenders of democracy was quickly contrasted by their anti-imperialist, pro-peace stance. Why? Because, when the Soviets signed a pact of nonaggression with Nazi Germany, the

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[70] “Resolution on Fascist Aggression,” Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 3, 1.1.
[71] “War Planes Roar Over Madrid,” Imperial Valley Press (October 26th, 1936), 1.
[72] “Resolution on Fascist Aggression,” Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 3, 1.1.

IWO was paying attention–and listened. Their enthusiastic support of the USSR in international politics had not waned, even as they shifted their allegiance in domestic politics. As an organization that celebrated their members who'd gone abroad to fight fascists, they now advised politicians to "keep the United States out of the bloody shambles of this devastating war."[73] During their fifth convention in 1940, the IWO railed against anti-semitism, specifically in Italy and Germany, and called on the United States government to condemn it as well. But, in the same convention, the executive leadership charged the IWO with "[taking] its share of responsibility in keeping America out of the war, and in making certain that the Yanks are not coming!"[74]

This was one of the IWO's most controversial policy decisions. To Insurance Commissioner Alfred Bolinger and the state of New York, eight years later in their original report, the acceptance and support of the Nazi-Soviet pact was egregious. They accused the IWO's support as "not a coincidence, but carefully planned and organized" because the Order's leaders secretly followed the Comintern's line.[75] The IWO's membership also felt confusion and betrayal as their organization completely switched on a line of policy, anti-fascism, that some members had literally fought for. At a convention for the New England lodges in 1940, Leader Joseph Landy accused the Order's enemies of using the pact as a way to divide membership. Landy admitted that their membership numbers "remained at a standstill for the first time in [their] history" because the USSR's sudden peace proclamation "created confusion."[76] But it, he

[73] "Minutes of Plenary Session of the General Executive Board" Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 1, 8.1.
[74] "Report of the General Secretary to the 5th National Convention of the International Workers Order," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 8, 3.6.
[75] Bohlinger and Williams, "In the Matter of the Application of the People of the State of New York, by Alfred J. Bohlinger, Superintendent of Insurance of the State of New York…," 1585.
[76] "Minutes of the 5th Annual Convention," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 8, 3.2-3.

argued, was all a misunderstanding because the pact was intended not to support the Nazis, but to protect the USSR's peace. Landy's assurance to the New England lodges spoke to a greater phenomenon within the IWO. The IWO had to release a "Speaker's Guide to the Nazi-Soviet War" after neutrality had been breached, and dedicated a whole section to the non-aggression pact. The Guide advised speakers to portray the pact as beneficial to the Nazis, who sought to avoid "the might displayed by the Soviet Red Army," as well as a necessary "breathing spell" for the Soviets which would give them time to prepare against the inevitable attacks.[77] Landy's speech and the "Speaker's Guide" illuminates the way the IWO had to restructure and take control of the narrative surrounding the Soviet-Nazi pact in order to preserve the image they'd carefully crafted with their anti-fascist period.

It was during this time of neutrality that the IWO first drew attention from the federal government. In 1938, the House un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was formed to investigate reports of subversive behavior amongst individuals and groups. HUAC was created in response to increasingly frequent fascist behavior abroad, but it also dealt with communist groups and domestic terrorists, like the Klu Klux Klan. A specific committee known as the Dies committee, run by Martin Dies, was charged with investigating communist activity based on a Russian treaty made in 1933. The Dies Committee named several organizations, such as the IWO and the American League for Peace and Democracy, along with 20 actors in the film industry that they would investigate for "Un-American" and radical behavior that might actually double as a foreign conspiracy.[78] Among the committee's early accomplishments, demonstrating their seriousness, was the arrest of CPUSA leader Earl Browder, who would later be identified as a

[77] "Speakers' Guide on the Soviet-Nazi War and Its Significance to Americans," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 62, 6.3-4.
[78] "Million Americans Accused of Subversive Activities in Dies Report," *Evening Star* (January 3rd 1940), 4.

Soviet spy once the Red Scare heated up. The IWO had invited Browder to speak at their fourth convention, where he dismissed the rumors of the IWO being "a Communist organization, something controlled by Joseph Stalin of Moscow."[79] However, once Browder was arrested, the IWO did nothing to continue dispelling this suspicion. IWO Executives passed resolution after resolution urging the release of Browder, and the General Executive Board passed a motion to donate $100 dollars as a contribution towards his legal fight. Another resolution passed in 1942 called Browder the "most ablest and truest [of] fighters against Hitlerism," and urged Roosevelt to use his authority to grant Browder's immediate release.[80] In a case where the Dies Committee was suspecting those for their affiliation with the CPUSA, the IWO did not appear to be assisting their cause. The House un-American Activities Committee would become even more concerning in 1940 when, on April 2nd, they raided the IWO's New York offices. After a warrant was granted by a Magistrate, agents raided the IWO's office and seized hundreds of papers and records, such as membership rolls and other data. Though the IWO would appeal this as an illegal seizure, the raid quickly demonstrated to Order members that their political affiliation was beginning to draw serious attention.

The Nazi's invasion of the Soviet Union was fortuitous for the IWO. Hitler violated the pact in June of 1941, launching operation Barbarossa, which meant that the IWO was no longer constrained by the Soviet's allegiance. The invasion finally allowed the IWO to resume the fight against fascism. The timing couldn't have been more perfect, as the IWO's growth had been stunted since 1939, decreasing to 5,000 members for the first time in its history.[81] In September's meeting of the executive board, Max Bedacht claimed that there was "never any doubt" of the

[79] International Workers Order, *Proceedings of the 4th National Convention*, 159.
[80] "Minutes of the General Executive Board Plenary Committee," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 1, 9.6.
[81] Walker, *Pluralistic Fraternity*, 34.

Order's commitment to defeating fascism, defeating Hitlerism–their hesitance had only been towards deciding the best *way* to do this.[82] However, Bedacht wrote, it was time for a change. "Everyone knows that in our projected campaign we must try to break the isolation in which our Order has found itself in the past two years," he announced to the other executives.[83] "All we will do is work so intensely and fight so hard for the defeat of Hitler."[84] For the IWO, all neutrality and hesitancy was to be dispelled.

The IWO once again became Roosevelt's and his administration's staunchest defenders. As the United States leapt into the Second World War with the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Roosevelt administration undertook drastic measures in the name of protecting the homeland. In the weeks following the attack, Roosevelt and several senior members questioned the allegiance of Japanese Americans; one administrator, Lieutenant John L. Dewitt, testified to Congress and cast distrust on people with Japanese ancestry. Another such proclamation from FDR required citizens to carry an identification card at all times, which was a prelude to Order 9066 a few weeks later, which incarcerated the Japanese. The IWO lauded Roosevelt and his secretary, Francis Biddle, for their efforts "toward the preservation of the civil liberties of all the people and especially the attitude of our government toward aliens and foreign-born citizens."[85] In the same resolution, they also firmly pledged their support toward ferreting out spies within the country. The U.S' incarceration drew substantial criticism enough to generate years of debate on

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[82] Max Bedacht, "Summary of Discussion of the General Executive Board," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 1, 8.1.
[83] Bedacht, "Summary of Discussion," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 1, 8.2.
[84] Bedacht, "Summary of Discussion," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 1, 8.2.
[85] "Minutes of the General Executive Board Plenary Committee," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 1, 9.20.

its violations of civil liberties–but the IWO's support of FDR neglected to mention or consider this.

