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Against the classes and the masses: The American Legion, the American Federation of Labor, and Square Deal Americanism in the 1920s

Gregory Steven Hopely
Rowan University

AGAINST THE CLASSES AND THE MASSES: THE AMERICAN LEGION, THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR, AND SQUARE DEAL AMERICANISM IN THE 1920S

by

Gregory S. Hopely

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Abstract

Gregory S. Hopely
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Melissa Klapper, Ph.D.
Master of Arts in History

This work explores the ideological contributions of the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor to American conservatism in the 1920s. It argues that the two organizations shared a vision of what the author calls Square Deal Americanism, a loose conception of ideal citizenship that added a nationalist rejection of class to more traditional nativist Americanism. The conservatism of both groups took inspiration from the legacies of the Progressive Era and World War I. They sought an active role for the federal government and engaged citizenry in eliminating any strain of radicalism, fostering patriotism, and securing a square deal between capital and labor.

Primarily through published sources, but also buttressed by archival work, this thesis demonstrates how the two organizations worked together toward a loosely shared vision of Americanism to a degree underestimated by historians. The Legion and AFL collaborated on anticommunist activities during the Red Scare of 1919-1920, were part of an information sharing network that included civic societies and the federal government, partnered to promote patriotic legislation and restrict immigration, and publicized their vision of the loyal American who placed nation above class. Finally, this work demonstrates how their conception of Square Deal Americanism led individuals in both organizations to make early, if cautious and ultimately abandoned, praise of Fascism.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents (Continued)

List of Figures

Chapter 1

Introduction

In an oft-cited statement, Alvin Owsley, who served as National Commander of the American Legion from 1922 to 1923, declared: "if ever needed, the American Legion stands ready to protect the country's institutions and ideals as the Fascisti dealt with the obstructionists who imperiled Italy."[1] When asked if he were willing to take over the government in order to do so, he replied, "exactly that…The American Legion is fighting every element that threatens our democratic government – soviets, anarchists, I.W.W., revolutionary socialists and every other 'red'…Do not forget that the Fascisti are to Italy what the American Legion is to the United States."[2] In a somewhat more cautious statement, John McQuigg, Commander from 1925-1926, proclaimed: "the Fascisti are the Legionnaires of Italy. Their aims and ideals, though not their methods, are identical with those of the American Legionnaires."[3]

Around the same time, the longtime president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), Samuel Gompers, himself an avid anticommunist, made a more restrained, though still quasi-sympathetic statement on Italian Fascism. Conceding that when the "effectiveness of parliamentary action had been largely destroyed…partly due to Communist intrigue" and "however repugnant may be the idea of dictatorship and man on horseback, American trade unionists will at least find it possible to have some sympathy with the policies of a man whose dominating purpose is to get something done;

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[1] Quoted in William Pencak, *For God and Country: The American Legion 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 21. John P. Diggins records the word "obstructionists" as "destructionists" in *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 206.
[2] Quoted in Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism,* 206.
[3] Quoted in Pencak, *For God and Country,* 21.

to do rather than to theorize; to build a working, producing civilization instead of a disorganized, theorizing aggregation of conflicting groups."[4] Doubtless, the men of the American Legion would have felt the same.

There is much in the sentiments expressed above to examine. From the martial calls to action, the rabid anticommunism, and the rejection of effete intellectual wavering to the call for the transcendence of unity over a politics of "conflicting groups," one gains an insight into a particular period in the history of American conservatism when young and dynamic organizations such as the American Legion, as well as older fixtures like the AFL, put forward a vision of the future rooted in modernism, corporatism, patriarchy, and "one hundred per cent Americanism." Such ideas were not rooted solely in the particularities of American in the 1920s, but were also in conversation with a new ideology then emerging in the Western world: Fascism.

Both the AFL and the American Legion would ultimately reject Fascism by the 1930s. Still, this initial flirtation with the ideas of Fascism begs the question: what ideological principles held by both groups made initial considerations and apologetics possible? Both organizations felt the need to state publicly their positions vis-à-vis Fascism and to engage with many of the ideas put forward by the ideology. Indeed, much of what the Italian Fascists talked about was already being discussed stateside. The ripple effects of the Progressive Era, the experience of World War I, and the specter of global Communism loomed large over the United States by the year 1919, so much so that questions of gender, race, nationalism, and immigration were inextricably tied up with the anticommunism shared by the Legion, the AFL, and Fascists. The goal of this project

[4] Samuel Gompers, "An Analysis of Fascism," *American Federationist* 30 (November 1923), 927-933.

is not to argue that the American Legion and the AFL were Fascists, but rather to explore how the ideological principles espoused by both organizations, which have enough commonalities with Fascism to warrant a comparison, played a role in shaping the context of conservatism in the 1920s.

On the surface, it is not obvious that the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor ought to be thought of as ideological allies. A federation of craft unions which had, having been on the scene since 1886, already been a key player in American history by 1919 does not seem an obvious match with the new, zealously militant band of veterans that was described by critics as the "Praetorian Guard of Capital."[5] And yet, the two often found themselves on the same side of many issues, including Red Scare repression, immigration restriction, the Civilian Military Training Camps movement, civic and educational programs, and, most importantly, the active promotion of Americanism against the foreigner, the radical, and the disloyal.

The first task of this paper will be to trace the origins of each of these organizations and to survey their position at the beginning of the 1920s. As the official Red Scare receded, the center of radical surveillance and suppression shifted from the government to non-governmental actors, including patriotic organizations and labor unions, who continued the work. The Legion and the AFL found common cause in anticommunism. For reasons that will be presented here, both organizations buried what mutual suspicion may have existed and worked together not just to restrict immigrants and silence radicals but also to foster a sense of Americanism. Exploring the various ways the two groups interacted with one another, embarked on joint ventures, or simply

[5] Victor D. Berger, "The American Legion and Civil Service 'Preference' for Soldiers" in *The Milwaukee Leader* 10, no. 67 (Feb. 24, 1921), pg. 1. Accessed via Marxist Internet Archive.

found themselves on the same side of particular issues, as well as *why* the two were able to come together, will be the second major task of this paper.

A third task involves discerning the historicity and meaning of Americanism as espoused by the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor. Though both groups had their own objectives and concerns and were not perfectly harmonious in their ideological principles, there nonetheless existed significant overlap. The language and ideas put forward by each organization were mutually intelligible. For example, when each group spoke of Americanism, they often directly or indirectly reinforced the perceived national, racial, ethnic, and patriarchal status quo. Neither organization doubted that radicalism was linked to foreign immigrants intent on subverting the national and familial order. Their martial calls for loyalty, duty, and service to the nation were also deeply rooted in the perspective of white masculinity. Unfortunately, most scholars stop at this sociological reading of Americanism. Examining the Americanism of the Legion and the AFL reveals, however, another dimension rooted in economics and class. This project will argue that when both groups spoke of a "one hundred per cent Americanism," they deliberately invoked a "class-blind" vision of national citizenship that denied the validity of organizing based on class interest and promoted an alternative vision based on cross-class cooperation in the name of modernization, democracy, and the national interest. This way of thinking about Americanism will here be described as "Square Deal Americanism."

The promotion of Square Deal Americanism ultimately resulted in the reification and ossification of existing social and economic relations. Thus, it is safe to say that both organizations have a place in the history of American conservatism. Yet this

conservatism was not rooted in a reactionary desire to return to some *laissez-faire* past, as some scholars suggest, but rather in the conceptions of civic responsibility, government activism, and the desirability of manufacturing social cohesion popularized during the Progressive Era and World War I. To preserve the "American" way of life and to defeat Socialism, society needed to change. Progressive means could be utilized toward conservative ends. For the Legion and the AFL, this meant experimenting with new relationships between capital and labor, borrowing liberally from Theodore Roosevelt's ideas for a Square Deal. Though these new relationships stopped short of the corporatism found in Italian Fascism, they nonetheless listed in that direction.

The final task of this project is to analyze the historical and ideological junctures (and disjunctures) between the Square Deal Americanism of the Legion and AFL and the Fascism on the rise across the Western world. Leaders of both the AFL and the American Legion were in communication with Fascists at home as well as abroad. Both groups initially considered the merits of Fascism and found within it some value. Fascists were quite confident of the support they could expect from both groups but were ultimately disappointed when the lack of substantive democracy in Italian Fascism proved to be too much for the loyal Americanists and the AFL and Legion became vocal opponents of the ideology. In the final analysis, American democracy was too stable, and both organizations found opportunity to advance their ideas within the existing system, effectively precluding a deeper rooting of Fascism. Owsley's comments above beg the question of what might have happened had this not been the case. Still, exploring how class conflict intersected with questions of nationalism, patriarchy, and corporatism in the

1920s United States can help broaden historians' understanding of American conservatism.

This study will argue that the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor held a similar vision of Americanism that accounts for the level of cooperation and fellowship found between the two organizations. It is important to note, however, that Americanism was, and remains, an elusive concept. Neither organization developed one set meaning for the term. Most times, the writers and public relations professionals who promoted the idea assumed members and readers would implicitly understand its meaning. Furthermore, different people meant different things when utilizing the term. Its meaning also changed with time and circumstance. It would be inaccurate to state that the Legion and the AFL meant the exact same thing when they spoke of Americanism. Nonetheless, there are strong similarities in the way it was used by both groups, enough to speak of a broad common understanding. Of particular interest here are the ways class colored the Americanism of the Legion and the AFL in addition to the more traditionally cultural meanings of Americanism.

Methodology

This study of the ideological contributions of the AFL and the American Legion to American conservatism intersects with a number of existing historiographies. Scholarship on the 1919-1920 Red Scare, anticommunism in America, American conservatism, and the histories of the Legion and the AFL, as well as Fascism have all been invaluable in informing the context of this project. Each chapter will contain a literature review highlighting the key issues relative to the topic under examination.

While the secondary scholarship was essential for this project, it is nonetheless based most heavily upon primary source material. Particularly useful are the official publications of both the American Legion, the *American Legion Weekly* (later changed to the *American Legion Monthly*), and the AFL, the *American Federationist.* As official organs of the respective groups, these papers contain valuable information about how, exactly, the organizations wanted to present themselves to the public. The articles published in these magazines will be considered the "official line," so to speak, of each organization. In addition to the official publications, this paper will also utilize the published reports and minutes of national conventions.

Using such published sources presents certain limitations. The official language and proclamations of the organizations did not invoke universal agreement among local-level organizations or individual members. Indeed, the conflict that existed between the ideas of national organizations and their local branches is a factor considered in this thesis. Though the scope of this project is mostly limited to the national level and at the level of ideas (though ideas embodied and manifested through material apparatuses), it will try to draw, when it can, from information about how national ideology was interpreted, accepted, or rejected at the local level. A more thorough examination of this conflict is a worthwhile venture but beyond the scope of the current project.

Moving beyond official, national-level sources, one must focus not just on words but also actions in order to get a more complete picture. Where possible, this paper will explore the episodes in which the ideals of the organizations were (or were not) put into practice at the local level. Unfortunately, an expanded project would be required in

order to fully flesh this out. Nonetheless, this paper will attempt never to stay too long in the realm of ideas but to explore how ideology was manifested through action.

To achieve this, one must look outside of official sources. Though an in depth state-by-state (or even local-by-local) study is beyond what this project can accomplish, it will explore various national newspaper publications, as well as relevant books and articles in order to round out an understanding of the ideology and role played by the Legion and the AFL in the 1920s. Such sources include *The Nation*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal.* For some information on the far-Left criticisms of the American Legion and AFL, this paper made limited and careful use of the Marxist Internet Archive.

In addition to newspapers, this thesis consulted memoirs and books written by relevant actors. Especially important are Samuel Gompers's autobiography *Seventy Years of Life and Labor* and Legionnaire Marquis James's 1923 *A History of the American Legion.*[6] A number of Samuel Gompers's speeches and writings were collected and published in book form and have proven valuable.[7] Finally, a number of books written by Legionnaires (and ex-Legionnaires) were consulted as well.[8] Each of these sources was critically evaluated and provide valuable insight into the minds of AFL and Legion leadership.

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[6] See Marquis James, *A History of the American Legion* (New York: William Green, 1923) and Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor: An Autobiography*, ed. Nick Salvatore (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, 1984).
[7] Samuel Gompers, *Labor and the Common Welfare*, comp. Hayes Robbins (New York: Arno, 1969), Samuel Gompers, *Labor and the Employer* (New York: Arno, 1971), and Gerald Emanuel Stearn, ed., *Gompers*, Great Lives Observed (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971).
[8] See George Seay Wheat, *The Story of the American Legion* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1919), Rumer, *American Legion: Official History*, Moley, *American Legion Story*, Victor Lasky, comp., *The American Legion Reader: Fiction, Articles, Humor, Cartoons from The American Legion Magazine* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1953), and Justin Gray, *The Inside Story of the Legion* (New York: Boni and Gaer, 1948).

Also of crucial importance is the special collections at the George Meany Memorial AFL-CIO Archive at the University of Maryland. Here one can sift through a vast array of documents ranging from personal correspondence, official statements, and speech transcripts to news clippings and more. Particularly helpful are letters written by (and to) Samuel Gompers and William Green. So, too, are transcripts and programs saved from events held by the American Federation of Labor, many of which contained names of important Legionnaires. This documentary evidence will factor prominently in this project.

Finally, a few words ought to be said about the theoretical underpinnings of this project. Though an attempt will be made to avoid over-theorizing, there are a few important ideas that have guided how certain aspects of this research are understood. First, this paper will follow Alec Campbell's use of Adam Przeworski's concept of "battle over class."[9] This idea posits that before a battle between classes can emerge within a given society, there must first be waged a battle over the validity of class as an organizational construct. It follows that if certain groups are able to delegitimize the very existence of class consciousness, then they have, even if unwittingly, scored a major victory in the overall class struggle by preventing a battle between classes from emerging in the first place. Thus, when the Legion and the AFL rejected "class conflict" and proposed Americanism, a Square Deal, or class cooperation as an alternative, it is understood here not as an avoidance or transcendence of class, but as a real position on class conflict that had real consequences, namely to legitimize and concretize existing

[9] Alec Campbell, "The Sociopolitical Origins of the American Legion," *Theory and Society* 39, no. 1 (2010), 1-24.

capitalist relations of production. This is an important part of the contribution to conservatism made by both organizations.

When speaking of ideology, one cannot simply refer to ideas and worldviews. Instead, this paper follows thinkers such as Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, and Jan Rehmann who sought to develop a materialist ideology-theory. They argued against idealist conceptions of ideology and in favor of materialist ones. This means that ideology cannot be understood apart from the material apparatuses that give them shape. Althusser's conception of Ideological State Apparatuses is particularly useful. He saw in institutions like schools, churches, the media, political parties, unions, and even families the function of constituting ideological subjects. He called these "Ideological State Apparatuses" (as distinct from "Repressive State Apparatuses," such as the police or military, which function primarily by force and only secondarily by ideology.)[10] This paper will think of the AFL and American Legion in such terms, as apparatuses that, wittingly or not, created a bulwark for existing relations and helped constitute the conservative subject of the 1920s and beyond.[11]

The main arguments of this paper can be summarized as follows: as ideological apparatuses, the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor found sufficient common ground to cooperate on various projects which carried the Red Scare of 1919-1920 well into the decade. In so doing, they represented a conservatism for the 1920s

[10] Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008) and Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014).
[11] It is important to note that in this usage of Althusser's "Ideological State Apparatus" one should not read an uncritical acceptance of the entirety of Althusser's work. Indeed, there is much that is problematic in Althusserian philosophy, from ahistorical abstraction to functionalism and an overuse of determinism. For interesting commentary on Althusser, and on the historiography of ideology-theory see Jan Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2014).

rooted in the Progressive Era and the experiences of World War I. By putting forward a Square Deal Americanism, both organizations contributed to imbuing the term "Americanism" with a strong class dimension to complement the racial, ethnic, and gendered components already implicit within it. Their Square Deal Americanism contained a potent rejection of class consciousness and any political project built around it and proffered an alternative based on nationalism, institutionalized "class cooperation," and a very classed, raced, and gendered vision of civic responsibility. Their cocktail of anticommunism, nationalism, and corporatism found itself on similar ideological terrain as the then-emerging Fascists. Exploring such relationships can help further enrich historians' understanding of 1920s American conservatism. It can complicate how the 1920s "return to normalcy" is understood, since, at least for organizations like the Legion and the AFL, the goal was to continue and expand wartime service and to employ the social engineering of the Progressive days as a weapon against those who would seek to fundamentally change American society. In a way, both Socialism and Square Deal Americanism sought a classless America, one through a revolutionary restructuring of society, the other through the complete subsuming of class into nationalism. It is this ideological contribution that this project aims to explore.

Chapter 2

The American Legion, The AFL, and Red Scare America

A vast scholarship exists on the post-World War I Red Scare in the United States. Debates abound over the exact nature of this intense period of government surveillance and repression of "reds" and immigrants, the two terms often conflated by those targeting them. Scholars have considered the role of the state, press, and vigilante organizations during these turbulent days. Among the multitude of narratives about the Red Scare, most present a specific end point, some as early as 1920 but most ending sometime before 1923. The Red Scare is seen as a final act in the drama of WWI in America, a brief but excessive case of hysteria before the return to "normalcy" in the 1920s. Scholars have given less attention to the ways various organizations carried the Red Scare well into the 1920s, long after the official repression ended. Furthermore, the impact of the Red Scare upon the development of conservatism in the U.S., particularly after the first few years of the 1920s, remains understudied. In many ways, 1919 was a turning point, not an ending.

Two organizations whose histories intersected with the Red Scare in interesting and important ways are the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the American Legion. The former, a decades old federation of craft unions dedicated to the advancement of skilled labor in America through an organization strong enough to negotiate with employers as equals, and the latter, a fraternal organization of veterans forged amidst the fires of the Red Scare itself, both had roles to play in the drama. Though neither group was in the halls of power directly assisting Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer or Bureau of Investigation chief J. Edgar Hoover in their purge of the "red menace," they nonetheless contributed, through their actions and publications, to the general anticommunism of the era. Most importantly, when the official anti-radical

program was over, each group saw itself as maintaining vigilant guard against the Communist threat long after the federal government had halted deportations and freed political prisoners and long after most newspapers moved on to other matters. Despite being quite different organizations and occupying very different spaces, the AFL and the American Legion would, after a brief period of mutual distrust, find themselves moving closer to one another and cooperating on many issues during the 1920s, with warring against the radical left ranking high on the list.

This chapter will focus on the history of the American Federation of Labor regarding its relationship with the socialist left.[1] It will also describe the founding and early years of the American Legion. This chapter will place this history within the context of the 1919-1920 Red Scare and describe how each organization behaved during this episode in American history. Finally, it will demonstrate that anticommunism was a primary driving factor in both organizations at this time and that the events of 1919-1920,

[1] The American Legion and the American Federation of Labor regularly spoke out against Socialists, Communists, Bolsheviks, and to a lesser extent Anarchists. Other times they chose more general terms such as "red" or "radical." It is important to note that these terms, all broadly on the left-wing of the political spectrum, had very related meanings but were not exactly the same. All of the terms describe an individual or a collective committed to ending capitalism in favor of one sort of post-capitalist collectivist system or another. While Communists tended to advocate an international working-class revolution to overthrow capitalism by crushing the capitalist state and seizing the means of production for the working class. Socialists were generally considered to be less revolutionary, preferring to capture the capitalist state through parliamentary means and to gradually orchestrate the workers' assumption of control over the economic machinery of the nation. The term "Bolshevik" referred specifically to the Communist revolutionary party that seized power in Russia in 1917. Anarchism preached a more anti-statist and communitarian approach to post-capitalism. Within each of these groups existed multiple tendencies and disagreements. There was also significant overlap among these different ideologies. Samuel Gompers and the men of the AFL occasionally recognized the difference between Socialists and Communists, having slightly more sympathy for the former than the latter, but nonetheless saw them both as enemies of the bona fide trade union movement. The American Legion made no practical distinction between Socialists, Communists, Bolsheviks, and Anarchists. All fell under the metonyms "red" and "radical," which were also intertwined with fears of immigrants, the struggle for black and women's rights, and an internationalism that they feared would undermine the strength of the nation. Throughout this thesis, Socialism, Communism, Bolshevism, radicalism, etc. will be used interchangeably, as this was how they were understood by the people under consideration here.

globally as well as nationally, were carefully monitored and considered by each group, thus contributing to their general approach to battling the left.

American Federation of Labor

The American Federation of Labor was formed in 1886, not long after the Haymarket Affair painted labor radicals and reformers alike with an anarchist brush in the minds of many Americans. The new labor federation stood in stark contrast to the National Labor Union, the Socialist Labor Party, and Terrence Powderly's Knights of Labor, all of which preceded it and were now on the decline. The post-Civil War years saw the growth of the National Labor Union and the Knights of Labor. These organizations sought to organize all laborers, even serving as early examples of multiracial organizing as well as the organization of women workers. Reacting against the emerging industrial capitalist order, they invested themselves in many of the reform movements of the day, from "greenback" monetary reform to the creation of consumer cooperatives and land reform.[2] They self-consciously saw themselves as representing the working class as a whole and as movements to fundamentally reshape society.

When the Dutch-born leader of a cigar makers union, Samuel Gompers, became the first president of the American Federation of Labor in 1886, a position he would hold until his death in 1924 (with the exception of one year), he had a much different type of organization in mind.[3] The AFL rejected the utopianism and radicalism of the National Labor Union and the Knights of Labor. Rather than represent the working class as a whole, the AFL would narrow its focus to securing "bread and butter" victories for the

[2] Philip Dray, *There is Power in a Union: The Epic Struggle of Labor in America* (New York: Anchor Books, 2011), 75-76, 122-124.
[3] See David Montgomery, *the Fall of the House of Labor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

skilled craft workers under its care. Unions would wrest higher wages and better working conditions from employers through negotiation rather than through labor action, which was to be avoided if possible. Considering it an inevitability, Gompers accepted the industrial capitalist system as it was and sought to make gains within the system. The AFL structured and managed itself much like a business. It made no effort to restructure society, rejected Socialism, and preferred craft- or wage- consciousness to class-consciousness.[4] Gompers believed that American workers were motivated not by the desire to own the means of production, or to fundamentally alter society, but rather by the desire for personal attainment that capitalism promised. In fact, Gompers declared that trade unionism, not Socialism, was the "historic and natural form of associated effort of the working people."[5] Through a strong organization that could check the avarice of greedy employers, American workers (which, for Gompers, often meant skilled, white, male, native-born or naturalized workers) could capture a piece of the American Dream for themselves.