Their support can also be measured in their contributions towards FDR's re-election campaign. The IWO's leadership repeatedly expressed that only FDR could be trusted to carry on the fight against fascism as well as protect civil liberties, and they were willing to throw all of their resources behind his re-election. For example, Rubin Saltzman, of the IWO's Jewish section, declared that their 45,000 members ardently believed only he was equipped with "brilliant leadership" to defeat the enemy and preserve peace; and, so, the JPFO pledged "to do everything in our power to make certain that you will have the opportunity to continue as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.[86] The Order treated its members as if they were workers in the 1944 election. Their plans included radio programs in a diversity of languages, meant to reach a wide audience and educate them on election issues; they united with other fraternal groups and organizations to jointly campaign for the president's re-election; they pooled together their finances to launch educational programs about the issues that would be important in the 1944 elections, and distributed numerous circulars.[87] When FDR did secure victory, the IWO lavished him with congratulations. "For now there is no longer any doubt that the founder of the United Nations and the great leader of the war against fascism will continue to lead us to Victory over our brutal and inhuman enemies," Saltzman wrote after victory had been secured.[88]

The IWO's approach to aiding the war effort was largely centered around their Policy of National Unity. They emphasized unity throughout their existence, but especially during the

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[86] "Letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt from Rubin Saltzman," Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 29, 6.1.
[87] "Plan of Work," Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 8, 3.1.
[88] "Letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt from Rubin Saltzman," Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 29, 6.1.

second world war. The IWO believed that their own membership of 160,000, though impressive, was not enough to defeat Hitler; the breadth of the war required "that we make our organization an instrument that can help mobilize and stimulate far larger numbers than are now embraced within our membership."[89] This meant reaching Americans from all backgrounds, regardless of race or class, to unite under one single cause: winning the war. The IWO's immigrant-centered membership meant that they were equipped for this job, seeing as they managed to maintain "harmony and unity regardless of race and nationality" even while engaging with their own nationalities.[90] "As long as any one group of Americans can be kept from cooperating with any other group because of some irrelevant difference, or prejudice," Herbert Benjamin argued in front of the executive board in 1942, "our cause suffers, the enemy gains and victory is jeopardized."[91] So, the IWO encouraged their membership and their communities to provide economic support regardless of national origin, regardless of political affiliation that had once stalled their war support. Doing so also likely had a two-fold measure, namely the hope that the wartime unity would persist after the fighting had stopped. Perhaps putting aside prejudice to fight against Hitler would change the country's norms in treatment of African Americans or immigrants.

As such, the IWO decided to tackle a host of domestic issues, one of which being anti-semitism. In America, the events and dynamics in Europe worried American Jews that virulent anti-semitism might spread abroad, or that public opinion could turn just as it had in Germany. One Jewish newspaper reported that "President Roosevelt is constantly being accused by

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[89] "Speech of Herbert Benjamin at General Executive Meeting," Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 1, 9.2
[90] "Speech of Herbert Benjamin at General Executive Meeting," Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 1, 9.2
[91] "Speech of Herbert Benjamin at General Executive Meeting," Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 1, 9.2

[Charles] Lindbergh and his followers of waging the war in the interest of the Jews, and by the Germans himself of being a Jew, and so on."[92] Max Bedacht recognized the loud but growing minority of people who were willing to cast American Jews in with their scapegoated European cousins, anti-semitism, he cautioned, "is becoming ever more vicious and ever more dangerous. It is becoming a formidable problem."[93] For the IWO, the Soviet Union had again become the paradigm for America's future. The USSR had "proved that anti-semitism can be wiped out," as they had criminalized antisemitism.[94] In the post-war era, the Order advocated for a similar fix, with HR 6897, a bill that would outlaw any hatred or hate speech to Jews or African Americans. Finally, their prescriptive philosophy towards advocacy was on full display when, for their "I Am an American Day" events, they published a brochure intending to educate their youth about Jewish slurs and encouraging them to withhold prejudice for immigrants and those practicing different religions.[95]

Included perhaps on a lesser scale, the IWO also sought to mobilize women for the war movement. They had geared plenty of programming towards women in the past because they explicitly believed that women had been glossed over in the working class movement, and believed working class issues could not be solved without them. "[Men] do not see [housewives] as an important part of the mass," the IWO wrote, "They do not see [women] as fellow sufferers from a common insecurity. They do not see in them possible and necessary fellow fighters for a common cause." [96] So, the IWO made it a point to educate their members on the importance of

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[92] "European Analyst Points an Accusing Finger," *Southern Jewish Weekly* (December 5th, 1941), 2.
[93] Max Bedacht, "Labor Fraternalism," Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 48, 3.14.
[94] "Outline on Anti-Semitism," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archive, Box 36, 8.4.
[95] "I am an American Day," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archive, Box 17, 5.1.
[96] "The Organizer and His Problems," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archive, Box 48, 4.8.

including women. “Lectures on birth control and on women’s sex hygiene were given to well populated lodges of men,” one executive lamented in a newspaper. But because organizers refused to make them convenient for busy mothers or wives to attend, the meetings were “barren of results.”[97] So, the IWO pushed again for lodge leaders to develop their advocacy with women’s perspectives in mind. In the context of the war, too, there was also a greater reason to be more inclusive of women's problems in their advocacy. Neglecting to consider the perspectives and problems of women “makes the job of Hitler so easy when he peremptorily assigns the women to the three K’s– Kinder, Kuecher und Kirch (children, kitchen, and church).”[98] Hitler’s German state relied on the gender norms that American men and IWO members perpetuated. In the interest of defeating their greatest enemy, the IWO was obligated to rebel against those norms.

Women also made concrete contributions to the United States’ war effort. Early in the war, women put their knitting skills to use, making garments for soldiers abroad. Once wool was rationed out, they transitioned to sewing for allied relief and bombing victims.[99] They also coordinated with American mothers whose sons were deployed to send relief and aid over to them. When an influx of women took up positions in manufacturing and industry, IWO executives and committees brainstormed on how they could alleviate the pressure of childcare, looking into creating new nurseries and daycares. These specific initiatives were all in addition to the Frontline Fighters Fund and other order-wide endeavors that were meant to support deployed allied soldiers.

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[97] “The Organizer and His Problems,” Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archive, Box 48, 4.8

[98] “The Organizer and His Problems,” Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archive, Box 48, 4.8.