Many scholars describe an early radicalism, Socialism, or even Marxism of early Gompers.[6] While it is certainly the case that Gompers used far more inflammatory language in his younger days, and his union and political education was influenced by a group of New York socialists, there is little evidence to suggest that Gompers ever endorsed a socialist, let alone Marxist, view of the world. In fact, the development of his

[4] Dray, *There is Power in a Union*, 161-166.
[5] Samuel Gompers, "Against Socialism" in Gerald Emanuel Stearn, ed., *Gompers, Great Lives Observed (*Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971, 49.
[6] A great example of this can be found in the collection of Gompers's writings edited by Gerald Emanuel Stearn. See *Gompers*, 22-28. Another example can be seen in Harold Livesay's book on Gompers in which he described the "theories of class conflict" that Gompers "embraced in his militant youth." See Harold C. Livesay, *Samuel Gompers and Organized Labor in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1978), 152.

union philosophy was always rooted in a rejection of Socialism. In his autobiography, Gompers describes how his mentor, Swedish-born Karl Laurrell, who translated and interpreted a copy of the *Communist Manifesto* for him, cautioned Gompers to "'go to their [Socialists] meetings by all means, listen to what they have to say and understand them, but do not join the Party.'"[7] He never did. Later, he would publicly state:

> I want to tell you, Socialists, that I have studied your philosophy; read your works upon economics, and not the meanest of them; studied your standard works, both in English and in German – have not only read, but studied them. I have heard your orators and watched the work of your movement in the world over. I have kept close watch upon your doctrines for thirty years; have been closely associated with many of you, and know how you think and what you propose. I know, too, what you have up your sleeve. And I want to say that I am entirely at variance with your philosophy. I declare to you, I am not only at variance with your doctrines, but with your philosophy. Economically you are unsound; socially, you are wrong; industrially, you are an impossibility.[8]

Gerald Emauel Stearn, who edited a collection of Gompers's writings, used an 1893 pamphlet titled *What Does Labor Want?* as evidence of the "remnants of his earlier Marxism." The pamphlet did include inciting passages, such as Gompers describing capitalists as a "class of parasites" which "devours incomes derived from many sources, from the stunted babies employed in the mills, mines and factories to the lessees of the

[7] Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor: An Autobiography* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1984), 26-27.
[8] Samuel Gompers, *Labor and the Common Welfare*, comp. Hayes Robbins (New York: Arno, 1969), 175-179.

gambling halls and the profits of fashionable brothels; from the land which the labor of others had made valuable; from the royalties on coal and other miners beneath the surface and from rent of houses above the surface."[9] While this might appear to be the type of rhetoric lifted from the works of a Marxist, Gompers added: "The separation between the capitalistic class and the laboring mass is not so much a difference in industrial rank as it is a difference in social status, placing the laborers in a position involving the degradation of mind and body."[10] Thus, the problem rested not with any injustices inherent to capitalist production itself, but rather in the injustices of the results of capitalist distribution. If the socialists were right in their description of some of the horrors of capitalism, they were wrong to propose that revolution was needed to overcome them.[11] Such horrors could be remedied without upending capitalism itself, and the AFL could be a vehicle for this endeavor. There is nothing inherently Marxist about this position, even though the language might seem as if it were. Even so, Gompers significantly toned down this type of language in his later years.

Throughout his career, Gompers regularly had to stave off threats from the left.[12] Not everyone involved in the labor movement agreed with Gompers's bread-and-butter business unionism. From its inception, the AFL clashed with some of the remnants of the Knights of Labor and the National Labor Union. There were many who called for an embrace of industrial unionism and for an end to the AFL's abstention from party politics

[9] Samuel Gompers, "What Does Labor Want?" in *Gompers,* 27-28.
[10] Ibid.
[11] In "Against Socialism" Gompers says of the Socialists: "their states as to economic ills are right: their conclusions and their philosophy are all askew." See Gompers, "Against Socialism" in *Gompers,* 50.
[12] As early as 1883, Gompers testified before the U.S. Senate that trade unionists had been at the forefront of holding "in check the more radical elements in society." See Gompers, *Labor and the Common Welfare,* 175.

by forming a separate labor party.[13] "The attempt to force trade unions into what has been termed industrial organization" Gompers wrote in 1919, "is perversive of the history of the labor movement."[14] Those who called for such organizational forms often looked to general strikes and sympathy strikes as positive and constructive. Gompers, who was generally suspicious of strikes and only utilized them sparingly, felt that such notions "should be discarded."[15]

As far as many of the conservative leaders of the AFL were concerned, no groups were more "perversive" than those who called for a complete revolution in the name of the working class. Gompers was almost always at odds with socialists of various stripes. At the turn of the century, followers of Daniel DeLeon of the Socialist Labor Party and "Wobblies" from the Industrial Workers of the World offered competing visions of industrial, class-conscious unionism. That the workers of the world should be organized into "One Big Union" that would overthrow capitalism in a general strike, as the I.W.W. envisioned, was anathema to the national, parochial, and craft-based unionism that Gompers advocated. The AFL leadership regularly worked to defeat socialist resolutions and socialist-supported candidates challenging Gompers at their conventions.[16] When the Socialist Party formed in 1901 and Eugene Debs's popularity grew, his vision of a "Cooperative Commonwealth" and his insistence that the proper role of unionism was as

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[13] Philip Foner's ten volume *History of the Labor Movement in the United States,* written by a historian with leftist sympathies, contains numerous examples of such dissention. For example, see Philip S. Foner, *Postwar Struggles, 1918-1920*, vol. 8, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1988); Philip S. Foner, *The T.U.E.L. to the End of the Gompers Era*, vol. 9, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1991); and Philip S. Foner, *The T.U.E.L., 1925-1929*, vol. 10, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1994).

[14] "Craft vs. Industrial Unionism" in *Gompers,* 29-30.

[15] Ibid.

[16] The history of AFL conventions and the socialist challenges to the leadership is meticulously detailed in Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*.

a vehicle for the working class to bring it about sat in stark juxtaposition to Gompers's craft-based unionism.

After the Russian Revolution and the formation of the Communist International in 1919, the fear of Communism increased exponentially. Gompers was keenly aware of the attempts by leftists to infiltrate and take over leadership and direction of the AFL. When Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin criticized "'Left' Communists" who refused to work inside of "reactionary" trade unions and called for Communists the world over to work within trade unions in order to win them over to Communist control, Gompers's fears were confirmed.[17] At the end of his life, Gompers's primary nemesis was the American Communist William Z. Foster and his Trade Union Education League, established in order to engage in "burrowing from within" the trade union establishment.[18] Gompers wrote that he was convinced that Foster's work in the AFL was for "no other reason than to gain some foothold by which he could undermine and destroy the bona fide labor movement of America and to try to reconstruct it upon the Soviet revolutionary basis."[19] A dramatic scene played out at the 1923 AFL convention when a vote of 27,838 to 130 led to the expulsion of William Dunne, a known Communist and ally of Foster's.[20] Throughout Gompers's autobiography, his references to Communism and the union

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[17] Vladimir Lenin, "'Left-Wing' Communism – an Infantile Disorder" in *Party Work in the Masses* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 90-99. Lenin calls for action against the "labor aristocracy" and calls Gompers out by name.

[18] "Reds Are Active in American Propaganda," *Wall Street Journal* (December 9, 1922), 5. This article reported that a surging Communist Workers' Party, having taken advantage of a schism within the Socialist Party to swell their own ranks, "have invaded the American Federation of Labor, are inculcating their principles among the negroes and even have emissaries in the army and navy."

[19] Gompers, *Seventy Years*, 212-213.

[20] "A.F. of L. Announces and Denounces," *Wall Street Journal* (November 5, 1923), 11. It is interesting that, in this very same article, the AFL is reported to have included the American Legion in a list of organizations it was criticizing for trying to influence public schools for the sake of their "special interests." This is a rare example of dissention between the two organizations. This likely stems from the AFL's wariness to cede too much authority to the state, particularly when there was risk that government policy could be swayed against labor.

movement were consistently set against the "bona fide" trade union movement represented by the AFL. From the start, Communism was not a competing tendency within the labor movement but an illegitimate infestation to be rooted out. This idea, that radicalism represented an existential threat from within, was shared by another organization, different in form but sharing many of the AFL's values, that had entered American history in 1919.

The American Legion

The American Legion's origins began with what has been called the "Roosevelt Dinner." This informal meeting brought together a number of influential military officers to discuss the issue of morale as the First World War came to a close. Included were Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., son of the former president, military leader, and public figure in his own right, Colonel William J. Donovan, Lieutenant Colonel George S. White, Major Eric Fisher Wood, Ogden Mills, Bennet "Champ" Clark, and a millionaire textile manufacture from Philadelphia named Franklin D'Olier.[21] D'Olier, a Progressive Republican of the "Bull Moose" variety, would become the first elected National Commander of the American Legion.[22] Most of these men had a common history in the Plattsburg Citizens Training Camp movement and preparedness campaigns prior to serving in World War I. Thus, the relationship between masculinity, citizenship and service was deeply engrained among these all-male citizen-soldiers.[23]

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[21] Terry George Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment: The Policies and Ideology of the American Legion in the Interwar Period" (PhD diss., Rutgers the State University of New Jersey, 1993), 14-16; William Pencak, *For God and Country: The American Legion, 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 48-77; Thomas A. Rumer, *The American Legion: An Official History, 1919-1989* (New York: M. Evans, 1990), 36-37.

[22] Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment," 15-16. Radtke notes that the presence of D'Olier allowed the Legion to secure the necessary start up loans from business leaders.

[23] Ibid.,13.

The meeting was a precursor to a more formal gathering that would take place in Paris.[24] The Paris Caucus of what would come to be called the American Legion was held in France March 15-18, 1919. Though open to all American service men, the first caucus was dominated by officers, a fact that would thoroughly impact the direction of the organization in the following years. In Paris, delegates agreed upon some general principles, formed a general council, and planned to hold a conference stateside. Messages were sent to governors throughout the United States encouraging them to form Legion departments (state-level organizations) and posts (local-level organizations) and a publicity campaign was launched to drum up support for the upcoming caucus, which was to be held in St. Louis.[25]

The St. Louis Caucus opened on May 8. The Caucus functioned primarily as a planning session for a national convention, but the delegates nonetheless began discussing some of the main issues the Legion would address as an organization. It was, for all intents and purposes, the official start of the American Legion. Delegates established a preliminary preamble and constitution, adopted broad statements of principle, and made plans to establish posts in every county in the country. Most of the debate at the St. Louis Caucus was symbolic; the Legionnaires purposely avoided debating and voting on divisive issues such as the establishment of black posts, the League of Nations, and partisan politics.[26] Indeed, the national organization would take a

[24] The Roosevelt dinner and the call for a conference to discuss "morale" was a product of a call for such a gathering made by General Pershing. Pershing would later decline to be directly involved in the American Legion due to concerns that the Legion could be painted as merely a front for Pershing's political ambitions. See Pencak, *God and Country,* 50.
[25] Christopher Nehls, "'A Grand and Glorious Feeling:' The American Legion and American Nationalism between the World Wars" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2007), 68-70.
[26] Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling," 52-99; Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment," 15-20; Rumer, *Official History,* 38-56; Pencak, *God and Country,* 58-63.

laissez-faire approach to these issues, maintaining a "disinterested Americanism," in the words of Franklin D'Olier.[27] This general approach would have lasting consequences.

The St. Louis Caucus established the structure and ideology which would be officially ratified by the Minneapolis Convention in November. The organization was further strengthened when it received a congressional charter, a practice that was not common at the time. The Legion dedicated itself to fighting for veterans' issues, such as adjusted compensation and disability benefits. It also promoted "one hundred per cent Americanism" and established a specific National Americanism Commission for this exact purpose. They also committed themselves to punishing past, and combating future, "slackers," "aliens," Anarchists, Socialists, Communists, and radicals of all stripes. The members and leaders of this burgeoning organization felt it was their special mission, as citizen-soldiers, to defend the homeland against such threats. Understanding this zeal is even more important when one considers that the Legion organized itself in the midst of the Red Scare of 1919-1920. As historian William Pencak noted, "In a land gripped by the Red Scare, the Legion successfully appointed itself America's leading anti-Bolshevik organization."[28]

Bolshevism was a theme that ran through all of the above-mentioned meetings. The fear of Socialism, and the belief in the need to do something to combat it, was baked into the founding of the Legion. Some of the earliest Legion publications make this point clear. In an article titled "America's Army Must Fight On: The Legion's Battle Has Just Begun," National Commander D'Olier positioned the Legion as America's anti-Red

[27] Franklin D'Olier, "America's Army Must Fight On: The Legion's Battle Has Just Begin," *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 22 (November 28, 1919), 9.
[28] Pencak, *God and Country,* 62.

force. The work that the American military men started in Europe was to be continued at home. This martial language fit nicely into the intense Red Scare atmosphere of the time. D'Olier stated: "the battle is on and the Legion shall not relent until America is purged, hide and hair, of every member of the I. W. W. and Bolshevik breed."[29] In the *American Legion Weekly,* Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. wrote: "The strongest bulwark this country can have against lawless anarchy is this society composed of service men. The service man, having given up himself to the country, intends to see that this country which he loves comes to no harm."[30] Legionnaire Marquis James proclaimed in his *History of the American Legion* that, when the next national emergency arrived, the American Legion would be ready to serve again.[31] This stance led many supporters to describe the Legion as "the best insurance policy any country ever had."[32]

A Changing World

The world into which the Legion was born, and the one in which the AFL deepened its conservatism, was wrought with uncertainty in 1919. An unfathomably bloody war had come to an end, though the treaty that would shape the peace was still being negotiated. Empires which had existed for centuries disappeared. The world was forever changed. As President Wilson dreamed of a new international order based on his Fourteen Points, which included a League of Nations, the Russian Bolsheviks, who had successfully seized power and were now fighting a civil war, dreamed of an international

[29] D'Olier, "America's Army Must Fight On," 28.
[30] Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. "Why I Back the Legion," *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 6 (August 8, 1919), 14.
[31] Marquis James, *A History of the American Legion* (New York: William Green, 1923).
[32] Quoted in Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment," 21.

order based on the principles of Socialism.[33] As historian Margaret MacMillan wrote, "in 1919 it was possible to dream of great change – or have nightmares about the collapse of order."[34] For the leaders of the Versailles Conference, their imaginings were often a contradictory mixture of both: the simultaneous hope for the fulfillment of national ambition *and* a new international order all undergirded by the deepening fear of the spread of international Communism. One man's dreams were another's nightmares.

Many peoples around the world took Wilsonian rhetoric about self-determination seriously and pressed their own claims to nationhood to a mostly deaf audience of major leaders. Historian Erez Manela described how protest movements and nationalist movements in places such as Egypt, Korea, China, and India used Wilsonian rhetoric to plead for admission into the proposed world community of nations.[35] Anti-colonial rebellions shook the imperial hegemons meeting at Versailles. In Afghanistan, Syria, India, Turkey, Egypt, and Ireland, to name just a few, challenges to colonial power and calls for independence were issued in 1919. Such activity would lead to a bloody massacre at Amritsar in India and an Anglo-Afghan, as well as Anglo-Irish, war. The Silesian Uprising in Poland, the threat to empire posed by the growing pan-Islamic Khilafat movement as well as Islamic Marxism such as that which arose in Indonesia around this time startled the global powers. A presidential assassination in Portugal and a Greco-Turkish conflict added to the growing sense of upheaval. Even more moderate

[33] See Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919* (New York: Random House, 2001) and Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) .
[34] MacMillan, *1919,* 65.
[35] Manela, *Wilsonian Moment.*

social changes, such as the string of suffrage victories scored in the U.S. and many European nations added to the sense that the world was fundamentally changing.

A massive strike wave also swept across the globe. Thousands of workers turned out in cities in Argentina, Southeast Asia, throughout much of Europe, and in the United States and Canada. Much of this was inspired by the example of the Bolsheviks and was encouraged by the newly formed Communist International. In Germany, revolutionary movements established soviets in cities such as Bavaria and Bremen and a general strike in Ruhr region. The Communist Spartacist Uprising, though ending in defeat and with the murder of its leaders, startled many worldwide. Italy saw a socialist insurgence during its "Two Red Years" following World War I, as did Hungary under the leadership of Bela Kun. Anarchists seized land in Spain, workers seized factories and even whole cities across Europe and North America, and it began to look like the worldwide revolution Communists the world over had hoped for might be on the horizon.

This did not come to pass, however. To explore the reasons why is beyond the scope of this paper. One cannot deny, however, the role played by another movement that was simultaneously developing, largely in response to the rise of the radical left: Fascism. 1919 saw the official formation of a Fascist party in Italy under the leadership of a socialist-turned-nationalist named Benito Mussolini as well as the growth of the German Workers Party, increasingly coming under the influence of a demagogic corporal named Adolf Hitler. With the assistance of liberal, even social democratic, governments, these Fascists were able to unleash intense violence upon socialists and radicals in many different localities.

Red Scare America

Many in America closely monitored these events. The extraordinary global situation fed into the sensationalism of the government and media when faced with similar challenges in 1919. The result was the Red Scare of 1919-1920. More than four million Americans engaged in strike activity in 1919. From a general strike in Seattle, a "soviet" in Portland, telephone and police strikes in Boston, nationwide strikes in the coal and steel industries, and streetcar worker strikes in Chicago, Denver, Kansas City, and Knoxville, to clothing and textile strikes in cities such as Lawrence and New York, the nation faced an unprecedented workers' insurgency.[36] Concurrently, the United States, already struggling with the rapid demobilization of its militarized economy, was facing several challenges which further stoked the anxieties of conservative Americans. For example, the long fight for women's suffrage culminated in the passage of the 19th Amendment by Congress in June of 1919. Conservative apprehensions about women's suffrage were deeply intertwined with fears of modernism, sexual liberty, and the effect this loosening of mores would have on the patriarchal family. Such concerns played a large role during the rise of conservatism in the 1920s.[37]

The deep-seated fear of foreigners and their supposed propensity to radicalism, so thoroughly heightened by the experience of World War I, was further exacerbated by the Russian Revolution, the formation of two American Communist parties (one of which

[36] For information on the various strikes and workers' movements that occurred during 1919 (and beyond), as well as their relationship to labor relations prior to, and during, World War I, see Philip S. Foner, *Postwar Struggles, 1918-1920*, vol. 8, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1988) and Dray, *There is Power*, 353-409.

[37] Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2007); this can also be seen reflected in the famous study *Middletown.* See Robert Staughton Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929).

was dominated by foreign language federations), and a string of bombings that targeted individuals and landmarks across America.[38] One such bomb hit Wall Street, while others targeted high profile individuals, including the home of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, who would become the architect of the Red Scare.[39] Fear of the "red" and the foreigner was also inextricably related to race. Following the Great Migration during World War I, racist violence was particularly pronounced in 1919 and took on new justifications in the name of anticommunism. The Red Summer of 1919 saw everything from the Chicago Race Riots to the Elaine Massacre.[40] Such activity would continue into the 1920s with numerous attacks on African American citizens, such as in Tulsa in 1921 and Rosewood, Florida in 1923, to name just two examples. As Robbie Lieberman points out, the nation's most intense red scares often occurred after wars when "higher expectations for black rights" emerged and red baiting could be utilized as a tool to undercut movements for racial equality.[41]

The American Legion and the American Federation of Labor both monitored the national and international situations very closely, which informed their ideology and decision making, as well as took an active role in them. Both organizations, in their own way, also carried the Red Scare mentality and anticommunist vigilance well into the

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[38] Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (New York: University of Minnesota Press, 1955); William Preston, Jr., *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* NNew York: Harper and Row, 1963); Stanley A. Coben, "A Study in Nativism: The American Red Scare of 1919-1920," *Political Science Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (1964); Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).

[39] Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in Its First Age of Terror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Stanley A. Coben, *A. Mitchell Palmer: Politician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).

[40] Barbara Foley, *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

[41] Robbie Lieberman, "The Long Black and Red Scare: Anti-Communism and the African-American Freedom Struggle," in *Little "Red Scares": Anti-communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946,* ed. by Robert Justin Goldstein (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2016), 261-288.

1920s. Most scholars focus on the "official" Red Scare, i.e. the activities of the Attorney General's Office, the Bureau of Investigation, and the office of the Secretary of Labor.[42] Scholars position men like A. Mitchell Palmer, J. Edgar Hoover, and Louis Post as the prime actors in this historical drama. From this perspective, the Red Scare was a brief period of frantic government response to threats, both real and inflated, of radical (which was synonymous with "foreign") subversion. Other scholars focus on the role played by the media in shaping and perpetuating the Red Scare.[43] Writing about the Red Scare from these angles results in a relatively short time frame. As a result, most of these narratives neatly conclude somewhere between 1920 and 1923. When scholars turn their attention to the social dimensions of the "unofficial" Red Scare, its racial, gendered, and ideological aspects as well as the activities of non-governmental and vigilante groups, however, the scope broadens.[44] This study of the Legion and the AFL falls into this latter category.

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[42] Larry Ceplair draws a distinction between "official" and "unofficial" anticommunism, with the former representing the government agencies involved in arresting, imprisoning, and deporting of radicals and the latter representing non-governmental groups (he names the AFL and the Legion specifically) who possessed the power to "inform, to publicize, to boycott, and to blacklist" in cooperating with the government. See Larry Ceplair, *Anti-communism in Twentieth-century America: A Critical History* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011), 2-40. For works that focus primarily on the government's role in the Red Scare, see Murray, *Red Scare*; Coben, "A Study in Nativism"; Coben, *A. Mitchell Palmer*; Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters*; Gage, *Wall Street*; Regin Schmidt, *Red Scare: FBI and the Origins of Anticommunism in the United States* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000); and Ernest Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, the Great War, and the Right to Dissent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Todd J. Pfannestiel, *Rethinking the Red Scare: The Lusk Committee and New York's Crusade Against Radicalism, 1919-1923* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2003).

[43] Matthew Pressman, "Black and White and Red All Over?: Reassessing Newspapers' Role in the Red Scare of 1919," *Journalism History* 39, no. 1 (2013): 29-39.

[44] Norman Hapgood, ed., *Professional Patriots*, comp. Sidney Howard and John Hearley (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927); Joel Kovel, *Red Hunting in the Promised Land: Anticommunism and the Making of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Andrew Edward Neather, "Popular Republicanism, Americanism, and the Roots of Anti-Communism, 1890-1925" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1994); Foley, *Spectres of 1919*; Cappozola, *Uncle Sam Wants You*; Ernest Freeberg, "After the Red Scare: Civil Liberties in the Era of Harding and Coolidge," in *Little "Red Scares": Anti-communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*, by Robert Justin Goldstein (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2016), 1-21; . M.J. Heale, "Citizens versus Outsiders: Anti-Communism at State and Local Levels, 1921-1946," in *Little "Red Scares": Anti-communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*,

The American Legion, the Red Scare, and Beyond

Though today remembered primarily as a service organization dedicated to advocating for veterans, a mission it has maintained since its founding, it is less understood how the Legion, from its very first breaths, was dedicated to existing as a martial force of anticommunism. Thus, it secured for itself a special place in the Red Scare days of 1919 and beyond. At the first convention of the American Legion in November 1919, delegates passed a resolution praising the actions of Legionnaires in Centralia, Washington where violence erupted between members of the I.W.W. and the Legion post during an Armistice parade. Reports vary as to what actually occurred at Centralia, it is unclear whether the Wobblies attacked a peaceful parade or whether they fired in self-defense as the Legion parade aggressively approached their union hall. The ransacking of the headquarters of radical groups was becoming a common Legion activity across the country, a fact of which the Wobblies were well aware. Either way, the day ended with the deaths of four Legionnaires and the extrajudicial lynching of Wesley Everest, a member of the I.W.W. and himself a veteran, after a mob of Legionnaires cut power to the city, stormed the local jail, grabbed him, and carried him to a nearby bridge where they performed the deed. The national convention defended this action as a "typical illustration of 100% Americanism."[45]

The December 12, 1919 edition of the *American Legion Weekly* featured an article titled "Centralia: The Inevitable Clash Between Americanism and Anti-

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by Robert Justin Goldstein (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2016), 45-69; Markku Ruotsila, "Leftward Ramparts: Labor and Anticommunism between the World Wars," in *Little "Red Scares": Anti-communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*, by Robert Justin Goldstein (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2016), 165-193; and Erica J. Ryan, *Red War on the Family: Sex, Gender, and Americanism in the First Red Scare* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016).

[45] *Committee Reports and Resolutions adopted, at the First National Convention of The American Legion* (November, 1919). American Legion Digital Archive.