[99] “War Activities Guide issued by In Communities Council,” Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archive, Box 48, 39.3.

As equally important as combating anti-semitism was the Order's commitment to bettering life in the states for African Americans. Louise Thompson, the IWO's Vice President and a prominent black communist, had a heavy hand in many of the advocacy initiatives for African Americans. Thompson was involved with activism before her time with the IWO; she taught at the Hampton Institute of Virginia where, each Sunday, she would lead a group of black students in singing plantation songs on the campus. She led the formation of a New York City branch of the Friends of the Soviet Union, which led her to visit Moscow alongside other black leaders.[100] After which, she was apparently nicknamed "Madame Moscow" by the press for her ardent support of the USSR.[101] Thompson often had a very public role in using her background and working towards the IWO's goal of embracing African American advocacy. In one instance, IWO President William Weiner used her experience of being denied a table with other customers at a restaurant due to her race as an example of black discrimination. In another, more serious experience, Thompson was arrested and charged with vagrancy in Alabama while on a national tour for the Order.[102] In addition to her skills in organizing and leading, Thompson utilized her background in mobilizing African Americans to join the Order. One newspaper article from Thomspon highlighted the IWO's quality services as compared to corporate insurance companies, enticing potential members by emphasizing that their "place is in this organization along with patriotic Americans of all nationalities and creeds who believe that democracy can

[100] Thompson also visited Russia for another reason. In 1932, Thompson and 22 other black leaders were invited to Russia to help create a film detailing African Americans' lives in the U.S. The project fell apart due to creative differences, but Thompson fiercely defended the Soviet Union as "the best friend of the Negro and all oppressed peoples." ("Negro Actors in Russia are Well Cared for," Daily Worker (September 16, 1932) 14. Thompson's participation and defense of the project only further demonstrates her closeness with the Communist Party and Soviet Russia.

[101] "Louise Thompson Patterson 1901-1999." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 25 (1999): 67–67. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2999389

[102] "Louise Thomspon Jailed," *Daily Worker* (May 15, 1934), 2.

function for one only when it can function for all."[103] Thompson followed her article with endorsements from several African American leaders, hoping that other prominent black figures would draw more African Americans in.

True to Thompson's word in the *Michigan Chronicle's* article, the IWO did try to hold itself to its inclusive ideology; not only for their commitment to racial equality, but also as a move to correct some of the mistakes and fissures that American society perpetrated. "Pitting white workers against black workers has been a powerful weapon in the hands of the exploiting class for a long time," Thompson articulated. "Every means at the command of the bourgeoisie has been utilized to maintain this advantage…For the separation of [black] and white workers in the United States is the basic split in the working class ranks."[104] For Thompson and the other executive members, the philosophy of proletarian fraternalism– being completely for and by the working class– meant that African Americans had to be not just included, but welcomed into the order. With this strategy, the Order would be able to decrease the working class divisions that racism had bred.

To diminish working class divisions and increase black economic security, Thompson and the IWO executives prioritized robust political advocacy campaigns on African American issues. Large insurance providers oftentimes price gouged or even denied coverage to African Americans, and a majority of African Americans did not qualify for social security at the time of its passing in 1935. Attempting to pass social security, legislators decided to exclude farm and domestic workers, many of them black workers, because Southerners could not stomach giving them American tax dollars.[105] Simply by offering cheap, quality insurance, the IWO provided

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[103] "A Message from Louise Thompson," *Michigan Chronicle* (Feb 19th 1944), 8.
[104] "5 years of IWO," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 48, 14.35.
[105] Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: 1929-1941* (Times Books, NY; 1961), 257.

another option that reduced the power of white supremacist systems and organizations. This commitment to quality services extended into political advocacy throughout the '30s and '40s; of course, the IWO made numerous resolutions and endeavors against Jim Crow laws and systems. Poll-tax and grandfather laws, mainly targeting African Americans in an attempt to uphold racial stratification from the Slavery era, was another way of "disenfranchising the have-nots in favor of the haves."[106] The executive board was determined to change their membership's approach to race and "eliminate any traces of anti-Semitic and Jim Crow attitude" through educational films, speakers, and discussions.[107] Promotion of these films and speakers became a annual endeavor, with the creation of "Negro History Week" which was meant to "strengthen the proletarian principles" by fostering support between white and black workers. The IWO executives fostered a close relationship with poet and activist Langston Hughes, and supported him on a national tour, where they published 10,000 copies of his poems for distribution. One of their sponsored events with Hughes had a record 400 attendees from the Order, even in inclement weather, forcing them to find a larger space to hold their meeting.[108] There are countless more initiatives executives pursued, beyond just these.

However, their fight for inclusivity was not always smooth sailing. The IWO executives were repeatedly frustrated over stagnating numbers of black recruitment; they were never able to significantly exceed 6,000 black members, a majority of which came from three lodges in areas where African Americans were predominant.[109] Brother Joseph Landy reported that, although he could think of "no section of the population that needs the benefits of the IWO more," that

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[106] "Some of the Educational and Cultural Problems Facing our Order," *Daily Worker* (June 1940), 23
[107] "History of the IWO and Role of the Fraternal Movement in the US," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archive, Box 17, 1.6.
[108] "Some of the Educational and Cultural Problems Facing our Order," *Daily Worker,* 4.
[109] Walker, *Pluralistic Fraternity,* 73.

section 640 in Newark, New Jersey had lost members despite a heavy advertising campaign and capable black leaders within the lodge.[110] And, in lodges where recruiting African Americans had been successful, leaders often times reported struggles. Sister Dora Chasen of New Brunswick's Lodge 813 wrote that her lodge "was in desperate condition" with lack of leadership and meetings. Their main issue, though, was the "chauvinistic tendency the [African American members] had towards the whites."[111] While Dora suggested that the problem could be fixed–more members could be pulled from other lodges–her complaint ultimately demonstrated the tension between having integrated lodges.

Finally, some members outright rejected the philosophy of racial equality that their Order promoted. "We bowed our heads in shame," executive Sam Milgrom wrote of a Croatian lodge in Canton, Ohio, that had passed a resolution barring African Americans from renting their lodge hall. Milgrom said the Canton lodge had not just committed a "flagrant violation of the basic principles of our Order," but also that the executive board realized that many other lodges held the same practice, just without formal declarations.[112] Milgrom declared he would travel to Canton and discuss the error of the lodge's ways, with the threat of revoking their charter being on the table. This was no consolation though, as the executive branch concluded that while the resolution had been revoked, "racist poison" had still managed to spread into an order that so unequivocally preached equality.[113] This anecdote indicates a few things about the IWO. First, that despite their repeated and genuine political advocacy of racial equality, the IWO was not always successful. The Canton lodge demonstrates that not every member subscribed to the

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[110]"Minutes of the 5th Annual Convention," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 8, 1.9.
[111] "Minutes of the 5th Annual Convention," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 8, 1.2.
[112] "Jim Crow Practices," *Fraternal Outlook* (June, 1944), 15.
[113] "Jim Crow Practices," *Fraternal Outlook*, (June, 1944), 15.