Americanism." Reminiscent of Paul Revere's *Boston Massacre,* the article described an innocent band of unarmed servicemen fired upon, without provocation, by malicious men. The article even contained drawings that showed crowds of clean-cut men in uniform falling under a hail of gunfire from unkempt, grimacing men with rifles firing downward (cowardly, from a position of ambush). The piece repeatedly stated that the Legion men acted lawfully and "in the manner the nation has come to expect from the men of the American Legion."[46] Interestingly, the article drew a distinction between the I.W.W. and organized labor. It stated that the I.W.W.'s attempts to associate its cause with the cause of labor in general ought to be resisted. It is a very early example of an important distinction that would open the Legion to cooperation with the AFL. The next edition of the weekly contained a small reference to Bert Bland, the supposed leader of the Centralia I.W.W., being behind bars and "guarded by eight members of the American Legion."[47]

[46] Jerrold Owen, "Centralia: The Inevitable Clash Between Americanism and Anti-Americanism" *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 24 (December 12, 1919) 7-9; 30-32. Interestingly, this article draws a distinction between the I.W.W. and organized labor. It states that the I.W.W.'s attempts to associate its cause with the cause of labor in general ought to be resisted. It is a very early example of an important distinction that would open the Legion to cooperation with the AFL.
[47] *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 25 (December 19, 1919), 24.

Figure 1. Centralia Parade. From Jerrold Owen, "Centralia: The Inevitable Clash Between Americanism and Anti-Americanism," *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 24 (December 12, 1919), 8-9.

This reference points to a few important details regarding how the Legion saw itself during these early days. Despite engaging in what can only be called vigilante violence, the Legion saw itself as the defender of "law and order" and repeated this claim time and again. In city after city the Legion took the law into its own hands, all the while proclaiming the fundamental legality of its actions. In this, the Legion secured for itself a place in the history of vigilantism in American history. Many so-called patriotic organizations have felt justified in taking the law into their own hands, in the name of the law, when the threats to the nation were seen as too grave to ignore or where confidence in the ability of traditional law enforcement was low.[48] The Legion saw as a crucial part

[48] For an excellent resource on the history of such organizations during and after the First World War, see Cappozola, *Uncle Sam Wants You.* See also Norman Hapgood, ed., *Professional Patriots,* comp. Sidney Howard and John Hearley (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927); Heale, "Citizens Versus Outsiders"; and, for veterans specifically, Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of*

of its one hundred percent Americanism its role in working with law enforcement, to be their eyes, ears, and, at times, enforcers. Legionnaires in posts around the country engaged in strikebreaking activities, violently broke up parades and meetings of radical and foreign groups, and ransacked offices, confiscating material to turn over to authorities. This behavior was far more prevalent during the official Red Scare days of 1919-1920. By the mid-1920s, however, the Legion more often vigilantly surveilled suspected radicals and radical organizations and relayed that information back to local law enforcement. They also used the weight of the prestige of their organization, as well as the many Legionnaires who were to be found in elected positions, to pressure officials to act in ways amenable to the Legion's goals.[49] They very consciously saw such activity, whether vigilantism or lobbying, as part of their mission, perceiving it as a struggle between good and evil, as veterans continuing their wartime service indefinitely during peacetime.

The Legion had reason to believe that it had official sanction to operate as it did during these years. It had been granted a charter, with little debate, by the United States Congress and received "official recognition and assistance" by the War Department, which went so far as to gift Legion posts with rifles for "ceremonial purposes." Historian William Pencak notes that "Legionnaires and their radical opponents realized that in the event on an insurrection these guns would have more than 'ceremonial' uses."[50] The Legion's cozy relationship with the government allowed them easily to cut through

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America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006). This is also argued in Christopher Nehls, "'Treason is Treason': The Iowa American Legion and the Meaning of Disloyalty after World War I," *The Annals of Iowa* 66, no. 2 (Spring 2007), 135-139.

[49] In 1920, there were 13 Legionnaires in Congress. By 1935, over a quarter of the House and a sixth of the Senate were composed of Legion men. See Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment," 46.

[50] Pencak, *God and Country*, 65.

bureaucratic red tape and saw them granted free office space in state capitols as well as a friendly ear in many a governor's office.[51] Despite having a Rooseveltian distrust of big monied interests, the Legion nevertheless was composed of influential and wealthy men and was able to secure loans of nearly $250,000, which proved to be quite controversial.[52] Though they claimed to be neutral on issues related to the conflict between labor and capital, they were dedicated to defending law and order against those who sought revolutionary change and these relationships would define what they considered orderly and lawful. In practice, that which challenged capitalism and the American political system was, by definition, subversive and incurred the wrath of the Legion.

[51] Ibid.

[52] The full details of the controversies surrounding these loans are beyond the scope of this project. However, a brief discussion here is worthwhile. From the start, the Legion proclaimed itself to be a grassroots organization representing a cross-section of the American populace. Critics, mostly from the left, contested this view. They pointed to the rather elite standing of its leadership, the disproportionate representation of middle- and upper-class men of the officer classes driving the organization, and its rather close relationship with Wall Street and the state. Leftists accused the Legion of being a private army defending the interests of Big Business, being anti-labor strikebreaking thugs, and, later, fascists. They suggested that the $250,000 was startup capital for the Legion, paid for by the alliance of a militaristic state and capitalists for their own sake. For left-wing critiques such as this, see Henry Allen, "The American Legion: It was Organized to Preserve Capitalism," *Labor Action* 6, No. 48 (November 1942). Marxist Internet Archive; Henry Allen, "The American Legion: As Labor-Baiters They Are 100 Per-Centers," *Labor Action* 6, no. 49 (December 1942). Marxist Internet Archive; Berger, "American Legion." Marxist Internet Archive. A competing veteran's organization, one with a politically left-leaning orientation, named the Private Soldiers' and Sailors' Legion led by Marvin Gates Sperry, wrote a petition to Congress regarding the Legion. The petition included charges that the Legion was founded with "tainted money," that the activities of the organization were not done in the interest of servicemen but for the benefit of the "hidden group of men who furnished the secret funds for its organization," and that the Legion had "instigated and incited lawlessness in numerous instances" and "should not be permitted to hide their offenses behind a Federal charter." It accused the Legion of pressuring many community institutions, from schools to churches and newspapers, to refrain from taking any stances or actions that went against the "interest of the secret financial backers of the Legion." Furthermore, the petition stated that the Legion did not have the right to speak for "rank and file" veterans. Because of all of this, the petition requested that Congress form a committee to investigate the Legion with the hopes of revoking its charter. See "Petition: National Headquarters, Private Soldiers' and Sailors' Legion of the United States of America, Washington D.C., August 10, 1921, to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress Assembled" in Gellerman, *Legion as Educator*, 268-269.

The Legion engaged in many actions against what they deemed subversive elements. Early on, their antiradical activities could be quite violent and extralegal. Aside from shouting down speakers and ransacking the offices of radical organizations, the Legion was not above kidnapping and assault. This can be seen in the case of Ida Crouch-Hazlett, an organizer for the Socialist Party. Legionnaires harassed her nearly everywhere she went. In some places, she was seized and forced to kiss the flag, forcibly placed inside police cars by Legionnaires, and once, while in Georgia, set upon by Legionnaires dressed as Klansmen who kidnapped her and drove her out of town.[53]

A resolution originally put forward during the first national convention of the Legion, which called for every post to "tender and volunteer its services…to the constituted government authorities for use in any time of public crisis to preserve law and order," a resolution which Pencak remarked made the Legion the "American *Freikorps*," was eventually toned down a bit, but its basic meaning remained the same.[54] Legion posts took this to heart, engaging in just such activity around the nation. Legionnaires raided Communist Party offices in Columbus, Ohio, silenced speakers in Philadelphia and Springfield, Massachusetts, disrupted the rallies of Socialist Party politician Victor Berger in cities throughout the land, broke up a Young Socialists meeting in Bayonne, and assisted police in harassing the I.W.W. wherever it could.[55] Though the national

[53] The relationship between the Legion and Ida Crouch-Bartlett is detailed in Nehls, "Treason is Treason."
[54] Quoted in Pencak, *God and Country*, 73. The final resolutions read: "(1) WHEREAS, Anarchistic and un-American groups in the United States have. incited riots and disorder in many of our communities and have already wantonly murdered our comrades and fellow citizens (2) BE IT RESOLVED, That the American Legion fully recognizing its obligation to the community, State and Nation urges its members as individual citizens to promptly, fearlessly and effectively assist the constituted legal authorities in the maintenance of law and order." See *Committees and Resolutions of the First National Convention,* xxx.
[55] Pencack, *God and Country*, 155. On November 22, 1919, the Legion Post in Los Angeles went so far as to declare war on the I.W.W. See pg. 10.

organization had to publicly denounce extrajudicial violence, in practice no local was ever expelled or censured for vigilante activity.[56]

The Legion press was filled with incendiary articles about the red menace. Throughout the 1920s, the Legion published articles and studies about just how many radicals there were in the nation and what their aims were and asked what could be done about them. The answer, of course, came from the Legion itself. Legionnaires saw themselves as a bona fide good fighting the evil of Socialism.[57] In a famous cartoon in the first edition of the *American Legion Weekly*, a man sits reading a newspaper, his anxiety rising with each story about "the spreading of Bolshevism" and the "terrors of Russian Sovietism," on top of reports of "starving Europe" and the "high cost of living." His anguish is only assuaged when he reads about the American Legion and the "gr-r-rand and glour-r-rious feelin'" it invokes among the American people.[58]

Figure 2. Grand and Glorious Feelin'. From *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 1 (July 4, 1919), 11.

[56] Pencak, *God and Country*, 10.
[57] Rumer, *Official History*, 9-10.
[58] *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 1 (July 4, 1919), 11.

The second issue of the magazine, the cover of which depicted a gallant Legionnaire sneaking up on a disheveled, foreign-looking man holding a bomb in front of a building labeled "American Institutions," featured an article written by Ole Hanson, the mayor of Seattle who had become a folk hero for his role in beating back a general strike there. Hanson's article described the horrors of Bolshevism and the devastation it was wreaking on Europe as well as what it had in store for an insufficiently vigilant America, before firmly declaring that there was no middle ground in the fight against it. Only through martial vigilance and a cooperative, conciliatory attitude between capital and labor could such horrors be averted. For Hanson, only by "fair, square dealing between the employer and the worker, Bolshevism is destroyed."[59] Eventually, this attitude would come to characterize the ideology of the American Legion. But in its early days, the organization was less interested in a "fair, square deal" between capital and labor and more interested in preserving law and order against any perceived threat.

Figure 3. Enemy at the Gates. From *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 2 (July 11, 1919).

[59] Ole Hanson, "Bolshevism…." *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 2 (July 11, 1919), 13-14, 26.

Thus, protecting the homeland from "mob violence" and the "anarchistic and un-American groups" most often took the form of strikebreaking activities. During the Chicago and Denver streetcar strikes, the Legion volunteered to help police protect scabs brought in by a professional strikebreaking agency.[60] During the Boston Police Strike, Legionnaires joined Harvard students in patrolling the streets in the stead of the striking policemen.[61] They also protected strikebreakers during the national coal and steel strikes as well as during the NY Teamsters and Dockworker's strikes.[62] Though the Legion maintained that their goal was "law and order" rather than any particular stance on the open shop or unionism in general, and that their concern was with radicals, not ordinary union men, they nonetheless gained a reputation as a pro-business and anti-union organization. This cost the Legion 121,000, mostly working class and liberal, members between 1920 and 1922.[63] It also caused a great deal of suspicion between organized labor and the Legion that would need to be overcome in later years.

Despite the vigilante character of these events, the Legion was far more active as a lobbying, surveillance, and support organization during the Red Scare. At the local level, its main tactics involved a two-fold approach: deny radical speakers a public platform while simultaneously countering radical rhetoric and action with public pageantry, educational programs, and community service activities. The Legion established its National Americanism Commission for just this sort of work. It

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[60] Foner, *Postwar Struggles*, 105.
[61] Dray, *There is Power*, 377-379. In an attempt to prevent the police from associating with the AFL, the police commissioner Edwin Curtis ordered that the police were not allowed to join any outside organization with the exception of the American Legion. Calvin Coolidge, the governor of Massachusetts would be made an honorary Legionnaire for his role in opposing the strike. See *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 25 (December 19, 1919), 24.
[62] Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment," 318-321.
[63] Nehls, "Treason is Treason," 155-156.

maintained contacts with the armed services and the Justice Department as well as other like-minded patriotic organizations, the National Civic Federation, local Chambers of Commerce, and local law enforcement.[64] A number of letters exist between Legion posts and Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer wherein members sent information about local radicals (usually the I.W.W.) alongside pleas for the swift and brutal punishment of radical leaders, like William "Big Bill" Haywood. Palmer responded with expressions of gratitude and reassurance that his department would do all it could to act upon the information received.[65]

The Legion took it upon itself to surveil radical activity, infiltrate organizations, send to authorities a "Bi-weekly report on Radicalism" and used the threat of blackmail to pressure any localities that gave a platform to radical speakers.[66] The Legion did not recognize radical speech as free speech, and therefore was publicly supportive of anti-sedition legislation, against the pardoning of those arrested (such as Eugene Debs) during World War I under the provisions of the Espionage and Sedition Acts. It also supported the work of the Lusk and Overmann Committees as well as lobbied for the firing of radical teachers and a thorough "Americanization" of America's education system.[67] The Legion asserted itself quickly as a conservative anti-radical force in America.

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[64] Pencak, *God and Country*, 163-166.

[65] See, for but one example, A. Mitchell Palmer to Francis Stout, Adjutant of American Legion Post No. 36, Kellog, Idaho, December 3, 1919. Industrial Workers of the World cases and activities. Folder 002366-006-0705. Accessed via History Vault. For an example of a typical Legion letter, such as the one written to Palmer by the Gerald V. Carroll Post no. 161 in Passaic, NJ, which reads, in part, that the post does "pledge itself to support the United States Government without reservation, in the suppression of Bolshevism, I.W.W. movements and all forms of anarchistic organizations, and demand immediate deportations of all undesirable and traitorous persons". See Post Commander of Gernald V. Carroll Post No. 161 of the American Legion, Passaic, NJ to A. Mitchell Palmer, November 19, 1919. Folder 002367-002-0216 Communist Party of the U.S.A. casefile 202600: general. Accessed via History Vault.

[66] Pencak, *God and Country*, 163-166.

[67] Norman Hapgood, ed., *Professional Patriots*, comp. Sidney Howard and John Hearley (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927), 56-63; William Gellerman, *The American Legion as Educator* (New York: Bureau of Publications Teachers College, Columbia University, 1938), 106-128; Andrew Edward Neather,

The leaders of the Legion, though at times uncomfortable with some of the extralegal activities of certain posts, knew the importance of channeling returned veterans' energies towards these ends. National Commander D'Olier knew that in Russia it was soldiers who were decisive in the revolution and was determined to ensure American soldiers, who returned to a country struggling under the weight of its own economic and social unrest, would not follow suit. This is why he believed the Legion to be "psychologically correct" for returning servicemen.[68] A U.S. Army intelligence report warned that "the returned soldier…has at all times been element of unrest in the community" and, without "some agency or organization to look after him," could turn to crime or, worse, political radicalism.[69] At all times the Legion was keenly aware of how the American soldier, their idealized citizen, could be led astray.

Believing that Communism was a foreign import and knowing that America was not sheltered from developments overseas, the American Legion kept a close eye on events abroad, particularly in Russia. Barely an edition of the *American Legion Weekly* (and, later, *Monthly*) was published throughout the 1920s *without* an article, editorial, comment, or cartoon deriding the Communist experiment in Russia (and supporting the American troops stationed in Archangel after the Revolution). They also looked with anxiety upon the spread of socialist ideas beyond Russia. In an article titled "Bolshevism

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"Popular Republicanism, Americanism, and the Roots of Anti-Communism, 1890-1925" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1994), 506, 521,532, 537-538; Alec Campbell, "The Sociopolitical Origins of the American Legion," *Theory and Society* 39, no. 1 (2010); Ernest Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, the Great War, and the Right to Dissent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); George Lewis, "Radicalism, Counter-Radicalism and the American Legion, 1919-1940," *Radical Americas* 2, no. 1 (2017); Nehls, "Treason is Treason"; Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling"; Radtke, "Politics of Commitment." The Legion even opened their own investigation into the Assistant Secretary of Labor Louis Post who was seen as "soft" on radicals. See Pancak, *God and Country*, 107.

[68] Quoted in Radtke, "Politics of Commitment," 20-21.

[69] Ibid.

– Enemy of Americanism," frequent contributor John Spargo wrote of the "bad and intolerable" principles of leaders like Lenin and Bela Kun, who had taken power in Hungary.[70] Workers' uprisings in Germany, specifically the Spartacist Uprising, and the support, financial and otherwise, it received from American socialist groups was also deeply concerning.[71] The connection between radical ideas and foreign persons was continually reinforced; the Legion, like other organizations of the day, used the terms "radical" and "foreigner" nearly synonymously. It was very common for Legion publications to denounce "red-hyphenates."[72] This led the Legion to join with other organizations to demand immigration restriction as well as the deportation of immigrants who advocated radical change. The revolutionary potential of strike movements in places like France and Italy increased the sense of urgency and mission felt by Legionnaires during the turmoil of the years 1919-1920.[73] Thus, the deliberate fostering of an organization committed to defending the American status quo against these international movements was of monumental importance to the history of the U.S. in the 1920s. The Legion was not alone in this work; it had an important ally in the bastion of craft-unionism, which was waging its own fight against left-wing challengers.

The AFL, the Red Scare, and Beyond

By 1919, the American Federation of Labor had long been concerned with international affairs and the fostering of loyalty at home. When the war ended, the AFL merely shifted its focus away from "German sympathizers" and on to socialists. As a

[70] John Spargo, "Bolshevism-Enemy of Americanism," *American Legion Weekly* 1. No. 23 (December 5, 1919), 7-9, 31.
[71] "America's Youth and the Reds," *American Legion Weekly* 4, no. 33 (August 18, 1922), 25.
[72] Pencak, *God and Country*, 113.
[73] Raymond Moley, *The American Legion Story* (New York: Meredith Publishing Company, 1966), 47.

founding force in the American Alliance for Labor and Democracy (AALD) and a member of the War Labor Board during the war, the AFL institutionalized its position vis-à-vis the government of the United States.[74] It was during the war that the AFL's position as anticommunist bulwark and as representatives of the responsible and loyal workingmen, as well as Gompers's political support for Wilson, earned the union a seat at the table. AFL leadership worked directly with the U.S. government for the purposes of instilling loyalty among American workers, driving out any "disloyal" elements or German sympathizers, and holding fast to a no strike pledge during wartime.[75]

Gompers maintained a close correspondence with Wilson, who often solicited Gompers's advice on labor matters.[76] In a 1917 letter, Wilson praised the work of the AALD, effectively equating its work with the aims of his own international policies, the justness of which he believed was evident to all "true Americans." He stressed to Gompers: "we must oppose at home the organized and individual efforts of those dangerous elements who hide disloyalty behind a screen of specious and evasive phrases."[77] The wartime work of the AFL was also praised by the military establishment.

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[74] Markku Ruotsila, "Leftward Ramparts: Labor and Anticommunism between the World Wars," in *Little "Red Scares": Anti-communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*, by Robert Justin Goldstein (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2016), 165-193.

[75] At this time, it was not taken for granted that labor unions were legitimate spokesmen for laborers. It was not until the 1930s that labor unions would receive legal sanction. Thus, at this time, groups like the AFL were still trying to stake their case as the bona fide voice of American labor. While opinions differed on how best to accomplish this task, men such as Gompers felt that proving the AFL was a loyal force of constraint was the best way to convince those in power to recognize, and cooperate with, their authority. In a 1917 AFL pamphlet titled *American Labor's Position in Peace or in War*, it was argued that the war was an "opportunity" for labor. Since millions of laboring men would serve either "militarily or industrially," the pamphlet argued that "the government must recognize the organized labor movement as the agency through which it must cooperate with wage-earners." See RG1-015, Box 4, Folder 11 in George H. Meany Memorial Archive, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.

[76] RG1-013, Box 1, AFL-CIO Records: Office of the President, Samuel Gompers and Woodrow Wilson Correspondence, 1914-1919, in George H. Meany Memorial Archive, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.

[77] Woodrow Wilson to Samuel Gompers, August 27, 1917, RG1-013, Box 1, Folder 4, Special Collections, University of Maryland.

The 1919 edition of the *American Federationist* contained a reproduction of a report written to the President by Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels hailing the "highly satisfactory" relationship between the AFL and the U.S. military and praising the "wise and patriotic councils" of the AFL who have "done much to keep such yard workmen as were members of labor organizations keenly alive to a sense of their duty as American Citizens."[78] In 1921, Gompers wrote to Secretary of War Newton Baker: "I shall always remember with deep gratification our association together in the work of the Council of National Defense and the Advisory Committee when we freely gave the best that was in us to the great allied cause – the cause of civilization and humanity."[79] The close relationship between the government and the AFL forged in service during wartime was essential in shaping how the AFL saw itself and its role during peacetime.

After the war, the AFL carried on its work in patriotic service to the nation. Jennifer Luff describes how the AFL was part of an "information loop" which included the General Intelligence Division of the Bureau of Investigation and the National Civic Federation (NCF), of which the AFL was a longtime member.[80] NCF members like Ralph Easley and renowned "radical hunter" Archibald Stevenson, who provided further links to non-governmental patriotic organization like the American Protective League, used their resources and connections with the Bureau of Intelligence (B.I.). to keep tabs on so-called radical activity within the trade union movement. Targets included everything from Communists and the T.U.E.L. to more innocuous activity such as calls for a labor party and/or amalgamation. Gompers relied on this network to surveil and

[78] Josephus Daniels, "Labor's Patriotic Part" in *American Federationist* 26 (1919), 51.
[79] Samuel Gompers to Newton Baker, February 4, 1921, RG98-003, Miscellaneous Items, Box 1, Special Collections, University of Maryland.
[80] Luff, *Commonsense Anticommunism,* 86-96.

suppress his enemies within the labor movement.[81] This is certainly consistent with Gompers's conception of himself and his organization as being on the "front lines" in the fight against radicalism. This sentiment would be stated best in 1925 when William Green, the AFL president who succeeded Gompers, spoke before the Army Industrial College. Vis-à-vis Communism, which he described as "labor's greatest enemy," Green stated that the AFL was "like an advance guard of an army" fighting in the "front trenches." Who, if not the AFL, which had been fighting threats from its left since its inception, had more experience facing down reds?[82]

Both the AFL and the American Legion played an important role during the Red Scare years (and beyond) in keeping pressure on Congress not to offer official recognition of the Soviet Union. Like the American Legion, the AFL's magazine, the *American Federationist,* is full of articles condemning Russian Socialism and warning Americans of the threat it posed to both the United States and the world (particularly Europe).[83] In an editorial called "American Labor is True to Democracy," Gompers wrote that "Bolshevism has created a cataclysm in Russia which seems almost beyond redemption" and "we hear rumbles of it in Great Britain's labor congresses,…it rose incessantly in the recent conference of the French socialists,…it broods over Austria and Italy like a whispered menace of the inevitable and has become a precipice which has

[81] Ibid.
[82] William Green, "Labor" Address Before Army Industrial College June 10, 1925, Washington D.C. RG01-015 Series 2, Box 2, Folder 11, Special Collections, University of Maryland.
[83] The AFL used its official publication to print many denunciations of the Soviet government. Much of it centered on the victimization of social democratic parties, like the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks, and trade unions. The *Federationist* printed letters it received from embattled social democrats in Russia and officially condemned the "prison regime" and its atrocities from "hunger torture" to executions. See "Labor Victims and Serfs of the Soviets" in *American Federationist* 28 (1921), 211-219. This edition also contains references to a new type of "slavery" in Russia as well as blames the Bolsheviks, not the Allied blockade, for suffering in Russia. See also, "An Amazing Portrayal of Russia as It Is" *American Federationist* 27 (1920), 1095-1102.

dimmed the hope for an early and orderly democratization and shows its head here and there in our own free America."[84] He went so far as to travel to an international labor conference in Bern with the primary aim of convincing the conference to officially denounce Bolshevism.[85]

Further indication that the AFL saw its work during the Red Scare as a continuation of its wartime work can be seen in the way officials spoke and wrote about Bolshevism. Writers in AFL publications made efforts to connect Bolshevism with German kaisarism, to suggest that the enemies of the American people during the war (i.e. German sympathizers) and the enemies now (Bolsheviks, foreign radicals, etc.) were really one and the same. William English Walling wrote of "Marxian Germanists" while the *Federation* published articles claiming Bolshevism was a "German product."[86] Even in his autobiography, written some years later, Gompers maintained that Lenin's Communist propaganda reinforced "German propaganda."[87]

As a labor union, the strike wave of 1919 put the AFL into a difficult position. The AFL was involved in a number of strikes but, in keeping with its historic ideological

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[84] "American Labor is True to Democracy," *American Federationist* 26 (1919), 318-320. The AFL remained optimistic, however. They maintained that U.S. institutions were strong enough to forestall bolshevism in America. They believed American workers were safely inoculated against Socialism. This belief stemmed, at least in part, from ethnic prejudice. In an article by William English Walling, it was argued that "educated" American workers were unlike the "uneducated" Hungarians and Italians and were, thus, less susceptible to Communism. Though some Legion writers would echo these sentiments – America isn't really in danger of falling under the Communist spell – they would do so later in the decade. Early on, the Legion took a much more urgent tone. For the Legion, the Communist threat was one of malice, while the AFL tended to see it born more of ignorance. Of course, the views of both organizations cannot be easily placed into the binary, as aspects of both appear in each organization, but, early on at least, their views generally trended this way. Nonetheless, both organizations were consciously aware of their role as a bulwark against Communism. America's safety was contingent upon its intellectual and martial vigilance. See William English Walling, "The American Federation of Labor and the Soviets" in *American Federationist* 26 (1919), 703-706.

[85] *American Federationist* 26 (1919), 227.

[86] Walling, "American Federation of Labor and the Soviets," 703; "That Thing Called Bolshevism" in *American Federationist* 26 (1919), 233-237. See also "More Truth About Sovietism," *American Federationist* 28 (1921), 140-142.

[87] Gompers, *Seventy Years*, 205.

stance, spoke out strongly against those that went beyond (or were perceived as going beyond) mere "bread and butter" issues of wages and working conditions. Thus, the Seattle General Strike, for example, received Gompers's scorn. While he did not deny workers the right to strike, he *did* condemn the Seattle Central Council for violating AFL rules by calling for a strike (only the Federation can do that) and for the radical bent of its leadership. He denied that the leaders of the strike spoke for labor.[88] The right to strike was reserved only for those who adhered to the "responsible" unionism of the AFL. Strikes that threatened social order, such as the Boston Police Strike, and those that hinted toward a radical transformation of society, such as in Seattle, would not receive the support of the AFL. The AFL preferred cooperation and arbitration to strike activity, in keeping with its fundamentally conservative ideology.

These antiradical activities continued well into the 1920s, long after the official Red Scare ended. It is telling that between 1924 and 1936, the AFL's Matthew Woll was a critic of J. Edgar Hoover for refusing to reestablish the GID and of the American Civil Liberties Union for letting concern for civil liberties interfere with the work of the FBI.[89] When Samuel Gompers died in 1924, he was replaced by William Green, who was even more conservative and vocally anticommunist than Gompers. Throughout the 1920s, the AFL battled what Gompers called the "Soviet Camouflage," the Third International's call for Communists to "bore within" existing unions.[90] Throughout the decade this took form in the ongoing struggle between the AFL and William Z. Foster's T.U.E.L.[91] As late as

[88] *American Federationist* 26 (1919), 242-244.
[89] Luff, *Commonsense Anticommunism*, 184.
[90] *American Federationist* 28 (1921), 276.
[91] This is detailed in two volumes of Foner's *History of the Labor Movement in the United States.* See Philip S. Foner, *The T.U.E.L. to the End of the Gompers Era*, vol. 9, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1991) and Philip S. Foner, *The T.U.E.L., 1925-1929*, vol. 10, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1994).

1926, Green was calling upon his contacts to gather information on a strike that was developing in Passaic, New Jersey, and to ascertain if there was any Communist influence.[92] When the answer proved to be a resounding yes, the AFL worked to undermine the leadership and organizers of the strike. Such behavior was common throughout the decade.

As for the Legion, they, too, maintained their anticommunist vigilance throughout the 1920s. In 1926, the *American Legion Monthly* (formerly the *American Legion Weekly*) ran a multi-part story called "How Red is America?" The author, Will Irwin, took as his starting point that radicalism was on the decline in the United States but nonetheless set out to write a series of well-researched and lengthy articles to inform, and warn, complacent Americans about the threat of its possible "rebirth and a wider growth."[93] Beginning with Marx, a "German Jew" who "had to a high degree the limitations of his race and nation," Irwin detailed the history and variety of "reds" while insisting that they were "branches of the same stem."[94] Conflating radicalisms while simultaneously using racial and gendered language, was a hallmark of the American Legion's anticommunism.

Irwin's later installments vividly described how Communists were actively trying to infiltrate American institutions, from labor unions like the AFL to the Non-Partisan League, and to take advantage of both laxity (Irwin wrote: "Laxity on the part of conservative labor unionism is the radical's opportunity") and racial divisions in the

[92] Henry F. Hilfers to William Green, January 19, 1927, RG98-003 Miscellaneous Items, Box 1, Folder 29, George H. Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.
[93] Will Irwin, "How Red is America?" *American Legion Monthly* 1, no. 4 (October 1926).
[94] Ibid, 15-16. Though anti-Semitism did not feature prominently in official Legion publications, it nonetheless did occasionally appear, as evidenced in the quote above.

United States to advance their cause.[95] The Red Scare mentality of painting even liberal organizations, such as pacifist groups, the Non-Partisan League, and the ACLU, as Communist sympathizers and seeing radical plots behind movements for justice, specifically those regarding race and gender, was alive and well by the end of the decade.[96] Though the threat in 1927 or 1928 of a socialist revolution was remote, and Legionnaires admitted as much, they nonetheless maintained that it was due to the vigilance of the organizations like the Legion (and the AFL) who never lost sight of the monster lurking around the corner.[97] In his concluding article, "the Socialists and the Future" Irwin also credited the high standard of living, brought about by the cooperation between "progressive manufacturers" who combine economic modernization (labor saving technology, Taylorism, etc.) with "liberal wages" and the American Federation of Labor, who "has bent to these conditions," for inoculating Americans from Socialism.[98]

Yet, as historian Christopher Nehls points out, it was not simply the acts of subversives that needed to be combated, but anything and everything that fostered an environment in which radicalism could grow.[99] This required constant vigilance. To this

[95] Will Irwin, "The Lively Communists" *American Legion Monthly* 1, no. 6 (December 1926), 22-25, 80-85.
[96] An interesting phenomena occurs throughout the history of Legion thought on radicalism. They seemed to argue that radicals were dangerous due to their shadowy nature and their unwillingness to press for change through "legitimate" American institutions. At the same time, however, they similarly criticized those who *did* operate in public for seeking to "bore from within" American institutions with the attempt to undermine them. In the event that red hunters in the Legion would find no evidence of Communism, rather than admitting that the Communist threat might be overly exaggerated, they concluded that it must have been due to a sly move on the part of the radicals aimed at discrediting the Legion. See Pencak, *God and Country*, 104 and Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment," 394.
[97] General Amos A. Fries famously compiled a "spider-web" chart explaining how to spot Bolshevik sympathies. It advanced the view that Communists were particularly active in working behind the scenes of organizations that were, on the surface, non-Communist. Amos's chart cast particular suspicion upon women's groups, thus furthering suspicion of women's political activities and bolstering traditional patriarchal ideas. See Pencack, *God and Country*, 9.
[98] Will Irwin, "Socialists and the Future" *American Legion Monthly* 2, no. 1 (January 1927), 83-87.
[99] Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling," 102-104.

end, the Legion kept their bi-weekly reports on radicalism alive and even published a pamphlet on radicalism in 1926.[100] Though their more direct, and physical, anti-radical activities declined, they continued to work closely with law enforcement throughout the decade to spy on radical activity. In their 1928 report to Congress, the Legion stated: "we observe from every side positive evidence that the activities of Communists and radicals in America are spreading," radicals who are "not now devoting their entire time to the ignorant immigrant but are working feverishly through the intelligent, wealthy women" engaged in "club work," and who, under the seemingly innocent guise of working toward the "abolition of war" and through schools and churches, are trying to weaken America and spread their radical message.[101] This, Legionnaires believed, could only be countered by what they called "active Americanism."[102]

It was in the fostering of "active Americanism" that both the American Legion and the AFL perpetuated the Red Scare into the 1920s. "Active Americanism" involved not just combating what both organizations were *against* but also promoting what they were *for*. The next chapter will explore the various ways the Legion and the AFL cooperated to foster an "active Americanism," as well as the basis for that cooperation. Subsequent chapters will explore the depths of their ideological Americanism.

[100] *American Legion Annual Report to Congress, 1926.* American Legion Digital Archive.
[101] *American Legion Annual Report to Congress, 1928.* American Legion Digital Archive.
[102] Ibid.

Chapter 3

The American Legion, The AFL, and Active Americanism

After Alvin Owsley of the American Legion spoke before the Denver convention of the American Federation of Labor in June of 1921, the AFL responded by sending its own delegate, George L. Berry, who held membership in both organizations, to the American Legion's Kansas City convention to return the favor. When Berry addressed the Legionnaire convention, he proclaimed:

> There is very little difference, fundamentally, in the purposes of these two great American organizations, and there is a basis upon which these two organizations at least legislatively can act in unison for the common good of the citizens of America. Fundamentally, the American Federation of Labor and the American Legion stand for the conservation of the constitution of the United States and the protection of the republic that we love equally well. The American Federation of Labor and the American Legion stand opposed to the introduction in the affairs of our country of a system of government that has been found to be a failure, a system of government in contravention to every ideal of Americanism and we are a unit not by word but by action in opposition to the introduction in the republic of the United States of Sovietism or Bolshevism.[1]

In the years following, the official publications of both organizations began to report on the correspondence between the Legion and the AFL. Each publication extended words

[1] *Summary of Proceedings Third National Convention of the American Legion, Kansas City, MO. October 31, November 1 and 2, 1921,* 12-13. American Legion Digital Archive.

of praise and invitation to the other while shining light on their shared common ground.[2] Indeed, leaders of both organizations often went to great pains to convince their respective membership, and the public, that the two organizations were on the same page. In the increasingly conservative environment of the 1920s, the two worked together to advance their vision of what it meant to be an American.

Scholarship

The AFL and the Legion formed an alliance during the 1920s that, on the surface, seemed rather unlikely. There were, however, a number of organizational and ideological similarities between the two groups, as well as many common goals that brought them together. This chapter will chronicle the development of this relationship, describe a multitude of activities undertaken as joint efforts, and offer some introductory suggestions for the ideological underpinnings of this relationship that will be more thoroughly borne out in the next chapter. What began as a rather contemptuous beginning, despite general agreement on many issues driving the Red Scare, blossomed into a fairly warm partnership by the end of the decade. From local concerns, such as public celebrations, community recreation, and school curricula, to major national issues concerning immigration, economics, and militarism, the Legion and the AFL worked closely with one another to foster not just a reactive anticommunism but an "active Americanism," presenting two different angles of American conservatism in the 1920s.

Though a few scholars have written about the relationship between the AFL and Legion, none place this partnership at the center of their analysis. If writers comment on

[2] For example, when advocating for the passage of a sales tax bill, the *American Federationist* remarked: "it is acceptable to the American Legion." Clearly, the opinion of the Legion began to hold weight within the AFL. See *American Federationist* 29 (1922), 294.

the nature of the relationship between the two institutions at all, they present it as a secondary factor in larger narratives on the history of the 1920s.[3] It has not been subject to in depth study. Nonetheless, some historians have given it limited consideration. In an article published in 1958, James O. Morris devoted a section to the "alliance" between the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor. For Morris, the desire on the part of the AFL to form such an alliance was part of a "grand defensive strategy," which involved the organization's desire to be "known and accepted as a loyal, patriotic, and American organization" in order to "remove barriers to union activity."[4] In other words, as a result of the general decline labor felt in the 1920s, the AFL leadership sought to forge alliances with "respectable" groups and rebrand itself in the hopes of stalling, or even reversing, the decline. This view, that the AFL made a rightward turn in the 1920s as a last-ditch effort to survive in a society that, in so many ways, seemed to reject the very basis of its existence, went mostly unchallenged by historians. Numerous scholars actively repeat, or tacitly assume, this line of reasoning.[5]

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[3] The official history of the American legion gives a passing mention, less than a paragraph, to the relationship between the two organizations. See, Thomas A. Rumer, *The American Legion: An Official History, 1919-1989* (New York: M. Evans, 1990), 131. This is typical of nearly all of the sources consulted here.

[4] James O. Morris, "The AFL in the 1920's: A Strategy of Defense," *ILR Review* 11, no. 4 (July 1958): 581-583.

[5] See Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker 1920-1933* (Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1960). See also, Harold C. Livesay and Oscar Handlin, *Samuel Gompers and Organized Labor in America* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1978); David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Philip Dray, *There Is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America* (New York: Anchor Books, 2011). Dray does not provide much information about labor relations in the 1920s, focusing far more on the Progressive Era and the 1930s. This in and of itself, is indicative of a particular way of seeing the 1920s as a period of little labor activity. Dray's narrative portrays a labor movement at the mercy of the onslaught of a rapidly changing American capitalism. Surveys of the period generally repeat this refrain as well. Both Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1991) and Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2007) highlight the essentially defensive posture and, thus, conservatizing of the labor movement, though Dawley does make passing reference to some extant labor militancy in the 1920s.

While it is certainly true that organized labor found itself in an existential crisis in the 1920s, one can go a bit deeper and dig a bit further for an understanding of the foundation of the relationship between the two institutions. A "defensive strategy" is not sufficient for an explanation. For one, while it might partially explain why an organization such as the AFL would want to align itself with the American Legion, it cannot explain why the Legion, who had something of an anti-labor reputation, would want to reciprocate. Furthermore, such explanations tend to flatten the labor movement and conflate the entire movement with the AFL. In fact, there *was* a tremendous amount of energy, movement, and militancy in the labor movement during the 1920s, but this largely came from the left, generally outside of the AFL.[6] It was precisely in the fact that the labor movement was contested territory that the AFL leadership, which sought to purge radical elements from its ranks, could find more in common with the leadership of an organization such as the American Legion than with revolutionary unionists. It is within these dynamics, and within the general atmosphere of the Red Scare, that one can find some common ground between the AFL and the Legion that points to something beyond opportunity and circumstance.

Was it, then, just a general anticommunism that bound them? For some scholars, this is the basis upon which the two organizations worked together. Rather than an alliance per se, a general "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" attitude brought the two groups into accord. Jennifer Luff places the two organizations together for the purposes of defeating Communism in the U.S. Largely through the intermediary National Civic Federation, Legionnaires and AFL officials worked toward common goals, specifically

[6] Indeed, there was enough activity during the 1920s for historian Philip Foner to fill three volumes of his *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* on the decade.

surveilling "reds" (even if the AFL and Legion might have been a bit at odds over the enforcement of the Espionage and Sedition Acts).[7] For Raymond Moley, it was their mutual support for the war that placed them in an agreeable position, earning the AFL a bit of respect from Legionnaires.[8] In Mai Ngai's *Impossible Subjects,* she chronicles the Legion and the union working for the sake of immigration restriction, evidencing a common nativism and xenophobia linking their organizations.[9] While there is certainly a great deal of truth to many of these arguments – both the American Legion and the AFL *did* share deeply-held anticommunist, xenophobic, and nationalist prejudices – each fails to take the next step by more thoroughly exploring not just what they were *against* but also what, if any, potential alternatives they proposed.

Additional suggestions for what formed the foundation of the Legion-Federation partnership can be gleaned from the work of William Pencak, who, writing in what remains the foremost scholarly history of the Legion, states the following:

> The Legion and the AFL had much in common. The old craft unions had originated as fraternal and social organizations and served the same function for workers as the Legion did for veterans in communities all over America. Composed of established ethnic groups – English, Irish, and Germans – the "aristocrats of labor" who controlled the AFL shared the ethnicity, nationalism,

[7] Jennifer Luff, *Commonsense Anticommunism: Labor and Civil Liberties between the World Wars* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014). See also Jennifer Luff, "Labor Anticommunism in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, 1920-1949," *Journal of Contemporary History* 53, no. 1 (2018) 109-133.
[8] Raymond Moley, *The American Legion Story* (New York: Meredith Publishing Company, 1966).
[9] Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). Historian Paul Buhle also stresses the links between the AFL and other Protestant nativist groups, as well as shared economic nationalism. See Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York: Monthly Review, 1999).

> and antiradicalism of the Legionnaires. Both organizations dedicated themselves to mutual helpfulness and offered companionship and support to members who felt vulnerable in the face of twentieth century capitalism. Both confronted an unsympathetic business community committed to the open shop and stingy in granting veterans' benefits; and both were challenged by equally distasteful "newer Americans" who sought more drastic changes than either the Legion or the AFL desired. The Legion and the AFL were organized in largely autonomous, self-governing units and could thus understand each other's problems with local recalcitrance. Furthermore, both rejected language and action based on class conflict.[10]

Here one can find similarities of structure, politics, ethnicity, and class, which can reasonably be added to the more circumstantial reasons listed above. The American Legion, despite numerous attempts at being a cross-class organization, maintained a disproportionately middle-class membership.[11] One might expect that the AFL, as a labor union, would demonstrate markedly different characteristics as a working-class institution. In many cases, this was true. The *American Federationist* dedicated more magazine space (and vitriolic language) to targeting employers than did the Legion in its magazine, for example. However, the specific nature of craft unionism, and the general

[10] William Pencak, *For God and Country: The American Legion: 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 215.
[11] See Pencak, *For God and Country;* William Gellerman, *The American Legion as Educator* (New York: Bureau of Publications Teachers College, Columbia University, 1938); and Alec Campbell, "The Sociopolitical Origins of the American Legion," *Theory and Society* 39, no. 1 (2010) 1-24.

manner in which the AFL sought to defend it, leads many scholars to remark on the middle-class orientation of the organization, especially in its leadership.[12]

On numerous issues, from immigration, education, war, civic responsibility, and economic relations to capitalism itself, the AFL was far closer in its ideas and its advocacy to middle-class groups like the Legion than it was to the more militant, at times revolutionary, labor left. The writings and speeches of Samuel Gompers and William Green, as well as the various exchanges between the Legion and the AFL, strongly bear this point out. Thus, the foundation for the relationship between both groups existed in important structural and ideological similarities. These similarities manifested through the common activities in which the two organizations engaged.

The Legion and the AFL: Structure and Membership

Though organized for very different purposes, both the Legion and the AFL had a similar federalism to their structure. Both organizations were decentralized, with local unions (or Legion posts) and state departments (or AFL state federations) retaining a fair amount of autonomy vis-à-vis the national leadership. State and local level organizations passed resolutions to be voted on at the national assembly, which itself was packed with delegates chosen at the state level. For the AFL, state federations and locals were most directly involved with labor disputes within their own jurisdictions. As long as they did not violate the overall principles of the labor federation set by Gompers and the national organization, such as in the Seattle General Strike of 1919, they could be relatively sure of national support.

[12] The argument that the AFL had a middle-class orientation is widely expressed and well documented. See, for example, Eugene T. Sweeney, "The A.F.L.'s Good Citizen, 1920-1940," *Labor History* (2001) 200-216; Craig Phelan, *William Green: Biography of a Labor Leader* (Albany, N.Y.: State Univ. of New York Press, 1989); Buhle, *Taking Care of Business;* and Livesay, *Samuel Gompers.*

Both organizations considered themselves democratic. The AFL claimed to speak for the working men (and some women) of the country, though this was, in practice, limited to skilled, mostly white, mostly male workers in craft trades who, especially if they were of immigrant origin, had cast aside any "old world" attachments to radical ideas. The Legion saw itself as representing a cross-section of the best of what America had to offer: an organization of citizen-soldiers that cut across class, religious, political, and, at least rhetorically, racial lines. By casting aside individual special interests in the service of a higher Americanism, the Legion saw itself as more than just a lobbying group for veteran interests, just as the AFL saw itself as representing more than just a narrow economistic trade unionism, and both presented themselves as a model for a renewed American citizenship going into the 1920s.

Yet such claims to democratic structuring and such broad representation begin to fall apart under scrutiny. As both Christopher Nehls and Terry Radkte argue, and as less impartial writers like William Gellerman also argue, the Legion's organizational structure was, in practice, fairly top-down.[13] State department heads were tasked with enforcing the resolutions adopted by the national organization. To the extent that local posts had autonomy, it was usually in the form of how enthusiastically they would implement national Legion policy. As long as excess did not create enough publicity to embarrass the organization, the National usually did little about it. Similarly, Gompers was strict

[13] Christopher Nehls, "'A Grand and Glorious Feeling:' The American Legion and American Nationalism between the World Wars" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2007), 8-10, 74-99; Terry George Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment: The Policies and Ideology of the American Legion in the Interwar Period" (PhD diss., Rutgers the State University of New Jersey, 1993), 25-26; Gellerman, *The American Legion as Educator*; Pencak, *God and Country*, 77-85. Where Nehls and Radtke take a more detached, scholarly approach to their study of the Legion, Gellerman's work was far more polemical. Gellerman displays his anti-Legion attitude throughout his book, portraying the Legion as a reactionary, quasi-Fascist, organization that had carved out for itself a disturbingly influential place in American life.

with his criteria for legitimate union activity and, through his growing publicity, powerful connections, and ability to control funding, circumscribed how much locals could do on their own. Despite claims to internal democracy, the two organizations remained fairly top-heavy.

This does not mean that the national organizations did not use this federal structure to their advantage at times, however. When questions arose that threatened to divide the national organization, such as the admittance of black Legion posts or the organization of women workers, both groups fell back upon the argument that the issues were up to the locals to handle, thus abdicating national responsibility for resolving such issues. Many southern Legion posts reacted vociferously to the idea of including African-American veterans, who made up more than half the veterans in some southern states.[14] Since the army was segregated and many African-Americans did not see combat, some Legionnaires argued, problematically, that they did not experience the same "spirit" that came from fighting that was at the core of the Legion's ideal citizen-soldier.[15] Some further argued that the experience of the war, and the travel to less racially stratified nations, would instill in African-Americans the desire to press for a better place in American society, which would amount to nothing short of radicalism.[16] This confirms Robbie Lieberman's argument that after the Red Scare any movement for the advancement of African-American life was painted with the brush of radicalism.[17] The National Organization similarly dodged the issue of condemning the Ku Klux Klan. By

[14] Pencak, *God and Country*, 68-69.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Robbie Lieberman, "The Long Black and Red Scare: Anti-Communism and the African-American Freedom Struggle," in *Little "Red Scares": Anti-communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*, by Robert Justin Goldstein (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2016).