IWO's politics, even if they still reaped the cheap, quality insurance benefits. At the minimum, there were some members who differed from the executive's beliefs, which aligns with the Order's goal of allowing members from all political backgrounds to join. However, this incident alternatively demonstrates that there were some non-negotiable policies–such as racial discrimination–that members were *not* allowed to deviate from. Finally, this case seems to indicate the level of autonomy lodges held. Lodges were allowed to pick and choose what policies they would implement, or even how it would be implemented. But, the IWO had punitive measures they could take to reign in erring members and branches, such as revoking the rewards and benefits they received from being a part of the organization.

Conclusion

The latter half of the 1930s and Second World War was a tumultuous period full of change. The IWO aligned with Roosevelt's New Front, advocated for anti-fascism then neutrality under the Nazi-Soviet pact, and finally worked towards a policy of unity to help the war cause. These changes, though, revealed that the IWO ultimately still held communist-adjacent policies and ideology–even if it was controversial. These changes would become the basis for increased suspicion during the postwar era, as cold war tension prompted U.S officials to begin looking internally for political and financial threats.

Chapter 3: Dawn of the Second Red Scare, 1946-1954

Prior to Truman appearing before Congress in March 1947, Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg advised President Truman to "scare the hell out of the American people." [114] Subsequently, Truman gave an eighteen-minute address, attempting to convince the Republican legislature to lend economic support to Greece by citing the threat "[of] the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by Communists, who defy the government's authority at a number of points…"[115] If the U.S failed to act against these Communist forces, he said, there would be a severe decline in western values such as freedom, democracy, independence, and western countries would also be facing the consequences as much as eastern ones would. The Truman Doctrine indicated a significant change in United States foreign policy. Greece and Turkey faced growing unrest and insurgency after the brutal Second World War, just as Europe embarked on paths to economic and infrastructure recovery. Worried that Greece and Turkey would accept aid from the Soviet Union, and subsequently join the Eastern Bloc, the Truman Administration decided to act. From this address, the U.S government's intentions became clear: they were to take a stance against communist activities to protect their own interests.

The U.S did not just have an ideological opposition to communists, though; the Truman Doctrine served a geopolitical function. In the post-war era, the Soviet Union emerged as a competing nation. Determined to have a 'sphere of influence,' the Russians now incorporated several Eastern European territories into their nation and had ideological influence amongst those who subscribed to Communist ideology. They saw an expansion of territory and influence as their rightful spoils from the wartime sacrifices and subsequent victory, spoils that their allies–

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[114] James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 127-128.
[115] President Truman's Message to Congress; March 12, 1947; Document 171; 80th Congress, 1st Session; Records of the United States House of Representatives; Record Group 233; National Archives.

the U.S and Britain–also reaped. The U.S was not willing to indulge the Soviet Union's interests, instead the Truman Doctrine represented a critical aspect of the postwar period: that it was an era of countering Soviet influence and promoting U.S interests, an era of U.S-Soviet tension.

The International Workers Order, however, seemed to have the opposing sentiments. Ideologically, the Order hoped there was support for American-Soviet friendship amongst the public, or that the seeds of a future coalition had been sown by the wartime alliance. The IWO praised a rally held in New York, and commended Corliss Lamont, Chairman of the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, who asked, "Must we have war with Russia?" They encouraged the public to take action to promote the return of the alliance, writing that it was "the task of the people, led by the united labor forces, to make sure this friendship continues."[116] And, their financial and political strength only seemed to strengthen, as the base for which they could advocate these things only seemed to be growing. They neared 200,000 members by the time of their 7th convention, in June of 1947, with a total of 10 million dollars ($142,672,558.14 in 2024) in combined sick and life insurance paid out by 1947.[117] The Order was growing at a healthy pace, too, with one article celebrating 13 new lodges in coal, steel, and manufacturing that were opened in 1946.[118]

The context of U.S-Soviet tension described above had a large influence on the legal and political focus on anti-communism; the emerging cold war meant that U.S leaders were more conscious about how communist rhetoric and ideology alongside activities could advantage the Soviets. This focus became something that individuals and organizations had to navigate. The

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[116] "Friendship For Peace: The Big Three Coalition Must Be Preserved for Enduring Peace in the World," Fraternal Outlook (April 1946), 2.
[117] "History of the IWO," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 17, 1.1.
[118] "13 New General Lodges Chartered," *Fraternal Outlook* (February 1946), 12.

International Workers Order was consistently and increasingly active after the war, but was faced with the resurgence of the anti-communist movement, which proved to be an existential threat. The Order was targeted for their critical rhetoric of U.S politicians and foreign policies, while advocating for alliances with the Soviet Union. While being put on trial for their communist connections, the IWO remained politically active, fighting back against the anti-communist movement.

American-Soviet tension existed well before the Cold War began. Earlier in the 20th century, the United States was uncomfortable with the Russian Revolution, as the Bolshevik party advocated for revolutions in other countries and the eventual fall of the west. As the Soviet Union developed and Stalin came to power, the U.S watched as the Soviet Union collectivized farms and initiated the Great Purge, leading them to perceive the country as totalitarian.[119] When the USSR snapped up their Eastern European neighbors in 1945, the other allied powers expressed concern over the growing geopolitical power they were amassing. Exemplified in his famous “Iron Curtain" speech, Winston Churchill expressed worry that the satellite territories were “subject in one form or another not only to Soviet influence, but to a very high and now increasing measure of control from Moscow.”[120] He argued that Communist forces and believers around the world, emboldened by the USSR’s growth, had “risen to pre-eminence and power far beyond their numbers and are seeking everywhere to obtain their totalitarian control.”[121]

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[119] William M. Wiecek, “The Legal Foundations of Domestic Anti Communism: The Background of Dennis v United States,” *The Supreme Court Review* (2001), 406- 407.
[120] Winston S. Churchill, "Iron Curtain Speech," speech presented at Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, March 5, 1946, transcript, The National Archives, accessed February 17th, 2024, https://www.nationalarchives.gov .uk/education/resources/cold-war-on-file/iron-curtain-speech/.
[121] Churchill, “Iron Curtain Speech,” The National Archives.

Churchill's remarks, then, indicate the tension between the allies' support of liberal democracy and the Soviet's totalitarian government.[122]

As such, the implications of the Truman Doctrine rippled down into the domestic sphere. The United States embraced their global role as peacekeeper, and underwent their own expansionist journey, hoping to combat Soviet influence in all corners of the world. In the eyes of the Truman administration, domestic politics would have to support this effort, and the U.S became increasingly concerned with "national security." To achieve national security, Michael Hogan argues in *A Cross of Iron,* American leaders believed the United States should be militarily and politically ready for war at all times, lest they be caught off guard. The U.S increased their defense and military budget, whilst researching new weapons such as the atomic bomb. In 1946, Truman authorized the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency, and legislators passed the National Security Act the following year.