1923, the Klan was a highly debated topic among Legionnaires. In 1921, the Americanism Commission refused to denounce the Klan, and Alvin Owsley similarly refused to do so in 1923.[18] When a resolution to officially denounce the Klan came before the National Convention, delegates voted it down in favor of a broader denunciation of any organization that "fostered class or racial strife" but did not mention the Klan by name.[19] With the question of African-American advancement posing a risk of dividing the organization or, worse, fomenting radicalism, the Legion opted to avoid the issue and pass it off to the states. This all but ensured that racial relations within the Legion would remain firmly within the status quo of the country.

The AFL faced similar dilemmas with the questions of organizing women and African-Americans. Here, the AFL avoided confronting such divisive questions by claiming that the national organization was not responsible for such issues, but rather that it was up to the individual unions within the federation to decide on female and black membership. Despite standing by the right of all workers, male and female, to organize into unions, the Executive Council determined that they only had the "authority to issue charters to women members of a trade only where such course would be authorized by the international organization having jurisdiction."[20] In practice, this meant, in the words of labor historian Philip Foner, the AFL would "use the slightest possibility of infringing on the 'autonomy of the internationals' as an excuse for excluding women.[21] The Women's Committee for Industrial Equality sent delegates to the 1921 AFL convention

[18] Pencak, *God and Country*, 131-142.
[19] *American Legion Weekly* 5, no. 46 (November 16, 1923), 18.
[20] Quoted in Philip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, Vol. 9 (New York: International Publishers, 1999), 56-63.
[21] Ibid.

with a resolution to amend the AFL's constitution in favor of women workers, which was rejected by the union's leadership and was defeated. Subsequent attempts to pass such resolutions failed, as did Gompers's attempt to create a women's bureau, which itself was designed to circumvent the Women's Trade Union League's activities for women's organizing.[22] Though the leadership was not opposed to organizing women workers, neither did it contribute much to this work in the early 1920s. Gompers downplayed the historical efficacy of women's strikes, going so far as to tell striking telephone operators to "maintain self-control" and accept arbitration because "you're only girls…and such strikes have an awful record."[23] As will be discussed later, Gompers preferred advocating for a "family wage" which allowed women to stay at home, thus preserving the patriarchal family structure. The AFL leadership effectively shirked responsibility for the issue of women's organizing by leaving it up to local units to decide, which often meant the barring of women from various unions.

It was largely the same when it came to organizing African American workers. Gompers and the AFL leadership at least nominally supported the organizing of black workers. There were black delegates to AFL conventions as well as a number of African Americans organized in AFL-affiliated unions. But the number of those organized fell far short of their white counterparts. At the 1919 AFL Convention calls for an international charter for African American workers, as well as four resolutions introduced by African American delegates were shot down. The following year, the AFL continued to pay lip service to the organizing of black workers and even made some gains toward integrating

[22] Ibid.
[23] Quoted in Philip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States,* Vol. 8 (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 91.

machinists' unions but ultimately deferred to the locals, respecting their decisions to exclude African American workers. More often than not, Gompers blamed black workers themselves for their numerically small membership, despite complaints that everything from de facto exclusion via "ritual" to outright barring kept numbers low.[24] Foner concludes that "despite official proclamations of racial equality by AFL officials and conventions, the Federation did little to organize Black workers other than adopt resolutions without creating effective machinery to put them in operation, or establish any enforcement machinery to prevent its unions from discriminating."[25] By holding fast to "trade union autonomy" on the issue of race, just as they had on the issue of gender, the AFL produced few results for organizing black workers.[26] By blaming African-Americans themselves, or red-baiting them if they tried to join more radical, but welcoming, unions like the I.W.W., the AFL leadership contributed to the perpetuation of the prevailing system of racial disparity in the U.S.

In regard to the class composition of both groups, the reality often did not match the rhetoric. The AFL represents an interesting case. As a labor union, it was by definition a working-class organization. The bulk of its membership were working class men. But in terms of its leadership, direction, and even awareness of its own mission (i.e. "consciousness"), some have argued that the AFL could be seen as "craft-conscious"

[24] Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, Vol. 8, 198-207.
[25] Philip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, Vol. 10 (New York: International Publishers, 1994), 189.
[26] Between 1925 and 1927 there were no discussions of resolutions on black labor. A. Philip Randolph struggled with William Green and the AFL, who feared Communist influence on black workers' organizations, for years to obtain a charter for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, only to finally end up entering the AFL not as an independent union, as most of the other craft unions were, but as a "federal union," which some argued was "'a substitute for real unionism.'" See Ibid, 189-217.

rather than "class-conscious."[27] Furthermore, others offer the caveat that while the AFL might have been a working-class organization, its barriers to entry made it an organization of the "labor aristocracy" rather than of the working-class as a whole. Historian Eugene T. Sweeney argued that the AFL had a "middle-class orientation" and, rather than fostering a collectivist orientation, maintained a core of "individualistic virtues."[28] Others, like Harold Livesay, have demonstrated how Gompers took what could be called a "class-blind" approach. Livesay wrote that Gompers believed "that American workers were not a class but shared the beliefs of their fellow citizens and would support no movement that disavowed that popular creed; that big business combinations were inevitable and efficient, to be dealt with realistically not by trying to break them up; that mechanization could bring great wealth, which labor could share, and therefore should be welcomed, not opposed."[29] The specifics of this type of thinking will be dealt with elsewhere, but this quote illustrates the difficulties of discussing the AFL as a working-class organization when its leadership effectively denied the desirability of a politics centered solely around class. This orientation toward class was required if the AFL were to be the "safe," "respectable," and "patriotic American" institution it lauded itself as.[30]

Neither does the Legion's argument about being a cross-section of the American people hold up. From its beginnings in Paris and throughout the 1920s, the Legion

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[27] Though many have made this argument, one example can be found in Julie Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 38.
[28] Eugene T. Sweeney, "The A.F.L.'s Good Citizen, 1920-1940," *Labor History*, 2001, 200-216.
[29] Harold C. Livesay and Oscar Handlin, *Samuel Gompers and Organized Labor in America* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1978), 173.
[30] James O. Morris, "The AFL in the 1920's: A Strategy of Defense," *ILR Review* 11, no. 4 (July 1958): 573, 590.

struggled to gain and maintain the working-class membership it hoped to attract. When the Paris Caucus was organized, despite efforts to get the participation of enlisted men, only 47 out of 450 men ranked below lieutenant.[31] Though the numbers increased, the early years of the Legion saw an underrepresentation of enlisted men. The list of occupations of delegates to the St. Louis Caucus reveal disproportionate representation of elite and middle-class professions as well, with business executives, bankers, lawyers, engineers, salesmen, merchants, journalists, students, clerks and public employees, being among the top occupations listed.[32] Names of well-known American elites, including Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., Franklin D'Olier, and Eric Fisher Wood appear on the list of guests to Roosevelt's "Dinner Party," the precursor meeting to the Paris Caucus.[33] Alec Campbell's article "The Sociopolitical Origins of the American Legion" argues that the Legion was founded and led by *rentier* capitalists, "old money" individuals who lived off of assets and inheritances (as opposed to "new money" industrialists) whom he calls "the Establishment." These "patricians sought to protect themselves from both the new industrialists within their class and the new working class outside of it while simultaneously looking for a bridge across the class divide in the interests of peace and stability."[34] The Legion was a predominately middle-and upper-class group during its first decade of life, and its ideological outlook generally reflected this fact.

There are a number of examples of early struggles within the Legion. Pencak's study of the internal debates within the Legion over postwar bonuses and Legion dues, to

[31] Pencak, *For God and Country,* 54.
[32] "Occupations of Delegates at the St. Louis Caucus Held by More than One Person" in Pencack, *For God and Country,* 339. It is perhaps unsurprising as working-class veterans would not largely have been unable to dedicate time off from work and pay the dues rates required by the Legion.
[33] "Men Present at Roosevelt Dinner Party in Paris, February 15,1919" in Gellerman, *Legion as Educator,* 267.
[34] Campbell, "Origins," quote from pg. 5.

name just two examples, reveal tension between the leadership and the rank-and-file.[35] This became particularly acute when members of the Legion who were also union men had to confront the realities of Legion strikebreaking activities. Unions began to retaliate against members who were also members of the Legion. In New York, a Legion post published a list of individuals who would be able to run city infrastructure should there be a strike. In retaliation, the local union ordered any members who were also part of the Legion to quit their membership. Workers in some locals were fined if they were found to have Legion membership, and across the country union men were ordered to quit the Legion.[36] By the end of 1922, the Legion had lost over 120,000 members.[37] This had the potential for creating great animosity between the trade union federation and the veterans. Sensing greater commonality than difference, leaders from both organizations, however, put great effort into reconciling the two organizations.[38]

Coming Together

An interesting letter to the editor appeared in a 1921 edition of the *American Legion Weekly.* It was written by a post commander and recounted a story of his interaction with an ex-serviceman, wounded during the war, whose "mind had been poisoned" by anti-Legion rhetoric. The man refused to join the Legion because they were a "bunch of strike-breakers." The post commander held a second meeting with the man, where he helped him secure government benefits, discussed Legion philosophy, and

[35] Pencak, *For God and Country,* 70-75.
[36] Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling," 115.
[37] Ibid. The tension between the two groups in hinted at in a speech by George L. Berry. Berry was attempting to smooth over any misunderstandings between the memberships, though he recognized that it has "taken time" to prove the "ridiculousness" of the charges that have been laid against the Legion and were a cause for anti-Legion sentiment among union men. See George L. Berry, "The Legion's Attitude Toward Labor" in *American Legion Weekly* 4, no. 12 (March 24, 1922), 8, 22.
[38] *American Legion Weekly* 3, no. 38 (September 23, 1921), 11, 18.

generally tried to change the man's mind. In the end, the ex-serviceman became a booster for the Legion. This letter provides an on-the-ground picture of attempts at reconciliation between the Legion and labor. The same issue of the magazine contained a report about a Legionnaire who received an invitation to speak at a union picnic in Kansas. The author commented: "it would be well if this example might be followed throughout the country, wherever an estrangement of feeling has been brought about in any way between the two organizations. They ought to understand each other; the controlling element in each ought to realize the genuine community of interest that exists between them."[39]

Clearly, from 1919-1922 there were some tensions between the two organizations. Still, there is evidence to suggest steps to bring the two groups together were taken as early as the spring of 1920. That year, Gompers spoke with Franklin D'Olier about relations between the two organizations. The press reported that Gompers personally saw no reason why ex-servicemen, laborers or not, should not join the American Legion.[40] In December 1919, the Indianapolis Central Labor Union passed a resolution against the Legion, citing how Legionnaires were actively interrupting union meetings, ransacking union halls, and even stealing an American flag from a Machinist's hall. By the spring, Gompers had concluded that there was no evidence to support the resolution. He argued along the same lines employed by the Legion: such actions were the responsibility of individuals separate from the otherwise friendly national organization.[41] This ability on the part of both the AFL and the Legion mentally to separate the other's organization as a

[39] Ibid.
[40] "Gompers Indorses American Legion," *New York Times* (March 17, 1920).
[41] American Federation of Labor Executive Council Minutes, February 24-28, March 1-3, 1920, Folder: 002035-006-0859, accessed via History Vault.

whole from its rogue elements was essential for the partnership the two formed. Actions found disagreeable to the other organization were often attributed by official publications and statements to excesses, wayward individuals, or radical saboteurs. This became a central theme by 1922, as members of both the AFL and the Legion began speaking to each other's conventions and began working on common projects.

The most important figure in the effort to bring the two groups together was George L. Berry. Berry served both as the National Vice Commander of the American Legion and the President of the International Printing Pressman and Assistant's Union of North America. He penned an important article in the *American Legion Weekly* titled "The Legion's Attitude Toward Labor" that sought to clear up misunderstandings and firmly state the Legion's stance vis-à-vis organized labor. As a member of both the Legion and the AFL, he was more than capable of bridging whatever divide there was. In the article, Berry emphatically denied that the Legion was funded by Wall Street and worked for its interests. In fact, the Legion was much like the AFL, he argued, in that it, too, had an enemy in the Chamber of Commerce, which tried to fight the Legion's call for adjusted compensation legislation. Like the AFL, the Legion was committed to an "Americanization program" which aimed to fight illiteracy, uphold the "traditions of our republic," and to "build up a spirit of loyalty and love for the ideals which the republic has stood for and fought for at home and abroad." For Berry, the common aims of such a program made not only the two organizations "inseparable," but also aligned with a common definition of good citizenship.[42]

[42] Berry, "Legion's Attitude," 8, 22.

Berry did not shy away from the differences between the two groups. He understood they were designed for different purposes, the AFL as an "economic" organization and the Legion as a "fraternal and legislative" organization, but he maintained that so long as the Legion, with its cross-section of members, maintained impartiality in labor disputes, and so long as the AFL did not take the "unfair and cowardly" route by blaming the entire Legion for the anti-labor activities of individual Legionnaires, harmony could reign between the two. It did not have to stop at harmony, either. Berry's statements pointed toward something even greater:

> The American Legion is a free institution made up of men who have proved their allegiance to and love for the cause of freedom and democracy at home and abroad; and in following such a course it will be in harmony with the high ideals that have animated the American Federation of Labor in the pursuance of a similar course of Americanism. There is no good reason for the existence of any other than the most cordial, friendly relationship between The American Legion and the American Federation of Labor and any effort to engender antagonism between them will fail because of its lack of merit and reason.[43]

Berry echoed many of these sentiments in a companion article published in the *American Federationist* in 1922. This article, however, presented an even stronger case for the affinity between the two groups, particularly as it pertained to Americanism. Berry's words are worth quoting at length:

> The question of Americanism is one that has attracted and is holding the attention of all forward-looking citizens. The American Legion has said that it proposes to

[43] Ibid.

coordinate with every influence accessible in arousing the spirit, the heart and the minds of the American people to the truth with regard to America.

The Legion appreciates the fact that there are too many persons, citizens of the United States, who really do not understand the obligations as well as the advantages of the constitution of the Republic of the United States. Our ills are not as result of the constitution but are the result of the lack of knowledge of the constitution. If the Declaration of Independence and the constitution of the Republic of the United States were literally applied by the citizens of our country then there would be little to complain of in our social and political conditions and our industrial difficulties would be considerably minimized; and thus as a genuine contribution to Americanism the Legion proposes to acquaint

the American people, to the best of its ability, with the truth regarding America.

And here again we find the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor in complete unison and this unity is of such a nature that it will not tolerate diversion or interference. If these two great organizations pursue the course that they have outlined in the furtherance of Americanism the selfish reactionary interests, who see only in America the opportunity of accumulating unnatural and un-American profits, as well as the revolutionary forces will find little comfort in their future campaigns. The relationship of the Legion and Labor, therefore is fundamentally sound and the feeling of mutuality and interdependence will grow as the membership of these two great organizations better understand the work that confronts them.[44]

[44] George L. Berry, "The Legion and Labor" in *the American Federationist* 29 (1922), 680-681.

As this telling passage suggests, the Legion and the AFL did not just share similar interests or similar enemies but a common mission to foster an Americanism that combated both the "reactionary interests," financial elites and businessmen who placed profit above duty to country (the Legion held out particular scorn for "war profiteers") and the "revolutionary forces" threatening America. By 1926, Berry attributed the relative peace and prosperity the country enjoyed "to the existence of the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor," further insisting "that there is an obligation resting upon the shoulders of every citizen of our nation to these two great American institutions."[45]

The press made much of this new alliance. In June of 1922, the *New York Times* reported on the Legion's invitation to Gompers to attend its next convention. Thanking the AFL for their support for "'a square deal for disabled soldiers,'" as well as their support for educational initiatives, the Legion formally invited the union to embark upon a "'great campaign for Americanism.'"[46] The result was Gompers's announcement at the Legion convention of the establishment of a "joint body…between the Legion posts and the Federation of trades and local trades central bodies in each community."[47] This would take many different forms throughout the remainder of the decade as the two organizations put their "great campaign" into action.

By the end of the decade, the two organizations were quite close. When Gompers died in 1924, the Legion publications paid deep respect to him but also openly worried

[45] *Official Proceedings Thirty- First Annual Convention Colorado State Federation of Labor, Alamosa, Colorado, June 7-10, 1926,* 77-80. Accessed via History Vault.
[46] "Legion and Labor Alliance Sought," *New York Times* (June 17, 1922).
[47] "Legion to Establish Close Relations with Labor Unions," *New York Times* (October 18, 1922).

about who would replace him as president of the AFL.[48] They were not disappointed in William Green, who proved to be even more conservative and enthusiastically committed to the cause of Americanism than was Gompers. Green would go on to become a supporter of the Legion's Endowment fund, earning him a place on the National Honorary Committee.[49] The Legion worked very closely with Green, just as it had with Gompers.[50] The common cause of the two organizations was not merely to defend America from radicalism, but, as previously mentioned, to foster an "active Americanism." The Legion and the AFL proved themselves to be up to the task.

Active Americanism

One way in which the two organizations sought to instill their own vision of citizenship and Americanism was through the active promotion of citizenship activities. This often took the form of counter-demonstrations on "radical" holidays and the enthusiastic celebration of patriotic holidays, as well as the creation of new ones.[51] Through what historian Donna T. Haverty-Stacke calls "creative opposition to radical working-class political culture," the AFL and the Legion (among other groups) sought to drown out radical celebrations, such as May Day, with patriotic alternatives. These ranged from "muscular" and militaristic holidays like Armistice Day (a Legion favorite), American Day, and Loyalty Day, to more reform-minded and youth (whose potential attraction to radicalism was of particular concern) oriented holidays such as the AFL's

[48] Frederick Palmer, "A Whale of a Job," *American Legion Weekly* 7, no. 6 (February 6, 1925), 13.
[49] *American Legion Weekly* 7, no. 12 (March 25, 1925), 9.
[50] An illustrative example of this can be seen in an exchange between the two groups over the Legion's proposed universal draft bill. Green expressed concerns over the provision for conscription in the event of a "national emergency." National Commander John McQuigg agreed to change the language to "war" rather than "national emergency" at Green's request. See AFL Executive Council Vote Books, January 1925-December 1925, Folder: 002033-017-0274. Accessed vis History Vault.
[51] One of many such examples could include a joint AFL-Legion Armistice Day parade in Fargo, North Dakota in 1921. See *American Federationist* 28, (1921), 979.

National Child Health Day.[52] This holiday, which was approved by Congress and President Coolidge in 1928, equated radicalism with a national health crisis. Support for such holidays was largely in keeping with AFL policy, which had for decades recognized the September Labor Day in defiance of May Day, which the AFL wrote off as radical and "European" despite its American origins.[53] As Harvey-Stacke argues, these celebrations not only served to reinforce masculine patriarchal norms, but also to reinforce "the specific nature of American identity their creators and participants wanted to defend. That identity was characterized by a patriotism with no room for class-based or internationalist yearnings."[54]

Both the AFL and the Legion sponsored a number of community building projects, parks, and public gatherings. At all times, such events were designed to foster a citizenship based on civic responsibility, loyalty, and the rejection of any "special interests" that conflicted with the well-being of the "nation."[55] The Americanism Commission and the National Community Services Division of the American Legion did this community outreach work, which included sponsoring Boy Scout troops, concerts and parades, education and English language programs for Americanizing immigrants,

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[52] Donna T. Haverty-Stacke, "Creative Opposition to Radical America: 1920s Anti-May Day Demonstrations," *Labor: Studies in the Working-Class History of the Americas* 4, no. 3 (2007), 59-80. An alliance of "politicians, businessmen, unionists, and social workers" sought to make National Child Health Day on May first specifically to compete with the labor holiday.
[53] Ibid, 78.
[54] Ibid, 79.
[55] George Seay Wheat, *The Story of the American Legion* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1919); Raymond Moley, *The American Legion Story* (New York: Meredith Publishing Company, 1966), 337; Thomas A. Rumer, *The American Legion: An Official History, 1919-1989* (New York: M. Evans, 1990), 180-182; Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment"; Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling"; Eugene T. Sweeney, "The A.F.L.'s Good Citizen, 1920-1940," *Labor History*, 2001; M.J. Heale, "Citizens versus Outsiders: Anti-Communism at State and Local Levels, 1921-1946," in *Little "Red Scares": Anti-communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*, by Robert Justin Goldstein (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2016), 45-69.

and even the maintenance of the well-known American Legion Baseball program.[56] In 1925, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., who was in charge of a Committee on Human Relationship, asked William Green to send representatives to work alongside members of the National Chamber of Commerce, manufacturers' associations and the Grange to develop outdoor recreation for both rural and industrial workers.[57]

While the AFL dabbled in pressing for Americanism legislation, such as attempting to mandate flag displays on National Child Health Day, the Legion had a long record of demanding Congress (and local governments) pass laws criminalizing flag desecration, limiting radical speech, denying recognition of the Soviet Union, making radicalism a deportable offense for immigrants, instituting loyalty oaths for teachers, censoring textbooks, and adopting the Star Spangled Banner as the national anthem of the United States.[58] The AFL, with a long history of restrictive legislation being used against union organizers, was less comfortable with such heavy-handed legislation. It preferred a more volunteerist approach, where citizens could freely express their patriotism without a repressive apparatus mandating it. Either way, both organizations saw such community investment as crucial to their "active Americanism" work, even if they differed on the role the government ought to play in fostering it.

Both the AFL and the Legion were deeply concerned about the youth of the country. From the aforementioned National Child Health Day to support for legislation

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[56] Jacob J. Bustad, "'One Hundred Per Cent American': Nationalism, Masculinity, and American Legion Junior Baseball in the 1920s" (master's thesis, University of Kansas, 2009).
[57] Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. to William Green, February 27, 1925, RG1-012, Box 1, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.
[58] Such demands can be found in countless Legion publications. An excellent source is the American Legion's annual report to Congress, as well as the proceedings from their national conventions, which contain a report from the Americanism Commission. See, for example, "Report of Committee on Americanism," *Proceedings of the Eighth National Convention of the American Legion, Philadelphia, P.A., October 11-15, 1926.* American Legion Digital Archives.

outlawing child labor, both groups were actively involved in trying to reshape the way American children were brought up. This can be seen most powerfully in the area of education. The AFL, long interested in fighting illiteracy through a quality public education system, teamed up with the Legion, along with the National Education Association and the Bureau of Education, to create American Education Week. On each day of the week, time was set aside for patriotic and citizenship education.[59] The *American Federationist* ran a small piece in 1922 reconfirming the AFL's commitment to the program, the purpose of which was explained by the Legion's Americanism Commission: "to arouse all the nation to a truer sense of our educational needs along broad, constructive, patriotic lines. By bringing our people to concentrate upon the training of the masses of the uneducated we shall go far toward eliminating illiteracy in our land and take a forward step in the solution of our national problems."[60] Though the AFL placed greater emphasis on the educational component and the Legion foregrounded the promotion of Americanism, both organizations adhered to its basic principles.