Politically, the Truman administration became concerned with the at-home influence of Soviet and Communist ideology. Fear of Soviet espionage and a new commitment to containment led to Truman backing a number of loyalty initiatives, some of which were platforms he and other politicians promoted during the 1946 elections. He instituted an employee loyalty program, where each department had an attorney general to review employees' backgrounds. Despite Truman enlisting a prominent labor attorney to protect civil liberties, the program quickly spiraled into an anti-communist witch hunt, with the FBI conducting illegal

[122] It is worth noting, however, that some historians reject the idea that Soviet advances towards territory were becoming purposefully aggressive. Historians such as Geoffrey Roberts are skeptical of Russia's involvement in the Balkans, arguing that Russia did not make or support active attempts to add Greece to their sphere of influence. Instead, Russian officials actually discouraged or disapproved of Greek radicals' calls for revolution or Soviet involvement, seeing their victory as unlikely. The Russians instead advocated for a democratic avenue towards communism. The U.S, however, perceived Russian calls for their fair share of the spoils as intentions to add more countries towards their Iron Curtain. Thus, this fear of Russian expansion became the basis for issuing the Truman Doctrine.

wiretaps and leaking information to legislators for their own political bidding. [123] While the boards only identified a few communists, the loyalty review program indicated that America's government was taking the worries of Soviet espionage and competition seriously.

The Truman Administration was not the ultimate catalyst for anti-communism, however; the legal basis for which the government could attack communists had been established years before the cold war. The court system had allowed the government to target what they considered 'subversive groups' at various points of history, most relevant was the First Red Scare of 1919-1920 where Bolshevik supporters were deported, and the Japanese Internment of 1942-1946 where Japanese-Americans were imprisoned without trial. In previous court cases, the state reflected an element of self-preservation when dealing with subversive groups; Supreme Court Justice John Harlan II (1899-1971), in one court opinion, cited radicals' rhetoric of violent government overthrow as a reason to consider them threats to American society and liberties. Like the First Red Scare and Japanese Internment, classifying subversive organizations as a "threat" meant that "that the Court imposed on Communists a special and diminished status under the Constitution."[124] This belief was also reflected by the Attorney General Tom Clark when he explained the importance of the IWO's trial, writing that "the presence within the Government service of any disloyal or subversive person constitutes a threat to our democratic processes."[125]

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[123] Michael J Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 254.

[124] Wiecek, "The Legal Foundations of Domestic Anti Communism: The Background of Dennis v United States," 377.

[125] Alfred J. Bohlinger and Paul W. Williams, "In the Matter of the Application of the People of the State of New York, by Alfred J. Bohlinger, Superintendent of Insurance of the State of New York, Petitioner-Appellant-Respondent, for an Order Directing Him to Take Possession of the Property and to Liquidate the Business, and Dissolving the Corporate Existence of the International Workers Order, Inc., Respondent-Appellant-Respondent, Herman A. Seligson, Marjorie DaCosta, Jacob Holmstock, Zachar Shpak, Isidore Siegel, Earl Wheeler, and Walter Hagelberg for the International Workers Order Policyholders Protective Committee, Intervenors-Appellants-Respondents." Book. (S.l.: s.n., 1951-1952), 50.

Attorney General Clark's 1947 list of subversive organizations included an initial 90 organizations ranging from the Klu Klux Klan to labor groups to Nazi splinter groups. The criteria for being included meant that the organization in question had to promote or subscribe to "totalitarian, fascist, communist, or subversive" ideology.[126] However, as the IWO's court cases would reveal, the government had an even more specific reason for their dissolution beyond these categories. Their first complaint was that the IWO disparaged and condemned the United States excessively. James B. Haley, a state investigator who released a Report examining the IWO's political advocacy and financial health (known as the Haley Report), dubbed the IWO's advocacy as a "propaganda of hate" towards America's institutions and figures, and speculated that their rhetoric could "become a threat to America's peace."[127] The Haley Report became the basis for the State of New York's Response to the IWO's appeal against liquidation, in which the committee accused an accusation that the IWO "has not lived up to its stated purposes" of promoting progressivism and unity.[128] Typically, criticism of the U.S would not be a valid complaint; but the courts also lodged a second complaint: that the IWO celebrated and idolized the Communist Party and the USSR alongside criticizing the United States. Haley concluded that the IWO's activities exposed people to "intensive class consciousness propaganda designed to convince them that their interests and those of the Communist Party are identical."[129] The State of New York argued that IWO concealed their true intentions and promoted disunity, pursuing

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[126] "Designation of Organization as Subversive by Attorney General: A Cause of Action." *Columbia Law Review* 48, no. 7 (1948), 1.
[127] Arthur J. Sabin, R*ed Scare In Court: New York Versus The International Workers Order,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, 61.
[128] Bohlinger and Williams, "In the Matter of the Application of the People of the State of New York, by Alfred J. Bohlinger, Superintendent of Insurance of the State of New York…," 100.
[129] Sabin, *Red Scare in Court,* 61.

their advocacy for the "purpose of subjecting [members] to propaganda in an attempt to win them to the Principles of the Communist Party."[130]

The shift in the political atmosphere that followed President Roosevelt's death also contributed to the IWO's decline. President Harry Truman, a democrat, was interested in aiding postwar America's recovery with low taxes and increased trade, while advocating for his progressive-leaning Fair Deal legislation which included a minimum wage raise, a veterans welfare increase, a revision to public works, promotion of civil rights causes, and more. Despite these progressive initiatives, the Truman administration was set against the backdrop of a Republican legislative coalition which often included conservative democrats, making it difficult for Truman to pass more liberal legislation around it. Republicans were more interested in local production and labor rather than international trade, and wanted to balance the country's budgets by reducing social welfare expenditures, which put them at odds with pro-labor leaders and politicians.[131] Truman himself faced the introduction of the Taft-Hartley act, which passed over his veto, limiting union actions and prohibiting certain kinds of strikes. Progressives despaired at this passing–the IWO called it the "Taft-Hartley *slave* labor bill–" taking the bill to be a sign that the Truman Administration was not suited for furthering the pro-labor side's goals. To much of the New Deal coalition and FDR's supporters, the political dynamic at the capital was often inadequate.

The IWO's rhetoric tended to characterize President Truman negatively, framing his presidency as a regression from the strides that his predecessor had made. Louise Thomas Patterson, one of the National Officers and Vice Presidents, criticized Truman's effort to "scuttle

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[130] Bohlinger and Williams, "In the Matter of the Application of the People of the State of New York, by Alfred J. Bohlinger, Superintendent of Insurance of the State of New York…," 85.
[131] Hogan, *A Cross of Iron*, 6-7.

the FEPC, the weapon developed during the war…to outlaw racial, national, and religious discrimination in job opportunities."[132] She continued to frame him as a threat to social and economic equality, writing that the "capitulation of the Truman Administration before the reactionary demands of the Southern oligarchy in the Democratic Party and of Big Business in the Republican party must likewise cause Negro America to consider seriously the need for a third party which can unite all progressive forces in the nation."[133] For Patterson, Truman's policies of compromise made him weak and ineffective, and his reshaping of the country meant he was ill suited for the IWO's goals. The IWO also accused Truman's political endeavors, specifically the Truman Doctrine, of exacerbating foreign security threats. The IWO passed a resolution criticizing the Truman doctrine for "[negating] the collective security work of the U.N"[134] Abe Chapman warned members that "under President Truman's administration, which coddles fascists at home and abroad," the war on Nazism had not yet been won.[135] In this way, the IWO implied that Truman was not the peacemaker he made himself out to be.

Simultaneous to their criticism of the Truman Administration, the IWO was also mournful and nostalgic for his predecessor, President Roosevelt. Their comments towards U.S policy in the postwar era were set against the precedent of FDR's tenure and accomplishments; on the one year anniversary of FDR's death, for example, the IWO condemned Truman's "lip-service to social security and other progressive legislation" while Roosevelt had already begun pursuing those policies a few earlier.[136] The IWO went so far as to announce, at its 1947 convention, that Roosevelt's initiatives were "in the interest of our country, in the interest of

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[132] "Post-War Problems of the Negro People," *Fraternal Outlook* (February 1946), 2.
[133] "Post-War Problems of the Negro People," *Fraternal Outlook* (February 1946), 10.
[134] "Convention Review," *Fraternal Outlook* (August-September 1947), 21.
[135] Abe Chapman, "Outline on Anti-Semitism," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 38, 8.4.
[136] "In Remembrance of FDR," *Fraternal Outlook* (April 1946), 12.

world unity" and " [pledged] itself to the arm of fighting for [their] restoration".[137] In the court's response to the IWO's appeal, these criticisms of Truman and his comparison to FDR was a focal point of their opinion. The committee wrote, "a concerted effort is being made to impugn the integrity of our country's President, his cabinet, and the congress, specifically in their conduct of foreign policy and particularly in that policy since the close of WWII."[138] While disagreeing with politicians was not a subversive act, the document concluded, the Order's rhetoric was meant to disparage the U.S politicians and convince its members of their ineffectiveness in comparison to more Soviet-friendly figures and the USSR itself.

The court of New York laid a second charge against the IWO, accusing them of being "laudatory" of the Soviet Union. Indeed, in the postwar era, the IWO continuously praised Soviet figures and publicly hoped for a reconciliation between the Big Three alliance. Some of the IWO's advocacy was just about praise and reconciliation, while some of it blamed the breakdown of relations on the U.S. "The present administration in Washington has abandoned this policy [of peace]," the IWO wrote in an article called "Fraternally Yours." "It is bent on breaking up the unity of the Big Three. That means it is working for a new world conflict."[139] An executive editorial from 1948 seemed to question how the frosty Soviet-American relationships had grown, again pinning Washington and related parties to the center of the tensions.

> War against whom? For heaven's sake, who are our enemies? The Russian people who are digging their way out of the rubble that fascism brought to them? …What is the pattern of the present bi-partisan foreign policy of the United States? It is a pattern of lavish aid and assistance to reactionaries and fascists…[140]

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[137] "Convention Review," *Fraternal Outlook* (August-September 1947), 20.
[138] Bohlinger and Williams, "In the Matter of the Application of the People of the State of New York, by Alfred J. Bohlinger, Superintendent of Insurance of the State of New York…," 319.
[139] "Fraternally Yours," *Fraternal Outlook* (December,1946), 7.
[140] "American-Soviet Cooperation: The Key to Peace and Strong United Nations," *Fraternal Outlook* (June, 1948), 3.

Rhetoric such as this had similarities to that of politician Henry Wallace, former U.S Vice President under FDR and a third-party presidential candidate in the 1948 election. Wallace had been Secretary of Commerce in the Truman administration, but was promptly fired once he advocated for the maintenance of U.S-Soviet friendship.[141] Though Wallace was accused of subscribing to communism, he was not a communist himself; instead, Wallace ardently advocated for U.S-Soviet alliance in the name of preventing fascism from spreading and maintaining peace around the globe. Wallace's views made him popular amongst the IWO. The Order distributed pamphlets of his "Century of the Common Man" (1943) speech, where he argued that alliance between Soviet and American peoples was a "prerequisite for the building of the post-war world of the common man."[142] Wallace was subsequently mentioned several times in the IWO's *Fraternal Outlook* newspaper, often positively for his left leaning views.

In an article recommending a book exploring the history of anti-Soviet sentiment, Max Bedacht classified current politics as the "Great Conspiracy," something that had surged again since the initial Red Scare earlier that century. "The great conspiracy is revived," he wrote. "Today, as then, it aims the destruction of the Soviet Union. Today, as then, the great conspiracy is directed as much against the people at home as it is against the Soviet Union."[143] The IWO's angered comments seem to articulate the insinuation that the Cold War tensions were unjustifiably manufactured by the United States, further casting doubt on the peace-oriented policies of the Truman Administration.

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[141] Alonzo L.Hamby, "Henry A. Wallace, the Liberals, and Soviet-American Relations," *The Review of Politics* 30, no. 2 (1968), 157.

[142] Henry Wallace, "Century of the Common Man," Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 49, 15.1.

[143] Max Bedacht, "The Great Conspiracy," *Fraternal Outlook* (December, 1946), 7.

Beyond their critical stance towards U.S-Soviet relations, the IWO also pursued more productive measures to carry out their policy. At their 1947 convention, the IWO passed a resolution, demanding the return of the alliance between the U.S and the USSR. IWO leaders sent several women to a National Council for American-Soviet Friendship conference in New York, later writing in the *Fraternal Outlook* that "American-Soviet Friendship is essential for a peaceful world."[144] The Order also tried to encourage general compassion and support for Soviet citizens, running a piece on Red Army Sgt. Leonard Berndaht, launching the Freedom Fighters campaign to raise money for soldiers, and fundraising to support "suffering" war-wounded Russians.[145] These instances demonstrate how committed the IWO was to pursuing the Soviet-American alliance.

With the listing of the IWO on the subversive organizations list and the launching of a legal battle, the IWO's priorities and activities until its dissolution shifted. Initially, the list sparked outrage amongst the leadership. They claimed that the subversive organizations list did not adhere to democratic processes, and actually undermined the institutions they were meant to protect. The list had revoked their tax exempt status that all fraternal organizations were entitled to which Lee Pressmen, the IWO's lead attorney, argued that it "constituted subversive activity on behalf of the government."[146] Rubin Saltzman, one of the National Officers and Vice Presidents vowed to lead the Order's action against Tom Clark's list with the reason that "history has taught us that you meet reactionary acts with counter offensive, not with passive defense, hesitation or liberal phrases."[147] In the same speech, he continued on to say that the subversive organization's list reeked of fascism.