By coupling technical improvements in the educational system with ideological Americanism, the AFL and the Legion played an instrumental role in developing what one collection of works calls the "politics of patriotism in America's schools" in the 1920s.[61] The AFL often sponsored the Legion Patriotic Essay Contest, covering such topics as "Why America Should Prohibit Immigration for Five Years."[62] Legion posts across the country lobbied for legislation mandating the display of flags in schools

[59] Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment," 339-340.
[60] *American Federationist* 29 (1922), 847.
[61] *Pledging Allegiance: The Politics of Patriotism in America's Schools,* ed. Joel Westheimer (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007).
[62] *American Legion Weekly* 5, no. 40 (October 5, 1923), 16.

alongside proper education in flag etiquette and "patriotic exercises."[63] More invasively, the Legion demanded loyalty oaths from teachers, with some local governments passing laws requiring teachers to swear that they did not teach any subversive ideas before receiving their paychecks.[64] In 1921, National Commander F. W. Galbraith stated: "We are going to survey every school-teacher and every school in the United States, and we will get the teachers' records. If we find them disloyal, we will tell you, and you can kick them out."[65] The Legion called for patriotic history and civic education, reserving for itself the right to appoint a committee to "determine whether they are loyal."[66] When the wording of the Pledge of Allegiance was being established, the Legion (cooperating with the Daughters of the American Republic, or DAR) recommended changing the phrase "I pledge allegiance to my flag" to "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America" in order to prevent any ambiguity and provide an opportunity for an immigrant to pledge allegiance to another country.[67] Much of what the Legion suggested, often with AFL support, was adopted by state and local educational apparatuses and have shaped American schools ever since.[68]

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[63] Marquis James, *A History of the American* Legion (New York: William Green, 1923), 295; Arthur Warner, "The Truth About the American Legion," *The Nation* 113, no. 2923 (July 13, 1921). Warner's essay is one of a four-part exposé on the Legion from a liberal perspective. It is interesting that the Bureau of Investigation monitored Warner's articles, coming to the conclusion that "there seems to be a more-or-less concerted pro-German—Irish—liberal—radical campaign…against the American Legion." See Bureau of Investigation General Intelligence Bulletin on Radical Activities, Folder: 002371-018-0323, July 1, 1921-July 31, 1921. Accessed via History Vault.

[64] See Gellerman, *American Legion as* Educator, 122-128 and Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment," 336-337. A resolution passed at the Third National Convention stated: "Be It Resolved, that the American Legion favors the adoption of state laws requiring every teacher in every elementary and high school and every instructor or professor in every higher institution of learning…to subscribe to an oath of allegiance to the Constitution of the United States and of the State where employed, and that we also favor a law permitting the cancellation of the certificate of any teacher found guilty of disloyalty to the government." See *Third National Convention of the American Legion* (1921), 37-38.

[65] Warner, "Truth About the American Legion," 36.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Cecilia O'Leary, "Patriot Acts" in *Pledging Allegiance*, 163.

[68] In 1923, President Harding called for a provision to be added to the codes regarding flag handling that were then being discussed that called for more Americans to learn to sing the "Star Spangled Banner." He

The names "American Legion" and "American Federation of Labor" were found written together on many programs as the decade progressed. In 1922, both organizations were present at the National Civic Federation's annual convention. The Legion's National Commander Hanford MacNider and Americanism director Owsley both spoke, as did Gompers. All praised the industrial arbitration work of the AFL as well as its continued opposition to Soviet Russia.[69] In 1924, the American Legion called 61 other organizations together for an "All-American Conference for an aggressive fight to exterminate revolutionary and destructive radicalism and propaganda."[70] Included was the AFL as well a host of other interesting conservative-leaning organizations, including the Grand Army of the Republic, the National Civic Federation, the DAR, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Daughters of the Confederacy. The conference predictably denounced sovietism but also included calls for immigration restriction, the "refusal to regard America's entry into and conduct of the war as a debatable question," and the "demand for unadulterated and undiluted American history in American schools, as opposed to the emasculated history which has been…robbing Americanism of much of its elemental significance."[71]

The Legion and the AFL were also partners in a joint banking effort. The Federation Bank of New York was established as a "labor bank" and the AFL's Matthew Woll was on the Board of Directors. William Green of the AFL and Samuel E. Aronowitz of the American Legion were on the Advisory Committee, alongside Franklin

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delivered this address before the American Legion National Flag Conference. See "Urges Americans Learn National Anthem," *Wall Street Journal* (June 15, 1923), 11.

[69] "Leaders to Discuss Public Problems," *New York Times* (January 29, 1922), 32.

[70] "War on Radicals Aim of Conference," *New York Times* (May 17, 1924), 2.

[71] Ibid.

Roosevelt. At a 1925 event commemorating the second anniversary of the bank, National Commander Drain and William Green were the two headlining speakers. The event received letters of commendation from Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon and President Coolidge.[72] The joint appearances of the Legion and the AFL alongside such noteworthy figures is a strong indication not only of how close the two organizations had become by mid-decade, but also an indication of the power and influence they had accumulated. They were at the center of efforts to more thoroughly Americanize the American economy and culture. By the 1930s, the Federation Bank's pamphlets were printed with a logo stating "industry and labor are allied here."[73]

There were even some surprising areas where the Legion and the AFL overlapped on issues of militarism, military preparedness, and war. Despite its martial nature and its entire membership consisting of ex-servicemen, the American Legion did not advocate war except as a last resort. It was not so much war itself, which for many Legionnaires was a horror to be avoided if possible (but not at the cost of losing America's standing in the world), but rather the type of citizenship and national unity it fostered that was to be held up as a model.[74] Legion historian Marquis James went as far as to say that the Legion aimed "toward world peace through a world-wide union of veterans."[75] This did not place them in the same category as the pacifists whom Legionnaires so despised – the

[72] RG1-019, Box 16, Folder 6, AFL-CIO Records, Series 5, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
[73] Ibid.
[74] An illustration of their discomfort with war can be seen in the position taken by both the Legion and the AFL on the call to form an international conference to limit airpower. An *American Legion Weekly* article stated: "Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, endorses the Legion's suggestion, declaring "every barrier that can be erected in the pathway of war is a marker on the highway of democracy toward a better world." See "Air Conference Proposal Wins Many More Endorsements," *American Legion Weekly* 5, no. 40 (October 5, 1923), 12.
[75] James, *History of the American Legion*, 215.

Legion's threshold for what constituted an offense worthy of war as lower than many other organizations – but simply meant that they saw war as a necessary evil more than a positive good, as Theodore Roosevelt would once have argued. Nonetheless, the Legion placed a premium on military preparedness, going as far as to be vocal advocates of mandatory military training in schools (and vocal opponents of those "pacifists, radicals, communists and others" who stood in the way of such a program) and praising the National Rifle Association for its promotion of "rifle marksmanship in high schools, colleges, and throughout the nation."[76] While not hankering for a war, America needed to be ready to rise to any challenge that might present itself, foreign or domestic.

The AFL felt similarly. In a speech before the Army Industrial College in 1925, William Green pledged labor's allegiance to the government of the United States, reiterating that it was "inconceivable that America would ever engage in a war of aggression or for the acquisition of territory."[77] But in the event of foreign aggression, organized labor would fall in line behind the nation. Thus, the AFL was in cautious support of military preparedness. Like the Legion, the AFL was suspicious of a large standing army, preferred the Americanization work of independent organizations to an overly militarized society, and held out a tentative commitment to a universal draft.[78] In the same William Green speech, he responded to a question about the drafting of capital and labor in the event of a war by stating that *if* the United States were fighting a just war,

[76] *Proceedings of the Eighth National Convention*, 44-45.
[77] William Green, "'Labor': Address Before Army Industrial College, June 10, 1925, Washington D.C.," RG1-015, Box 2, Folder 11, Series 2, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.
[78] Pencak, *For God and Country*, 46-47.

that war had the support of the people, and it was absolutely necessary, the AFL would place its support behind such conscription.[79]

Both organizations were solidly behind the Civilian Military Training Camps (CMTC) movement.[80] As early as 1915 Legionnaires (and Samuel Gompers) were involved in the Plattsburgh Movement for military preparedness, and as late as 1929 William Green expressed a "full measure of support" for the CMTC, which he called a "patriotic movement." Going further, Green essentially conflated pacifists with Communists due to their "opposing reasonable and adequate defense." He complained that "those who constitute these groups are pacifists here but militarists where they have succeeded in imposing autocratic domination over the lives of millions of people."[81] Here, even in 1929, the language of the Red Scare was alive and well.

The two organizations saw eye to eye on militarism, war, and preparedness but took somewhat different stances on international affairs. The AFL was, in general, much more comfortable with a degree of internationalism (though not at the expense of nationalism) than was the American Legion.[82] For example, while the AFL was supportive of, and involved in some of the proceedings of, the League of Nations, the Legion characteristically avoided the issue.[83] Interestingly, even in some other areas of

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[79] William Green, "'Labor': Address Before Army Industrial College, June 10, 1925, Washington D.C.," RG1-015, Box 2, Folder 11, Series 2, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.

[80] Pencak, *For God and* Country,35-45; Radtke, "Politics of Commitment," 428; Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling," 154

[81] "Address Delivered by Hon. William Green, President, American Federation of Labor, May 2, 1929 to Officers and Cadets of West Point Military Academy, West Point, New York." RG1-015, Box 2, Folder 23, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.

[82] This had its limits, however. The AFL discontinued its affiliations with international organizations, such as the International Federation of Trade Unions due to their perceived support for Socialism and Russia. See "Attitude of A.F.L. Toward the International" in *American Federationist* 28 (1921), 328.

[83] For a detailed report of the AFL's role in the League of Nation's deliberations and their attitude toward the League, see Ernest H. Greenwood, "Labor and the League of Nations," *American Federationist* 27

disagreement, the two organizations were not as far apart as it might have appeared on the surface. For example, on the issue of how the government ought to handle those prosecuted under the Espionage and Sedition Acts during the war, the Legion and the AFL appeared at odds with one another. As the pressure to pardon the 168 political prisoners, Eugene Debs most famously, grew, the Legion emphatically rejected this call. First, the Legion rejected the label "political prisoner," insisting that they were traitors, full stop. The Legion then argued that pardoning them would set a dangerous precedent, give radicals a victory, and dishonor those who died or were wounded during the war.[84] The AFL, on the other hand, came out in favor of amnesty. The reason given by Gompers, after a meeting with President Harding on unemployment turned to a discussion of Debs, was that "the Socialist Party is at present worshipping Debs as a martyr…his release would destroy their most effective means of propaganda."[85] Even when the AFL and Legion disagreed on means, they were often in pursuit of the same ends.

The Legion and the AFL: Immigration

If there was one area in which the AFL and the Legion were in absolute agreement, it was on the issue of immigration. Both organizations' publications were filled with articles on immigration restriction throughout the 1920s. They were among the

(1920), 51-56. Many other such references can be found in the *American Federationist.* The *American Legion Weekly* also ran a few articles on the League, but the Legion's attitude is best summarized by the following Marquis James statement. Like Prohibition and the "race problem," the issue of the League of Nations was "led gently but firmly back into a corner and suppressed so far as the Legion was concerned." James, *History of American Legion*, 56.

[84] Pencak, *For God and Country*, 157-159.

[85] RG1-015, Box 6, Folder 21, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD. A clipping from the Washington Post dated July 28, 1921 recounts a meeting between Gompers and Harding over Debs. Gompers takes the time to make it clear that he was at the meeting at the behest of the president, *not* the Political Amnesty League, a "socialist" organization which he denounced.

leading voices for immigration restriction and for strict Americanization of immigrants that were already here, unless they were radicals in which case they were to be deported. They came out strongly in favor of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924, which barred Japanese, Chinese, Indians, and other Asians from entry because they were deemed "racially ineligible for naturalized citizenship," while establishing a quota system which limited future immigration to two percent of each nationality that was present in the United States during the 1890 census, effectively favoring northern and western Europeans and sharply limiting those of eastern and southern origin.[86] The Legion and the AFL were, of course, driven by dominant racial prejudices of the time, particularly in regard to Asians as well as "Slavic" eastern Europeans. This prejudice was inextricably linked with fears of radicalism, un-Americanism, and an economically nationalist fear of downward pressure on the wages of Americans.

At its 1921 Kansas City Convention, the Legion "reaffirmed the Legion's previous stand against Oriental immigration and against granting citizenship rights to Orientals now in this country." Additionally, the Legion called for "the exclusion of all aliens for a period of five years…strict examination of prospective immigrants in their native lands…uniform and dignified naturalization ceremonies and establishment of knowledge of civics and American history as a prerequisite for citizenship."[87] This position aligned with the AFL's concerns over "Slav radicalism" and advocacy for literacy tests.[88] A 1922 edition of the *American Federationist* contained an article titled

[86] Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 3,7,20.
[87] James, *History of American Legion*, 236.
[88] Warner, "The Truth About the American Legion," *the Nation* 113, no.2924 (July 20, 1921), 65; Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York: Monthly Review, 1999), 44-45.

"Immigration and America's Safety" which pulled together multiple facets of the AFL's attitude toward immigration. First, it argued that since both "reds" and "reactionaries" (i.e. companies who benefit from exploiting cheap labor) were against immigration restriction, it followed that responsible Americans ought to be for it. Next, it declared the two percent quota system, and its disproportionate impact on eastern and southern Europeans, a "desirable outcome." It put forward "scientific" evidence of the substandard intelligence of eastern Europeans and, on that basis, questioned their "citizenship material." It concluded by alluding to the fall of the Roman Empire, which it attributed to immigration and the breeding of the "lowest sort." With the "melting pot theory of immigration" thoroughly discredited, the article claimed the AFL "has performed a great social service on behalf of the United States by its stand against an unrestricted flow of immigration" and by helping to "develop and maintain the American standards of living and citizenship."[89] Citizenship standards, labor relations, ethnic prejudice, and the fear of radicalism were all thoroughly entangled when it came to immigration.

The American Legion ran an article in the *American Legion Weekly* by a Professor Edwin Grant Conklin called "Is Immigrant Labor Really Cheap?" which echoed a number of the concerns raised by the AFL, while expanding on the concerns for declining wages and "white civilization."[90] Professor Conklin channeled Theodore Roosevelt when he expressed his fear of a "Chinafied America." He further stressed the importance of defending a "high level of white civilization" against the "colored races" who "underlive Americans…reduce wages and standards of living." This applied to

[89] Oliver Hoyem, "Immigration and America's Safety," *American Federationist* 29 (1922), 818-827.
[90] In an editorial, Gompers succinctly stated: "unrestricted immigration would mean a savage drive to cut wages, with the consequent danger of a lowering of American standards of living." See Samuel Gompers, "America Wants no Wide-Open Immigration," *American Federationist* 30 (1923), 657.

southern and eastern Europeans as well as Asians. He expressed fears that unrestricted immigration would lead to the replication of European societal divisions, would lower "hereditary qualities," and would, like Greece and Rome before her, lead to the general ruin of America.[91] Thus, the Legion shared Labor's concern for a decline in wages. Also like the AFL, the Legion did not place sole blame upon the immigrant laborer. They also heaped scorn upon the employer who defied the principles of Americanism by placing "profit over patriotism."[92] This further illustrates the connections which existed between the idea of Americanism and relations of production. Employers were to put aside their own special interests in the interests of a broader Americanism and this included resisting the temptation to import cheap labor.

The Legion and the AFL were at times in communication with one another, working together to advance the cause of immigration restriction. An interesting exchange began between the AFL and the Legion in 1921 over Asian labor in Hawaii. The AFL was outspoken on what it called a "despicable and un-American proposal" by Congress to allow 500,000 Chinese "coolies" into Hawaii. This proposal led to a flood of telegrams to reach the committeemen working on the legislation. One telegram in favor of the legislation was sent by Leonard Withington, a National Executive Committeeman from the Hawaiian department of the Legion. In the telegram, he protested against the AFL's position and expressed his Department's support. Samuel Gompers then wrote a letter to Lemuel Bolles, the national adjutant for the American Legion, to which he attached Withington's telegram. Bolles immediately wrote to Albert Johnson, chairman

[91] Edwin Grant Conklin, "Is Immigrant Labor Really Cheap?" *American Legion Weekly* 5, no. 29 (July 20, 1923), 5-6.
[92] Ibid.

of the House Committee on Immigration, to stress that Withinton's views were not the views of the American Legion and that Withington had no authority to write to Johnson in such an official manner. Bolles wrote to Johnson: "The American Legion is opposed to any lowering of the standard of immigration now existing and any action which would tend to lower the standard of living of the American working man in any part of the United States or of its territories."[93] This common stance, and sharing of information, brought the two organizations closer over the next few years, as they worked together in the fight for immigration restriction in Hawaii and beyond.

Using data provided by the Hawaiian Department of the Legion, the *American Federationist* published two articles on Chinese and Japanese labor in Hawaii. In "The Japanese in Hawaii," Paul Scharrenberg lamented the "leak" of "hordes" of Japanese laborers who immigrated into Hawaii, as well as Hawaiian and California-born Japanese who attempted to gain dual citizenship. The AFL blamed declining wages and labor standards as well as a general decline of public education that propelled white families to place their children in private schools on the Japanese living on the islands. To combat this decline, the AFL called for the abrogation of the historic "Gentlemen's Agreement" between Japan and the U.S., which in 1907 saw the U.S. agree to avoid restrictive immigration legislation targeted at Japanese immigration if Japan in turn agreed to prevent emigration to the U.S., in favor of stricter laws denying admission to those considered "ineligible" for citizenship. They also called for a renewed agreement with Japan as well as a law revoking citizenship to any American-born Japanese person

[93] A report on this entire exchange, as well as the text of the telegram from Bolles to Johnson, can be found in *American Federationist* 28 (1921), 789-792.

seeking dual citizenship.[94] The author also argued that the intellectual deficiencies of the Japanese and the language barrier created opportunities for radicals, like members of the I.W.W., to poison Japanese laborers against the AFL, implying that the Asian laborers on Hawaii were more susceptible to radicalization. A second article, this one on Chinese labor, described how allowing Asian immigration was ultimately to the benefit of the sugar plantation owners and led to the common debasement of both white and Asian labor. After using Australian sugar plantations, which utilized white labor, as an example to uphold, the article ended by stating "the prospect of Americanizing the Islands" by importing more Chinese labor in order to "stabilize" the economic climate there was "as brilliant as the idea that petroleum will extinguish a fire."[95]

The next year, the AFL, again citing Legion data, reaffirmed its position by adopting Resolution 86 at its national convention. The resolution condemned the House and Senate Immigration Committees, which "report[ed] favorably bills permitting the importation of 50,000 Chinese Coolies into the Hawaiian Islands."[96] They further argued that such a course of action was a violation of longstanding U.S. immigration principles and posed a threat not just to Hawaii (whose native population was being rapidly replaced by Asians, much to the chagrin of the author) but to the whole country because Hawaiian-born Asians were "entitled to come to any part of America whenever they so desire." They called the "increasing number of this [Japanese] race" one of the "gravest problems facing the American people today."[97] The AFL was keenly aware of how employers could take advantage of this situation to "displace the men and women of the white race

[94] Paul Scharrenberg, "The Japanese in Hawaii," *American Federationist* 29 (1922), 742-750.
[95] Paul Scharrenberg, "Does Hawaii Need Chinese?" *American Federationist* 29 (1922), 637-643.
[96] *American Federationist* 30 (1923), 917-919.
[97] Ibid.

with workers from the Orient."[98] The issue of immigration restriction was bound closely with the Legion and AFL's vision of Americanism, effectively combining ethnic prejudices with an economic and civic nationalism that had an important influence on 1920s conservatism.

In 1929, William Green gave a speech before the Tenth National Convention of the American Legion. In many ways, this speech provided a passionate reflection upon the work that the two organizations had undertaken throughout the decade. He began by stating his joy and honor in representing the men of the AFL, which he called "an army that serves in peacetime and in time of war," many of whom were Legionnaires themselves. He enthusiastically recalled the "beautiful custom" of sending delegates to each other's annual conventions as well as the many common crusades they took together, from the war on "subversive movements" and child welfare legislation to immigration restriction and the fostering of Americanism. He promised before the crowd: "so far as my influence goes and so far as I can serve with the spoken word and pen and so far as I can use the influence of our great movement, it is freely offered…to you in helping you to achieve those noble purposes so ably set forth by The American Legion." To highlight the masculine nature of each organization, Green remarked upon how any disagreements that arose between the organization were resolved in "man fashion."

Throughout the speech, Green emphasized the affinity of the two organizations and their common loyalty to the country, its ideals, and its institutions. At one point, he stated:

[98] Ibid.

> in your common purpose to raise the standard of citizenship in America we stand solidly with you. We want to develop a citizenship here that fully comprehends and appreciates the value of our American form of Government, and the service of American institutions. We want to assist you in developing respect for our flag, devotion to our constitution and loyalty to the laws of our Republic. I am sure in rendering this service with you that we are helping to perpetuate here in America the greatest government upon the face of the earth…We believe that we have implanted here on American soil an ideal form of government, not perfect in all its operations. but a government of the people for the people, and by the people, a government where individual and collective liberty is recognized, and we are not going to stand for the importation into America of a foreign philosophy that would destroy all our fathers have built.

He promised the assembled Legionnaires that the AFL was a "great army" ready to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with the Legion, granting "no quarter" to those espousing philosophies at odds with Americanism. At the end of his speech, Green spoke from the heart: "I wish I could command the language that would adequately express to you the feelings of my heart and mind. I want to assure you that upon all matters and all policies which are common to us all…you can rely upon our great movement to work with you and to assist you."[99] His words are a testimony to the feelings of brotherhood and camaraderie which had formed across a decade of common struggle.

[99] *Summary of Proceedings Tenth National Convention of the American Legion,* 21-23. American Legion Digital Archive.

On many of the key issues facing America in the 1920s, from the fear of radicals, major economic transformations, and immigration, to the need for a renewed definition of Americanism to fit the so-called "New Era," the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor were on the same side. Though their interests and ideals were not identical, they nonetheless shared important compositional and structural similarities that allowed them to see the world in complementary ways. Even when the two groups disagreed on specific issues, it was often a disagreement over means rather than ends. The vision of Americanism which they espoused, the details of which will be explored in the next chapter, was deeply conservative. In many ways, one can see the two groups as representing two sides of the same conservative, nationalist coin. Their conservatism was a bit different from other conservative groups of the age, however. Their vision of Americanism went beyond a mere reactionary response to a changing society. Theirs was a dynamic, Progressive Americanism that did not hearken back to some nineteenth century *laissez-faire* ideal but rather looked to the experience of the Progressive Era and World War I as a model for citizenship to meet the demands of the 1920s.

Chapter 4

The American Legion, The AFL, and Square Deal Americanism

By the 1920s, "one hundred per cent Americanism" was a household term. Conservative organizations of all shades evoked Americanism with remarkable frequency and for a variety of issues. Alongside terms such as "America First" and the "American Dream," Americanism evoked strong emotions and was full of meaning for those speaking it as well as those hearing it.[1] Yet the term remained largely undefined. At its most basic level, it conjured images of a disappearing white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant hegemony amidst a perceived flood of un-assimilable immigrant populations. It also evoked fear of social change as the seemingly simpler bygone era of *laissez-faire* capitalism, separate gendered spheres, and racial stratification was giving way to a newer, monopolistic capitalism complete with a boom in consumerism, new forms of entertainment, communication, and labor processes, along with pressures for social mobility and equality for women and African-Americans.[2] Many scholars interpret the rise or reinvigoration of patriotic societies and conservative organizations, such as the revival of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s as a backlash against the modernism of the New Era. The rise of the American Legion and the rightward turn of the American Federation of Labor are sometimes interpreted within this framework, as an expression of a longing for a nineteenth century past as a corrective for a country sliding into decadence.

[1] Sarah Churchwell, *Behold, America: A History of America First and the American Dream* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).
[2] See Robert Staughton Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929) and Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2007).