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[144] "Women United," *Fraternal Outlook* (February, 1946), 9.
[145] "He Fought in Two Armies," *Fraternal Outlook* (December, 1946), 5
[146] "Nation-Wide Campaign," *Fraternal Outlook* (January, 1948), 8.
[147] "Nation-Wide Campaign," *Fraternal Outlook* (January, 1948), 9.

One of the main injustices the IWO fought against was court ordered deportations of some of their members. After being placed on the subversive organization's list, the Immigration and Naturalization Services determined that IWO membership was grounds for revoking or denying citizenship to immigrants.[148] Andrew Dmytryshyn, the vice-president of the Ukrainian-American section, was questioned by the INS in 1950 and subsequently deported. The Order, in a news release to their membership, accused the INS "stool-pigeons" of trying to use Dmytryshyn's testimony as a way to paint the Order as violent and revolutionary.[149] The INS also targeted ordinary members, too. Clara Dainoff, a 65-year-old Russian immigrant, was among those questioned and subsequently deported from America solely because she was a member of the IWO. At the time of her questioning, Dainoff had resided in the U.S for 26 years, and was the mother of two adult children–one of which was a U.S citizen, the other applying for their citizenship. Dainoff was politically active, picketing a bakery in the 1931 "Bread Strike" and then protesting evictions in the 1933 "Rent Strike."[150] Though the INS documents do not offer details beyond her deportation, due to her age, it's likely she was never able to return to the U.S. Dainoff's deportation demonstrates how the IWO's political rhetoric and activities had a direct impact on their members in the early-cold war era. For an organization heavily composed of immigrants, the INS' examinations were dangerous to them remaining in the country.

The IWO tried to retain their reputation amongst the Order members and the public, utilizing news releases and immediately challenging their designation as "subversive." President Rockwell Kent and General Secretary/Treasurer Peter Shipka issued a joint statement explaining that the IWO was permitted to challenge the subversive organization list. Their books and

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[148] Sabin, *Red Scare in Court,* 23.
[149] "Present Status of the Fight for the Life of the Order," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 17, 6.1.
[150] Zecker, *Road to Peace and Freedom,* 65.

records had periodically been submitted to the New York State Department for review and compliance, they wrote, and "the Order's good standing as a fraternal organization has always been upheld."[151] The IWO also promised to fight back against the list, and protect their reputation as a law-abiding organization that represented the working class. Attorney Lee Pressmen assured members that they had swiftly filed a complaint with the federal courts to deem it unconstitutional, under the auspice that it was unconstitutional from lack of due process, and included statements from the Labor Department and the Civil Service Commission to prove the "IWO is a loyal organization which has made a tremendous contribution as a fraternal organization to its members and the nation."[152]

In addition to these legal steps, the IWO leadership turned to the might and force of their nearly 200,000 members to try and persuade the government to leave them be. A letter from IWO executives refused to let the Attorney General's targeting unchallenged, writing, "you, dear members, know best through your daily activities the loyalty and devotion you and your organization have displayed in service to this country."[153] The letter then called on lodges to adopt a resolution condemning the Attorney General, as well as issue joint-statements of protest just as President Kent and Treasurer-Secretary Shipka did. Other leadership correspondence articulated America's seeming descent into a police state status, arguing that the loyalty oaths, administrative actions, mass deportations all pointed to the growing tyranny of the government.[154] In this manner, the IWO tried to frame the threat to their organization as one arbitrarily brought on by politicians.

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[151] "As We See It," Fraternal Outlook (June 1949), 18.
[152] "Nation-Wide Campaign," Fraternal Outlook (January 1948), 8.
[153] "Resolution Against Tom Clark," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 56, 3.1.
[154] "Present Status of the Fight for the Life of the Order," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 17, 6.1.

The efforts to mobilize lodges and members garnered a large turnout of resolutions and protests. Lodges from Chicago, to New York to Massachusetts passed a resolution condemning the Attorney General's actions and asserting the Order's loyalty. In addition, members and organizations sent letters of protest to various government officials– many of them complaining of the violation of civil liberties. A letter from Branch 236 of the Jewish sections wrote, "The manner in which you have taken upon yourself, to distort all facts, the violation of the Constitutional rights of all free people, and you attempt to eliminate all Democratic principles, and your false accusations shall not go unanswered."[155] Spiridan Conouits from Youngstown, Ohio, denounced the Truman Administration for allowing "the big Nazis from European countries to help the American reactionaries to overthrow the U.S government…This is an insult to the young boys and girls–our children, who shed their blood and laid down their lives for the U.S so we may live in peace."[156] From New York City, organizer Tony Barrata sent a letter of support to IWO National Officers, writing that the subversive organization list "is just another attempt to destroy the civil liberties of the American people and I am happy that the IWO is fighting back."[157]

Although the IWO did have vocal supporters, the accusations of communism and disloyalty did have an effect on their membership. Some members began withdrawing from the organization, fearing the repercussions based on association; Dave Greene, General Director of Organization and a member of the general council, released a statement urging members "to reconsider your resignation from the IWO, based on the fear that you would lose your dwelling"

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[155] "Letter from Branch 236 to Attorney General Clark," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 60, 6.1.
[156] "Letter from Spiridan Conouits to Attorney General Clark," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 60, 6.1.
[157] "Letter from Tony Barrata to IWO Leadership," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 60, 6.1.

because of the loyalty requirement needed for public housing.[158] Another member, E.T Besenyodi, from Akron, Ohio, wrote that he was "sorry I ever paid a damned cent into your organization."[159] Bensenyodi claimed that Tom Clark would not have made the accusations without substantial proof and listed out his reasons he was revoking his membership. "I feel that as a good American I should support [Clark]. 1. Because I am a good American. 2. I love my country. 3. I like my government."[160] These two incidents indicated that Clark's accusations managed to persuade some members to abandon the IWO out of self-preservation, and others departed after Clark's accusations persuaded them to believe the order was disloyal.

The communist and disloyalty accusations occupied a large place in IWO postwar politics, demanding a significant amount of attention for the Order to try and fight their subversive distinction and preserve their reputation. However, this fight did not occupy all of their political advocacy; they were still advocating for advancements in social security, African American equality, and promoting culture of their nationality groups. As a few examples, the IWO urged the adoption of the Neely-Price bill for mining safety, which would charge the government with using federal mine inspectors and authorize them to close mines that were immediate dangers.[161] In New York, Russian Dance groups from the IWO marched through the streets, and launched into dances "of such color and motion as to astonish outlookers."[162] The Fraternal Outlook still published recipes from various ethnic backgrounds–with the spring 1947 issue teaching members how to make Hungarian goulash and pancakes.[163] The IWO also

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[158] "Letter from Dave Greene to IWO Lodges," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 60, 6.1.
[159] "Letter from E.T Bensenyodi to IWO Executives," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 60, 6.1.
[160] "Letter from E.T Bensenyodi to IWO Executives," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 60, 6.1.
[161] "IWO Urges Adoption of Mine Safety Bill," *Fraternal Outlook* (June, 1949), 11.
[162] "IWO Russian Dance Groups Parade in New York," *Fraternal Outlook* (December, 1947), 11
[163] "Foods of All Nations," *Fraternal Outlook* (April, 1948), 18.

sponsored folk and blues concerts and dances in Connecticut, New Jersey, and Eastern-Pennsylvania for Negro History Week. These initiatives to preserve the cultural programming fit with General Secretary-Treasurer Peter Shipka's promise that "the Officers of the Order are doing everything in their power to safeguard the interests of the members."[164]

The postwar era, then, marked a shift in the United States' political atmosphere. It was characterized by heightened U.S-Soviet tensions, anti-communist movement, and the Truman Administration's political navigations. This atmosphere was the context in which the IWO went from being seen as a loyal ally to being perceived as a subversive organization. However, this status of subversiveness was not exactly fabricated, as the IWO's rhetoric was critical of the U.S and praiseworthy towards the USSR. The Order's political activity thus became focused on the preservation of their organization through their membership's mobilization and reputation's defense.

On a final note, there is debate on why the state would target the IWO at all. The International Workers Order did not call itself a communist organization, nor made consistent direct and impactful contributions to the CPUSA itself. However, the state devoted considerable effort towards investigating their finances and politics and fighting the IWO in court. Robert Zecker in *Road and Peace to Freedom* speculates that the IWO's "commitment to racial equality and union action" was what drew the government to action, as their liquidation limited the arenas in which these causes could be pursued by ordinary people. Instead, in this chapter, I argued that the IWO's political causes and rhetoric opposed the U.S' policies in the cold war context; the IWO offered support to the USSR and criticized the American politicians and leaders. But, it was

[164] "Letter to Irwin W. Barkan from Peter Shipka," Collection 5276, Cornell University Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Box 60, 6.1.

not just the rhetoric that made the IWO a threat—it was their magnitude and operations. With their 162,000 members as of 1951, and their nearly $7,000,000 (nearly $100 million in 2024) dollars in insurance assets, the state of New York asserted that "the order is in a position to effectively further the aims to which it subscribes."[165] The Order had a long history of mobilization—from raising money for Communist candidates, to knitting sweaters for soldiers, to passing hundreds of resolutions against liquidation. This history of mobilization and action of their membership, along with financial capital they held, made their causes and rhetoric more threatening than individual intellectuals or actors were

[165] Bohlinger and Williams, "In the Matter of the Application of the People of the State of New York, by Alfred J. Bohlinger, Superintendent of Insurance of the State of New York…," 85.

Conclusion

In his unpublished memoir from 1967, Max Bedacht offers his reflections on his life and the close of the International Workers Order era. "[The Insurance Department] decided to transform themselves into illegal censors of the politics expressed in the speeches of some officers," Bedacht wrote. "The IWO was a thorn in their sides and it had to go, legally, if possible, extra-legally or better illegally, if necessary."[166] Bedacht argues that the IWO's downfall was contrived by the state for the government's benefit, not by any justified means. His words, even years on from their liquidation, capture the debate that makes the IWO's story interesting and relevant. The weight the IWO's liquidation has stems from the morality of their end: was their liquidation valid or not?

This thesis tries to move beyond simply using CPUSA membership of some leaders and members as a determinant of whether the IWO was a communist front or not. Instead, it tries to look at the IWO's actions and words to give a more nuanced understanding if and how they supported the Communist Party. It briefly explores the political evolution of the IWO, tracking one main idea–the prevalence of Communist Party rhetoric and beliefs throughout the IWO's political advocacy. The third chapter, specifically, unpacks the validity of the Insurance Department's examinations in respect to postwar advocacy; it finds that the IWO did in fact do many of the things they were charged with. Things such as supporting a return to the U.S-Soviet alliance, rejecting Truman and his administration, and calling for the return to FDR's policies. Before that, the IWO had been noticeably neutral once the Nazi-Soviet pact was drawn, as well as endorse the Communist party and donate money to their newspaper in the early '30s.

[166] Max Bedacht Manuscript, Collection 6224, Box 1, 27.403.

The IWO, however, never advertised itself as communist front. It also never formally associated with the CPUSA, beyond having some party visitors such as President Earl Browder at their 1938 convention. It was also a federated organization; activities were largely determined by local lodge presidents, rather than the executives that belonged to or espoused Communist beliefs. The organization, as a whole, seemed to operate based on the needs of the American people rather than the Soviet Union. Support of communist or radical left ideology was done with impacts on American workers in mind. Despite these caveats, the fact that the IWO espoused communist rhetoric is fairly evident from closely examining their politics.

The validity of liquidating the IWO, then, depends on two things. First, whether one prioritizes free speech fundamentalism or national security. The end of the second world war did not mean that all conflicts had been tidily wrapped up and resolved; on the contrary, the Soviet Union had been a concern to the U.S far before the cold war. Those concerns were amplified by the Soviet's race to build an atom bomb and their acquisition new satellite territories. In other words, the U.S had legitimate concerns about the USSR, perhaps legitimate enough to warrant their concerns impacting U.S citizens and organizations. The legitimacy of the state's actions towards the IWO depends, second, on whether one believes that communism is a dangerous or threatening ideology at all. For the IWO, who thought that communism and its principles could be a vehicle for bettering America's quality of life, communism was not a threat but instead a method of growth and change.

Regardless of the validity debate, the IWO's meaning to regular Americans should not be neglected or overshadowed because of the communist allegations. The IWO delivered cheap, quality insurance to thousands of workers, offering financial security during tenuous times. The Order also provided a way for Americans, especially immigrants, African Americans, and

women, to socialize and connect. These social endeavors often honored and celebrated aspects of identity such as ethnicity, race, and gender. Finally, the IWO leadership also took up causes such as improved healthcare, racial equality, workplace safety–causes that were objectively for workers' benefit.

To the IWO executives and members, political advocacy seemed to be more important than the tangible benefits that they offered. Bedacht, in his memoir, said that the IWO "was not an insurance company. It was a workers' mass organization for mutual aid. In the course of their efforts, its members concerned themselves with politics. Why shouldn't they? Politics concerned themselves very much with them."[167] The Order, most importantly, provided a way for ordinary workers to get involved with their own advocacy and political education, empowering Americans to make their voices heard on important issues. The tragedy of their liquidation was that ordinary members were punished for the state's issues with the Order's leadership. And, by disbanding the IWO, political speech seemed to be restricted for questionable and, to many, unjustifiable reasons.

[167] Max Bedacht Manuscript, Collection 6224, Box 1, 27.403-404.

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