"Americanism" was a term in wide usage during the 1920s despite being ill-defined and even contradictory. The historiography of the term largely reflects this. Writers generally treat Americanism as a coded term denoting racism, nativism, xenophobia, and a promotion of Protestantism. Those who describe the various phenomena surrounding "patriotic organizations" and the era of "one hundred per cent Americanism" focus almost exclusively on this aspect. Works ranging from Thomas R. Pegram's *One Hundred Percent American* and Kathleen M. Blee's *Women of the Klan* to the more recent *Behold America* by Sarah Churchwell describe Americanism primarily in terms of a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant backlash against the modernism of the era. The immigrant radical, the recalcitrant African American, and the sexualized woman were an existential threat to the republic, one that needed to be met with the full weight of the authorities – or, failing that, with the terror of vigilante violence.[3] There is absolutely no doubt that this was *mostly* true for both the Legion and the AFL, which both utilized the term "Americanism." Though they both insisted that their animus was toward only the disloyal and the radical, these terms were so thoroughly intertwined with the image of the immigrant that one cannot understand them as separate phenomena. Much of the coded

[3] This particular usage of "Americanism" is widespread. For a few examples, see William Preston, Jr., *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals 1903-1933* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963); Thomas R. Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011); Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1992); John Patrick Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 205-206; Stanley A. Coben, "A Study in Nativism: The American Red Scare of 1919-1920," *Political Science Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (1964); Sarah Churchwell, *Behold, America: a History of America First and the American Dream* (New York: Basic Books, 2018); and Christopher Nehls, "'Treason is Treason': The Iowa American Legion and the Meaning of Disloyalty after World War I," *The Annals of Iowa* 66, no. 2 (Spring 2007). For deeper analysis on the role of vigilantism during the Red Scare and into the 1920s see Norman Hapgood, ed., *Professional Patriots*, comp. Sidney Howard and John Hearley (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927); Christopher Joseph Nicodemus Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010); and Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

language used by both groups makes this quite clear. When it came to Asian immigrants, for example, neither group even bothered to hide their prejudice behind the language of citizenship and assimilation the way they did when speaking of European immigrants. As Christopher Nehls notes in his dissertation on the American Legion (though the following statement can apply to the AFL as well), Legionnaires propagated a "class and colorblind interpretation of citizenship."[4] Yet, most of the positions taken by both groups were nonetheless rooted in particular assumptions that were neither color – nor class or gender, for that matter – "blind."[5]

There is a problem with this racial and ethnically focused definition of Americanism, however. To classify Americanism as a reactionary, White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant phenomenon misses the mark on a few points. First, this argument tends to conflate the various organizations who used the language of Americanism to describe their activities. While there was certainly some overlap in membership in certain places, there were nonetheless important differences between the Ku Klux Klan and the American Legion, for example. The Legion was open to the admittance of African Americans, though, as previously stated, not on equal terms, did not share in the same Protestant moralizing as the Klan, especially regarding alcohol consumption, and did not always demonstrate the same disdain for Jews and Catholics. Whereas Klansmen saw race as biologically fixed, Legionnaires tended to view race and ethnicity in social terms, where change was possible via a process of "Americanization." The AFL's membership base, though biased toward skilled white workers, was particularly multicultural and

[4] Christopher Nehls, "'A Grand and Glorious Feeling:' The American Legion and American Nationalism between the World Wars" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2007).
[5] Buhle. *Taking Care of Business.*

many of its locals were entrenched in immigrant communities, Jewish and Catholic among them. Clearly, when the Legion and the AFL used the term "Americanism," they did not mean exactly the same thing as did the Klan.

Another problem with this approach is that it assumes Americanism to be reactionary. Historian Alan Dawley, for example, describes the American Legion as a type of conservative movement striving for a return to Victorian-era America, while John P. Diggins refers to the Legion's "fear of all that was modern and progressive," calling it "fundamentalist" and "reactionary."[6] Indeed, there were reactionary elements to the organizations that used the term. However, studying the proclamations and deeds of the American Legion and the AFL point to more than just an anti-modern reaction.

In fact, some historians argue exactly the opposite. Christopher Nehls suggests that the American Legion's conceptions of Americanism and civic nationalism were the legacy not of the Victorian Era, but of the Progressive Era.[7] Both the AFL and the Legion put forward endorsements, efforts, and money to fund government programs to improve civic life. Their primary targets included education, holidays and celebrations, and community programs, among others.[8] This behavior stemmed from a Progressive notion

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[6] Dawley, *Struggles for Justice*, 261-262 and Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 205-206. Eugene T. Sweeney argued that the AFL "adhered to the ideals of an older, agrarian society (even as did the American Bar Association, the N.A.M., the American Legion, and other groups), despite the fact that their very existence was a response to the disappearance of this old order." See Eugene T. Sweeney, "The A.F.L.'s Good Citizen, 1920-1940," *Labor History*, 2001, 208-209. Ernest Freeberg, though correctly discussing the work the American Legion did with the KKK to promote Americanism in schools, he nonetheless draws no distinction between the two organizations' conceptions of Americanism. See, Ernest Freeberg, "After the Red Scare: Civil Liberties in the Era of Harding and Coolidge," in *Little "Red Scares": Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*, by Robert Justin Goldstein (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2016), 15.

[7] Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling."

[8] Donna T. Haverty-Stacke, "Creative Opposition to Radical America: 1920s Anti-May Day Demonstrations," *Labor: Studies in the Working-Class History of the Americas* 4, no. 3 (2007), 59-80. See also, Pencak, *For God and Country*; Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling"; and Terry George Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment: The Policies and Ideology of the American Legion in the Interwar Period" (PhD diss., Rutgers the State University of New Jersey, 1993).

of citizenship, derived from the New Nationalist idea that, since all were granted equal opportunity by the democratic state, all had a civic responsibility to that state. Thus, this particular idealization of citizenship was tied up with a sense of voluntarism, duty to the common good (embodied in the state), and the conception of an idealized "class and color blind" government.[9] Both organizations eventually came to embrace corporate capitalism, mass production, and new technological advancements. They both felt these changes could be harnessed to serve the nation and the common good. Both saw their forward-thinking Americanism to be Progressive. To be sure, as historian Maureen Flanagan points out, there was not one Progressivism but many "Progressivisms."[10] There were Progressive circles with which neither organization would feel comfortable, such as those dedicated to pacifism, pluralism or temperance, but the general reorientation of citizenship and the role of the government in society wrought by the Progressive Era and First World War undergirded how both the Legion and the AFL operated in the 1920s.

The central argument of this chapter is that in Americanism, as understood by both the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor, one can discern not only a sense of what both organizations were against but also a loose vision of what a new type of citizenship, political and economic, might look like. The inspiration for this vision came not from a distant *laissez-faire* past, but rather the more recent experiences of the Progressive Era and WWI.

[9] Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling."
[10] Maureen A. Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s - 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (December 1982), 113-132.

Americanism was an active ideology and one that had class and gendered aspects alongside the racial and ethnic features discussed above. The most instructive work in this regard has been Erica Ryan's *Red War on the Family.* There she puts forward an analysis of the gendered components of the Red Scare and its continuation into the 1920s. Ryan's work fits within the framework of understanding how unofficial anticommunism, expressed via patriotic organizations, intellectuals, the media, labor unions and beyond, carried and even expanded the scope of anticommunist ideology beyond the official Red Scare. Such organizations were crucial in developing conservative ideology in the 1920s. A "precursor" to modern conservatism, a "conservative consensus" of "social conservatives, economic elites, and 'super patriots'" organized around a "capitalist Americanism" based on "antiradicalism, antimodernism, and antiradicalism."[11] Ryan argues that the fear of Bolsheviks stemmed, in part, from the threat the regime posed to the patriarchal family structure. At the same time, it was during the 1920s that capitalism became actively linked with Americanism and patriarchy. Thus, for Ryan the term Americanism implies much more than just "loyalty" or Anglo-Saxonism and become inextricably linked to capitalism and patriarchal structures.[12]

This analysis is essential because neither the AFL nor the Legion, with its denunciations of "both the classes and the masses," saw itself as specifically defending capitalism, at least not in the early 1920s. The American Federation of Labor also saw

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[11] Erica J. Ryan, *Red War on the Family: Sex, Gender, and Americanism in the First Red Scare* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016). While one might be able to challenge whether "antimodernism" accurately describes the Legion and the AFL, it is certainly true that both groups were driven by antiradicalism and, each in their way, a type of antifeminism. This can be supplemented with important works describing the activities of conservative women, such as can be seen in groups like the American Legion Ladies Auxiliary. See Kim E. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2001) and Blee, *Women of the Klan.*

[12] Ryan, *Red War on the Family.*

itself as being progressive, rather than reactionary, on gender issues. Yet the two organizations played an important role in shaping and strengthening both capitalism and patriarchy after WWI. On gender, it is easier to see how the Legion, an organization dominated by veterans, would be largely built around a particularly martial vision of masculinity. Kim E. Nielson's article "What's a Patriotic Man to Do?: Patriotic Masculinities of the Post-WWI Red Scare" uses Ole Hanson, the famous Red-baiting mayor of Seattle, the American Legion, and the idealized male union worker as case studies to discover the "specific behaviors and beliefs" that made up a particular "gendered form of male citizenship" that not only excluded women but many men as well.[13] This gendered vision of citizenship colored how members of both the Legion and the AFL understood Americanism.

Though the Legion had a Women's Auxiliary, and the AFL made some effort to organize women workers, they often gave women secondary consideration and subservient roles. Historian Philip Foner argues that the AFL payed lip service to women's issues, but often failed to fight with much vigor for organizing women. Furthermore, through its support for militarism, a family wage, and, as Ryan points out, the Own Your Own Home movement, the AFL, in practice, did more to bolster patriarchal capitalism than undermine it.[14]

Finally, with specific regard to class, this chapter will argue that the rejection of "class conflict" and promotion of "class cooperation" by both organizations was, itself, a class move. The Americanism and Square Deal ideology espoused by the Legion and the

[13] Kim E. Nielsen, "What's a Patriotic Man to Do?: Patriotic Masculinities of the Post-WWI Red Scare," *Men and Masculinities* 6, no. 3 (January 2004).
[14]See Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, vol. 8-10 and Ryan, *Red War on the Family*.

AFL placed them decidedly on the right in American politics, acting as a bulwark against challenges to American capitalism and the prevailing social order. As mentioned earlier, however, this does not mean that they were merely reactionary entities. Instead, they were dynamic organizations that adapted key ideas of Progressivism to a more conservative conception of citizenship and corporatist relations of production. Alec Campbell, following the lead of Adam Prezeworski, argues that a crucial preliminary step in the "battle between classes" occurs in a "battle over class," where the very legitimacy of utilizing class as a concept is contested. Campbell posits that the Legion "fought the 'battle over class' by denying the importance of class as a social concept and proposing 'Americanism' as an alternative."[15] This paper will proceed with this understanding in mind. Perhaps more controversially, it will also argue that the American Federation of Labor, at least since WWI, took a similar position.

It is important to understand what is meant by the argument that Legion and the AFL conceived of Americanism as an "alternative." It must be reiterated that when both groups used the language of "Americanism" they invoked the prevalent racial, ethnic, and gendered ideas as described by the authors discussed above. Yet there was more to their Americanism. The writings of the two organizations make clear that when they talked of Americanism, they described a dedication to the national interest above individual, group, international, or, perhaps worst of all, class interest. The problem with radical Socialists, what made them so dangerous, was their call for a loyalty to class, international solidarity, and world peace (at least in regard to "imperialist" war) that was fundamentally at odds with the "nation."

[15] Campbell, "Sociopolitical Origins," 1.

But it was not just the Socialists who were subject to the ire of the Legion and the AFL, though they certainly took a disproportionate share of it. There were also important criticisms of economic elites who placed their own profit above that of the wellbeing of the people or the nation. Both "slackers," those who found a way to avoid military service, and *"*war profiteers," individuals, usually wealthy businessmen, who exploited wartime conditions to enrich themselves, were violating the principles of Americanism. In this, there are very important connections between Americanism and the Square Deal, a term hearkening back to the Progressive Era and Theodore Roosevelt. Both the Legion and the AFL spoke often about a Square Deal. The Square Deal meant that both labor and capital had the right to be treated fairly and both had the responsibility to subordinate their specific interests to what was best for the nation.[16] By the late 1920s this meant an implicit recognition that the massive changes in technology and corporatization of America that had taken place were here to stay. For the AFL, the only way a Square Deal could be realized was via a responsible organization representing workers and negotiating in good faith with management.[17] The Legion, despite its reputation as an anti-labor organization, officially agreed with this, so long as organized labor remained loyal and rooted out any hint of Socialism.

Where the two institutions differed was in their beliefs about the role of government in ensuring this class cooperation. The Legion saw no problem in the use of government negotiation, or force, to ensure that labor relations remained well within the

[16] See Jean M. Yarbrough, *Theodore Roosevelt and the American Political Tradition* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2012).

[17] When William Green took over the AFL, he went so far as to try to convince the business community that organized labor, but only those organized along the craft lines of the AFL, could be a positive good for the nation's economic health by ensuring efficiency, quality, and the suppression of radical demands. See Phelan, *William Green.*

boundaries of loyal Americanism. The AFL was less enamored by the idea of government interference in labor relations, preferring to keep relations voluntary. Nonetheless, the AFL had grown tremendously close to the U.S. government during WWI and steadily lowered its aversion to state interference. The ultimate result was a vision of labor relations that reified the corporation, scientific management, and the increased role of the federal government while completely rejecting "class conflict" as an organizing principle. In its place, they preferred the development of a corporatist class cooperation. To achieve this end, AFL unionists and Legionnaires needed to be vigilant in order to root out radicalism and those reluctant to assimilate and to actively foster a renewed sense of national and civic identity. The national, economic, political, and social goals of both organizations were, with a few exceptions, mutually reinforced in this vision of Americanism.

The American Legion and the American Federation of Labor took the concept of Americanism beyond race, ethnicity, and politics and into the realm of class. More accurately, their Americanism was of a professed "class-blind" variety. They specifically described their vision of cooperation between capital and labor, and the rejection of class consciousness, in terms of Americanism. Thus, when describing this variety of Americanism, this paper will use the term "Square Deal Americanism." Square Deal Americanism refers to the conceptualizing of the Progressive Era Rooseveltian usage of a Square Deal between capital and labor as being inextricably linked with civic Americanism, anticommunism, and a rejection of class as a basis of organization. Instead, loyal citizens were to place special interests aside in deference to a higher nationalism. The American Legion, believing itself to be a living example of a cross-class, class-

rejecting organization, explicitly denounced appeals to class solidarity or the political organizing around class issues to be narrow and unpatriotic. Thus, it rejected radical labor unions, Socialists, and internationalists on the one hand as well as businessmen who placed their own drive for profits above the needs of the nation. For instance, Legionnaires looked down upon "war profiteers" and wealthy, war-avoiding "slackers." When capitalists refused to negotiate with bona fide trade unions, so long as those unions were themselves free of Communist influence and had no ambitions beyond improving the living standards of their craft unionists, or were unwilling to sacrifice in times of national need, such as in times of war, they fell afoul of Square Deal Americanism.

By the 1920s, the AFL took a similar position. Though its rhetoric did not so obviously reject class the way the Legion's did and appeals to the struggle of the working class against greedy employers still filled its publications, it nonetheless shared the same basic framework of Square Deal Americanism with the Legion. Samuel Gompers's (and later William Green's) AFL did not see itself as an instrument of power representing the working class as whole but rather representing a very specific, craft-based membership that excluded large swaths of the working class. The AFL rejected Socialism and sought to position itself as a counterweight to corporate excesses within, and to the ultimate strengthening of, American capitalism. It saw itself as an organization that placed country before class, going so far as to explicitly reject the idea of an independent labor party like one found as a crucial part of the European labor movement of the day. Each group saw itself as "progressive" and "forward-thinking," embracing New Era economics, the inevitability and desirability of the Corporation, complete with its Taylorist rationality,

and modern technological advancements. Each positioned itself to help shape the direction of America in the image of a Square Deal Americanism.

Square Deal Americanism and the Progressive Era

. Both the unionists of the AFL and the Legionnaires called themselves "progressives." Labors leaders regularly spoke of the AFL as a "progressive and constructive" force dedicated to the "maintenance of American ideas and American ideals."[18] A James W. Kline, president of the International Brotherhood of Blacksmiths called it a "constructive force, an honorable progressive movement."[19] In 1919, Asher Howard, a House of Representatives member from Minnesota, wrote Gompers and praised him as the "leader of the Loyal, Progressive, Sane Laborers of this country."[20] Though "progressive" was a rather nebulous term, it is still telling that the organization repeatedly self-identified in this way. As supporters of the abolition of child labor, investors in community service programs, and proponents of initiative, referendum, and the direct election of senators, as well as, unsurprisingly, advocating for legislation that eliminated barriers to union organizing (and opposed courts' use of injunctions as well as the interpretation of anti-trust legislation as applying to labor unions), the AFL was in line with a number of different Progressive Era-projects.[21] Gompers and the AFL became

[18] "Report of Legislative Committee," *American Federationist* 28 (1921), 789-792.
[19] James W. Kline, "Blacksmiths Must Go Ahead," *American Federationist* 30 (1923), 745.
[20] Asher Howard to Samuel Gompers, August 25, 1919, RG1-015, Box 6, Folder 19, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.
[2121] Philip Foner offers a somewhat contrary view. He cites the narrow focus of the AFL on labor issues as evidence of their disinterest in Progressive movements as a whole. Though it was certainly true that the AFL was uncomfortable with government regulation of areas they felt to be the jurisdiction of the union, such as wages, hours, and working conditions, they nonetheless were active in supporting other Progressive measures and politicians, particularly Woodrow Wilson. No single "progressive" organization was in full agreement on all programs considered to be Progressive. There was immense variety among Progressive Era movements, many of them at odds with one another. See Philip Foner, *AFL in the Progressive Era, 1910-1915*, Vol. 5 of *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1980), 88-90.

vocal supporters of Woodrow Wilson's presidential candidacies, preferring his more "volunteerist" approach to reigning in corporate power, relying less on government regulation and more on arbitration between the responsible elements of both capital and labor.[22] Gompers continued to support Wilson during the war and in his attempt at building the League of Nations, remaining a steadfast ally and regular correspondent until his death.

The AFL archives contain a newspaper article from May 26, 1919 which features a large image of Theodore Roosevelt and praises AFL president William Green for being like Roosevelt in speaking softly while wielding a "big stick."[23] Further connections to Roosevelt can be found in the AFL's consistent allusions to a Square Deal. Jean Yarbrough's book on the political thought of Theodore Roosevelt explains how his Square Deal was designed to "steer a course between the envy and resentment of the poor and the arrogance and contempt of the wealthy" while introducing "sensible reforms" in order to "avert the class warfare that had doomed earlier republics." In practice, this meant the government playing a role in mediating between capital and labor, much as Roosevelt himself had done with the coal strike of 1902.[24] Though Gompers and Green were uncomfortable with this much government interference in labor relations, preferring the government lift restrictions on labor and to allow the AFL to be the de facto leader of responsible organized labor that would then go on to uphold its end of the Square Deal, they shared a faith in the ends sought by Roosevelt. In 1922, as the U.S. economy showed

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[22] Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made It* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 265-365.
[23] *San Diego Union*, May 26, 1929, RG01-015, Box 6, Folder 19, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.
[24] Jean M. Yarbrough, *Theodore Roosevelt and the American Political Tradition* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2012), 187, 253.

signs of recovery from its postwar slump, an AFL official praised the stalwart "conservative and constructive policy" of the union throughout the downturn, and its maintenance of "sound economic principles" before concluding that, moving forward, "a square deal to all interests will bring prosperity, peace, and harmony."[25] The *American Federationist* published a speech given by Herbert Hoover in 1921 praising the regulatory system in place in America to check individualist capitalism and provide a "square deal" to all. Hoover called for a "new economic system" based on these cooperationist principles that was based on neither Adam Smith nor Karl Marx, which he thought would be a "priceless gift to the twentieth century."[26] One final example can be seen in the AFL's commitment to an "educational square deal" which involved not only unionizing teachers but also lobbying for increased funding for education, yet another important Progressive plank.[27] The legacy of the Progressive Era and the Square Deal ran deep in the veins of the AFL.

Before turning to the Legion, it is important to highlight what aspects of Progressive thought were embodied in these organizations and adapted to the cause of conservatism in the 1920s. Though there was no one single Progressive movement, there were nonetheless some assumptions and ideas that undergirded the multitude of movements that operated at the turn of the century. At the core of this Progressivism was two interrelated factors: first, the notion that the forces of government, citizens' organizations, and businesses could, and should, be put to use reshaping society in the interests of a common good and second, that the individual had a civic responsibility to

[25] Edw. I. Hannah, "Never to Perish," *American Federationist* 29 (1922), 36.
[26] Herbert Hoover, "A Plea for Cooperation," *American Federationist* 28 (1921), 35-40.
[27] Charles B. Stillman, "Teachers and Organized Labor," *American Federationist* 26 (1919), 819.

the democratic state and to his or her fellow citizens to work toward a higher good. Christopher Nehls writes of how Americanism shared Progressive assumptions about democracy creating a "common status and identity" to be defended and sustained by civic action.[28] Without a "new public morality," in the words of historian Philip Dray, "that recognized that great wrongs could result…from decisions made by faceless institutions, corporate boards, the courts, and neglectful government agencies" such problems could not be resolved.[29] This meant that "good citizenship was grounded in personal conduct" and focus ought to be placed on "reforming the civic performance of individuals to better operate within the democracy and serve the nation. This focus on the need for greater individual consciousness that one existed in a web of social and economic relationships that well transcended one's local and parochial contexts had been part of Progressive thought since the turn of the century."[30] For labor relations, this meant, again in the words of Dray, "a new openness to the idea that workers and capital might acknowledge the other's necessity" and that "some form of mutualism, the working out of problems, could replace the cyclical tradition of hurtful strikes and class antagonism."[31] This generally Progressive commitment to reforming society on the basis of civil responsibility and labor cooperation formed the background of Square Deal Americanism.

One can see the connection between the Progressive Era and Square Deal Americanism even more clearly in the writings of the American Legion. While the AFL's more Wilsonian Progressivism sat uncomfortably with some of the more statist aspects of

[28] Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling," 95.
[29] Philip Dray, *There Is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America*, anchor books paperback edition. ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 2011), 226-227.
[30] Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling," 181.
[31] Dray, *There is Power in a Union,* 227.

Rooseveltian Progressivism, the Legion traced its ideological legacy direct back to Theodore Roosevelt. The 1919 Paris Caucus concluded with a moment of silence for the late Roosevelt, the delegates honoring the legacy of the former president.[32] Carrying forward his father's legacy, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. was a founding member of the Legion. According to Legion historian Christopher Nehls, the conservative nationalism of the organization was rooted in Roosevelt's New Nationalism and the definitions of citizenship contained therein. In essence, the men of the Legion believed that the American system was fundamentally just and democratic and could only continue to be so if Americans remained vigilant and adhered to their civil responsibilities to state and society. Nehls explains that "Legionnaires reasserted the idea that political participation in the United States had rules to follow based on fealty to the democratic principles and ideas upon which the nation was founded and Americans' common civic identities were based." Such ideas, he continues, were "critical to the development of a modern American nationalism," which was part of a "political culture" that "reinforced a conservative, classless vision of American citizenship that backed existing political power relations."[33]

In his dissertation on the Legion, Nehls further argues that America "did not favor one class, region, race, or ethnic group but provided equal citizenship rights to all…The Legion began a discursive trend in American conservatism that defined the limits of belonging to the American nation very broadly but the requirements of citizenship quite narrowly, allowing for a kind of race and color-blind conception of citizenship that could

[32] Pencak, *For God and Country*, 62.
[33] Christopher Nehls, "'Treason is Treason': The Iowa American Legion and the Meaning of Disloyalty after World War I," *The Annals of Iowa* 66, no. 2 (Spring 2007), 159-160.

mask systemic problems and invalidate the political movements of those seeking to solve those problems."[34] This is similar to George L. Berry's statements in "The Legion and Labor," when he described Americanism as following the principles of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution and argued that problems in the nation arose not due to flaws in those documents but in the misinterpretation and misapplication of them.[35] This style of thinking did much to bolster the specific arguments put forward by the Legion and the AFL, especially as general prosperity and "normalcy" returned to America by the mid-1920s and Communism became ever more remote.

With anti-capitalism thoroughly marginalized but the fear of corporate malfeasance rising, the Legion, like the AFL, made impassioned arguments for a Square Deal approach to citizenship and labor relations along the lines advocated by their hero Roosevelt. A Square Deal was synonymous with "justice, fair play" and "equality before the law for rich and poor, labor and capitalist."[36] Legion writings are full of references to square dealings among individuals, mostly men. The Square Deal for the Legion had a gendered component, with a Square Deal the desired outcome of "rational" negotiations between men. In a 1925 article denouncing those men who avoided service during the war and who managed to live comfortably while other men served, the author wrote of how public opinion had "improved in the sense of the square deal to the manhood of the land."[37] The Legion also regularly called for a Square Deal in education, demanding greater funding and support from the government, as well as for immigrants, particularly those who fought alongside the U.S. during the war, by providing English and civic

[34] Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling," 7.
[35] George L. Berry, "The Legion and Labor," *American Federationist* 29 (1922), 680-681.
[36] Quotes in Nehla, "Grand and Glorious Feeling," 98.
[37] Frederick Palmer, "The Things That Count," *American Legion Weekly* 7, no. 1 (1925), 9.

education, provided the foreigner was willing to Americanize and did not harbor radical ideas.[38] For both the Legion and the AFL, the Square Deal meant everything from a general sense of good faith negotiating between individuals to a model for public policy and labor relations. For the good of the nation and the general welfare, as they conceived it, the Square Deal meant recognizing the legitimacy of the demands of the other while being willing to compromise one's own desires in the interest of a fair settlement that denied the supremacy of any special interest. Yet, it must be reiterated, the good faith Square Deal bargaining idealized by the AFL and Legion could only take place among bona fide organizations dedicated to preserving public order. Those who sought to subvert public order, such as racial justice activists, Communists, and those who abstained from participating in the martial type of citizenship lauded by the men of the Legion and the AFL, such as pacifists, conscientious objectors, and "slackers," were beyond the scope of the Square Deal.

Further evidence that, despite their conservatism, the Legion and the AFL were far from reactionary comes from their embrace of modernism, specifically in the realms of consumerism and technology. Both organizations generally embraced the structural readjustments then taking place in American industry as large corporations, mass assembly line-style production, increased concern for efficiency and the rationalization of industry, and mass consumption – complete with a marked increasing in advertising and public relations efforts – rapidly became regular features of American life.[39] In 1921, George Berry stated before the Third National Convention of the American Legion:

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[38] Arthur Woods, "Practical Americanism," *American Legion Weekly* 2, no. 20 (1920), 5-6.

[39] A tremendous amount of literature exists on the New Era changes to American capitalism, which have variously been described as "Monopoly Capitalism," a "Managerial Revolution," "Corporate Liberalism," etc. For just a few examples, see Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism: The Degradation of*

> My friends, disabuse your minds of the fact of the statements that have gone abroad that the trade union movement has closed its eyes to readjustment. The man who closes his eyes to industrial readjustment, whether it is the employer or the employee organization, is a fool and not deserving of the sympathetic consideration of the fair citizenship in our country. We must ever stand for readjustment, because readjustment in the main means progress, and the Legion can be satisfied readjustment means the conservation of industry in America and it is the duty of every man, employer or employee, to join in a constructive readjustment of the industry of this country to the end that justice might apply, to the end that our industrial organization may continue uninterrupted, to the end that there may come to this country a stability, industrial stability, that means the very foundation of our republic.[40]

Fair citizenship, national stability, and the principles of republicanism combined in support of these changes. As early as 1920, Samuel Gompers came out in favor of "every possible device which will increase the productivity of human labor and increase its standards," particularly after his experience of working closely with the U.S. to manage the war economy. He accepted the need for such changes in production so that all could be prosperous. These changes could only be accomplished "with the assistance of science," and therefore he stressed "there can be no objection to really scientific

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Work in the Twentieth Century, 25th anniversary ed. (New York: Monthly Review, 1999); Alfred D Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business by Alfred D. Chandler, Jr* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1977); Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice*, 297-333; and Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 56-97.

[40] *Summary of Proceedings from the Third Annual Convention of the American Legion, Kansas City, October 31, November 1 and 2* (1921), 14. American Legion Digital Archives.

management."[41] He felt, however, that this process should be done in cooperation with organized labor so that the rationalization of production did not lead to the degradation of human labor. A Square Deal for labor required that technological advancements lead to a general prosperity in which both labor and capital would share rather than the deskilling and cheapening of labor that could occur to the benefit of capital.

If Gompers saw the changes to American industry as inevitable and something for labor to adjust itself to meet the challenges of, his successor William Green saw New Era capitalism as a positive good. Craig Phelan, Green's biographer, argues that he took a chance in the 1920s to try to reshape capital-labor relations along an ethical basis rooted in his vision of Christianity. To this end, he led a "massive but ineffective marketing campaign" during the 1920s to "sell unionism to industry and the public."[42] Using the media technology and marketing techniques available at the time, Green sought to gain "respectability and acceptance" through the selling of the idea of "union-management cooperation" in order to "make production more efficient."[43] Rather than fighting the changes to American industry, which, if not handled properly, could bring significant hardship to an already flagging union movement, Green (and Gompers) sought to embrace it and try to position themselves within it. While many historians, Phelan included, see this as a defensive measure, it is equally true that such a move was consistent with the ideology that the AFL nurtured at least since World War I, if not before.

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[41] Samuel Gompers, *Labor and the Employer* (New York: Arno, 1971), 301-303.
[42] Craig Phelan, *William Green: Biography of a Labor Leader* (Albany, N.Y.: State Univ. of New York, 1989), 29-31.
[43] Ibid.

When Green became president of the AFL, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* stated that "capital has nothing to fear" from William Green.[44] Under his leadership, the AFL became much more comfortable with the explicit embrace of capitalism. Green's regular radio program, called "The Worker and His Money" was sponsored by the Wall Street investment firm Halsey, Stuart and Company.[45] On October 6, 1925, George Berry spoke before the Kansas City convention of the American Legion and stated: "capitalism, in effect, is simply the recognition of individual and collective individuals in the ownership of property…I stand for the system that has made America great – call it capitalism if you wish."[46] By the end of the decade, the AFL no longer considered capitalism a necessary evil but a positive good. Green took to describing the role of unions, in terms indicative of an internalization of consumerist values, as a guarantor of "comfort," "opportunities," "independence," "more recreation and leisure." For the ability of the American worker to enjoy such privileges, he credited the cordial relations between capital and labor, since American workers "do not see their interests as necessarily in conflict with other groups in industry or the community. They see an interrelation of interests that points to the conference table, joint agreements and cooperation in the problems of production so that the benefits of efficient production may be shared by all."[47] Green's AFL wholeheartedly embraced capitalism and presented unionism not as a challenge or alternative to it, but as a means to spread its promised benefits to a wider population.

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[44] Melvyn Dubofsky and Joseph Anthony McCartin, *Labor in America: A History*, 9th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 334-247.
[45] Ibid.
[46] *Summary of Proceedings of the Seventh Annual National Convention of the American Legion* (October 1925), 16. American Legion Digital Archive.
[47] William Green, "Idealism of the American Trade Movement," RG1-015, Box 6, Folder 19, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.

William Green even attempted to popularize a new AFL wage policy. Exhaustively touting his vision of employee-employer cooperation, recognizing that capitalists had the right to own and control productive property and that unions had a vital role to play in providing valuable skilled labor, acting as a bulwark against labor unrest, and partnering with capital to increase efficiency and productivity, Green presented a change in the union's approach to wage issues. He willingly accepted that wages ought to be tied to productivity and argued that a maintenance of high wages was economically necessary in order to avoid overproduction.[48] The assumption of such positions are an indication of how much the AFL came to accept and embrace the changes of the 1920s.

The American Legion also embraced this new world of technological advancements and consumerism. Legionnaires were decidedly unlike the technology-fearing conservative citizens studied by Robert and Hellen Merrell Lynd in *Middletown.* Instead, they attempted to utilize the worlds of public relations, media, and advertising to spread their message of nationalism and civic responsibility. Terry Radtke wrote that "the American Legion defined almost every aspect of its work as public relations."[49] The Legion had its own publicity division, news service, film service, radio station, and speakers' bureau.[50] The *American Legion Weekly* was a major component of the organization's public relations activities, carrying a wide range of content to hundreds of thousands of subscribers.[51]

[48] Craig Phelan, *William Green: Biography of a Labor Leader* (Albany, N.Y.: State Univ. of New York Pr., 1989), 31-32.
[49] Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment," 31-32.
[50] Ibid, 58-66.
[51] Ibid.

As the decade progressed, so too did the Legion's attitude toward capitalism and consumption. During the immediate postwar years, Americanism and citizenship was usually presented in terms of sacrifice and commitment. The ideal citizen-solider was a hard-working man whose asceticism was a sign of his patriotism. Though the patriarchal overtones never diminished, the Legion began to draw connections between wealth, consumption, comfort and Americanism. An excellent example of this connection can be seen in an image and accompanying article published in the July 1928 edition of the *American Legion Monthly*. Here, a suited man can be seen sitting in his armchair, presumably in his study evidenced by the bookshelf behind him. On his lap is a young boy and resting on the back of the chair behind him is his doting, bejeweled wife. The caption below the image states: "A good home and good health contribute more than anything to a man's enjoyment and usefulness." The article goes on to describe what a "good American" is. A "good American" denies that all rich men are crooks and that all laboring men are reds, a "good American" recognizes that a "square deal" is more important than "all men shall be equal," and a "good American" minds his own business.[52] The article concludes that the "chief business of life" is "enjoyment."[53] This more inward-focused conception of Americanism is a far cry from the heady early vigilante days. By 1928, the country was quite prosperous for the middle-class men of Legion and the threat of Communism had significantly diminished. By the end of the decade, the Legion had embraced not just the technological innovations of the age but also the deep connection between Americanism and capitalism on both a systemic and personal level.

[52] T.D. Skidmore, "What is a Good American?" in *American Legion Monthly* 5, no. 1 (1928), 11, 64.
[53] Ibid.

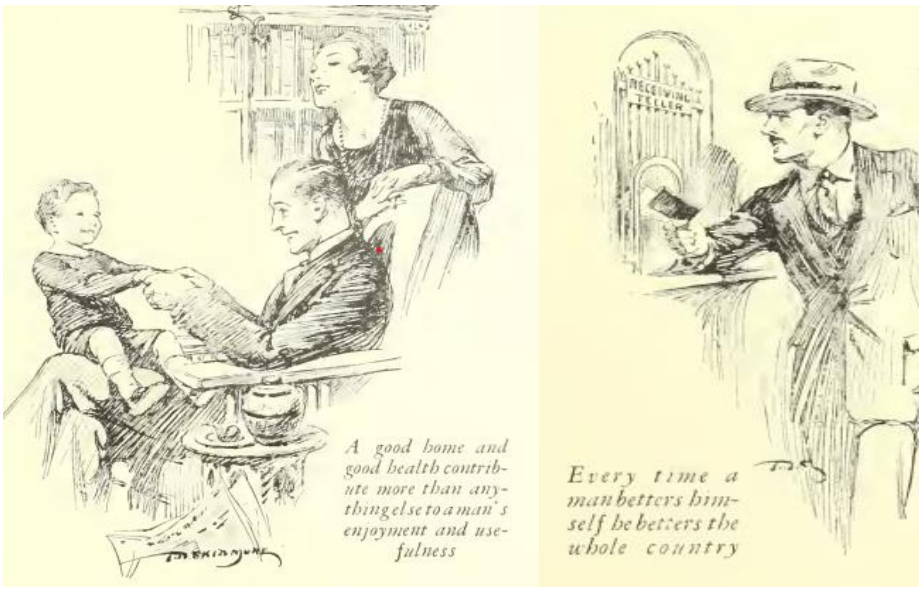

Figure 4. The Good American. From T.D. Skidmore, "What is a Good American?" in *American Legion Monthly* 5, no. 1 (1928), 11, 64.

Square Deal Americanism and Capitalism, Race and Gender

Since Square Deal Americanism meant a rejection of organizations formed around special interests – as opposed to organizations who place the betterment of their nation before the immediate needs of their group – its adherents eyed women's suffrage and radical union organizations as well as racial justice with suspicion. On the one hand, organizing on the basis of gender or race violated the Legion and the AFL's race-, class-, and gender-blind conceptions of a higher form of citizenship. On the other hand, in practice their idealized citizenship bolstered the existing racial and gendered relations extant in the U.S. of the 1920s. Despite claims to advocate for racial minorities (with the exception of Asians) and for women, both organizations took positions which strengthened gender inequality and racial division while defining attempts to organize for greater equality as dangerous and radical.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the American Federation of Labor did allow the organization of black workers. However, when such organizing occurred, African Americans often ended up in lesser unions. Resolutions calling for greater equality within the organization were frequently voted down or ignored by union leaders and delegates during conventions. Though Gompers feared the competitive pressure of unorganized black workers, the pressure from union locals, particularly those in the South who rejected integration, combined with the AFL's historic association with white, skilled labor, led him to be less than enthusiastic about putting his weight behind racial equality. For example, when the International Association of Machinists, a union that barred black workers, requested a charter, Gompers refused, feeling the discrimination would "hurt white machinists." As a compromise, the IAM removed the specific racist clause from their constitution while the AFL allowed for a "local option" on black admittance.[54] This compromise all but guaranteed that the discrimination would continue.

Nor can the presence of personal prejudice, though admittedly hard to measure, be discounted. AFL leaders operated within the racial ideas of their time. For example, they defended the privileged position of white labor by arguing that native-born whites, being more refined, needed more than the "Asiatics" or Eastern Europeans, who were happier with less.[55] Concerns for the organization of African Americans were often expressed not for reasons of justice or equality, but more out of a concern for the downward pressure the failure to organize black workers could have on white wages. Also, black workers associated with Socialist organizations (where many black workers turned when barred

[54] This event is described by Nick Salvatore in the introduction to Gompers's autobiography. See Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor: An Autobiography*, ed. Nick Salvatore (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, 1984), xxiv.
[55] Dawley, *Struggles for Justice*, 279.

from AFL-affiliated unions), like A. Philip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, were marginalized by the AFL, earning the federation the ire of men like Chandler Owen, who criticized the AFL in his newspaper *The Messenger*.[56] Still, the role of the AFL in organizing black workers in early twentieth century should not be downplayed. Gompers believed that the organization of black workers would take away the ability of employers to exploit the racialized labor arbitrage, making a Square Deal for labor easier to attain.

Like the AFL, the American Legion was officially open to black membership but left the question of race up to local posts. In some of these locals, as historian Robbie Lieberman notes, "plans were made for organizing armed posses to put down any black insurrection." This is because agitation for racial equality was often red baited. Even the FBI believed protests in the African American community to be caused by "red propaganda."[57]

In other locals, the relationship between Legionnaires and African Americans were a bit more complicated. There were a number of integrated locals as well as segregated, all-black locals. Still, the Legion was not above racist tropes, evidenced by a 1922 cartoon and story published in the *American Legion Weekly* called "They Also Served."[58] Here, a story recounting the wartime exploits of black soldiers was presented in a way which made the black protagonists seem uneducated, lazy, and childish. It

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[56] Chandler Owen, "The Right and Left Wing Interpreted (1919)" in Paul M. Heideman, *Class Struggle and the Color Line: American Socialism and the Race Question 1900-1930* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2018), 172-176.

[57] Robbie Lieberman, "The Long Black and Red Scare: Anti-Communism and the African-American Freedom Struggle," in *Little "Red Scares": Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*, by Robert Justin Goldstein (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2016), 261-288.

[58] For example, when speaking of the postwar situation in Germany, Legionnaire Marquis James wrote disparagingly of the "uncivilized African negroes" that occupied the Rhine region. See Marquis James, *A History of the American* Legion (New York: William Green, 1923), 171.

centered around Wildcat Marsden, the "greatest black-face character in American literature since Uncle Tom." Dialogue was written in a way to mockingly stereotype speech of African Americans. The article also did not shy away from using the term "nigger."[59] Nonetheless, the story does provide recognition for the role played by African American servicemen and portrayed the white lieutenant ordering the black men around as pompous. In this way, it is representative of how the Legion approached the issue of race in America.

Though, as Nehls reports, there were thousands of Legionnaires who also held membership in the Ku Klux Klan, the official attitude of the Legion differed from that of Klan with regard to race.[60] The Legion felt that the service of African Americans in the war granted them some place in American life, even if it was not as the full equal of white men. The Legion did not regard race as an immutable, fixed matter of biology. Though they did believe some races were more "fit" for Americanism than others, they generally believed that all could be Americanized with proper dedication, education, and behavior modification. The Legion stressed the desirability of a multi-ethnic society, so long as all followed the principles of Americanism.[61]

This can be seen most clearly in the Legion's attitude toward immigrants. Officially, the "problem" with immigrants was not racial inferiority (with the exception of Asians), per se, but rather the potential for disloyalty. In keeping with the Square Deal Americanist rejection of special interests, the Legion feared aliens would place loyalty to

[59]Hugh Wiley, "They Also Served," *American Legion Weekly* 4, no. 12 (March 24, 1922), 7-8. Interestingly, this article appeared just before George Berry's "The Legion's Attitude Toward Labor."
[60] Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling," 182-215. This indicates that there were a large number of Legionnaires who differed from the national organization at least on the question of race. Still, for years the national Legion refused to condemn the Klan by name, even though some states did.
[61] Ibid.

themselves, their families, or to their country of origin above loyalty to America. This is why "alien slackers" were a particular target of Legion rage. The Legion kept records of those who avoided military service by withdrawing naturalization papers but continuing to work. The Legion then made this information available to employers.[62] The organization held seemingly contradictory attitudes about wanting to restrict new immigration while expending effort to support the Americanization of those already in America. This attitude helps explain why the Legion supported both immigration restriction *and* naturalization efforts while continuing to call for a Square Deal for immigrants.[63]

Like its stance on race, the American Federation of Labor officially allowed and supported the organization of women workers, while simultaneously making only half-hearted efforts at doing so. It also supported legislation and philosophical principles that strengthened, rather than challenged, patriarchal structures. For example, the AFL supported minimum wage laws and hour restrictions for women.[64] Though such legislation was favored by some women's organizations, others opposed it on the grounds that it limited women's prospects for employment and was rooted in ideas about women's inferiority, hence the need for special protection. Similarly, the AFL was a staunch advocate of the "family wage." It stressed the need for American workingmen (often understood as *white* workingmen, since Asians and African-Americans were thought to be content with subpar standards of living) to earn enough money for their

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid. See also, Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment," 369-377.
[64] "Address Delivered by Hon. William Green, President, American Federation of Labor, Opening of Brym Mawr Summer School, Bryn Mawr, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, June 14, 1925." RG01-015, Box 2, Folder 12. George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.

wives to be able to be full-time housewives.[65] Gompers supported women's suffrage on principle, since politics surrounding "food prices, pure food laws, municipal sanitation, building regulations, school laws, child labor laws, and an almost endless list" were of vital importance to women in the home.[66]

Gompers also feared the downward pressure on men's wages that unorganized women in industry threatened. Early in his career he stated: "We know to our regret that too often are wives, sisters, and children brought into the factories and workshops only to reduce the wages and displace the labor of men – the heads of families."[67] Thus, Gompers maintained that "the development and organization of the economic power of women wage-earners were essential to the permanent economic betterment of all."[68] This commitment to unionizing women sat somewhat uncomfortably with his dedication to the "family wage" as well as with his personal attitude toward women. Though he wrote words of praise for many women activists, he occasionally let slip a condescending tone, such as when he described the "simple faith" of Lucy Robbins which "compelled attention."[69] The AFL's record on women was uneven and, at times, contradictory. While officially, if halfheartedly, supporting women's rights and the organization of women workers, it justified such support with fundamentally conservative arguments about a woman's inferiority and ideal role as a housewife and mother.

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[65] Dawley, *Struggles for Justice*, 279. See also

[66] Samuel Gompers, *Labor and the Common Welfare*, comp. Hayes Robbins (New York: Arno, 1969), 107.

[67] Samuel Gompers, *Labor and the Employer* (New York: Arno, 1971), 118. See also Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences*, 2nd ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 19.

[68] Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, 126-129.

[69] Ibid.

Historian Erica Ryan expertly documents the various ways patriarchy and antifeminism combined with Red Scare anticommunism and support for American capitalism in *Red War on the Family.* According to Ryan, one of the places these strands intersected was in the Own Your Own Home (OYOH) movement. Arguing that home ownership inoculated one from Bolshevism, the movement sought to help American workers afford to purchase their own homes. The AFL was a supporter of these efforts. The AFL's Matthew Woll argued that home ownership "will make for a more efficient worker, a more contented and happy family, and a better citizen."[70] As Ryan posits, such arguments were deeply rooted in the desire to strengthen the patriarchal family structure, which was itself inextricably linked to anticommunism and Americanism.

The American Legion also expressed support for home ownership. In 1919, the Legion pressed Congress to pass the American Legion Home Founding Act, which would provide government loans for the development of rural communities and city homes for ex-servicemen.[71] The Legion also shared core assumptions about radicalism and traditional gender relations. In his article "How Red is America?" published in the *American Legion Monthly*, Will Irwin repeated rumors about Communists supporting the nationalization of women. He wrote of how Marxists believed in the "community of women" where women were nothing more than "fine and desirable pieces of property."[72] This stemmed from the liberal marriage and divorce laws, as well as communal living, dining, and childrearing programs, instituted in the Soviet Union, which many Americans

[70] Quoted in Erica J. Ryan, *Red War on the Family: Sex, Gender, and Americanism in the First Red Scare* (Philadelphia]: Temple University Press, 2016), 987.
[71] *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 21 (November 21, 1919), 8; "The American Legion," *New York Times* (December 28, 1919).
[72] Will Irwin, "How Red is America?" in *American Legion Monthly* 1, no. 4 (October 1926), 16.

interpreted as the destruction of the family. Many conservatives argued that sexual modernism was a slippery slope toward Bolshevism, and Bolshevism a harbinger of the nationalizing of women. Ryan argues that this mode of thinking, which posited that the decline of the family meant women would become communal property, was only conceivable because women were seen as private property in the first place. She writes: "antiradicals found themselves openly conceiving of women as a form of property being taken away from individual men and opened up to society as a whole…the fear of free love hinged on fears of men's loss of women more than it did on the loss of women's dignity and self-determination."[73]

The Legion reinforced the idea of women playing a subservient role to male leadership. The Ladies Auxiliary of the American Legion was designed for the wives and daughters of Legionnaires to play this supporting role. It also reinforced the links between masculinity and capitalism. As was argued by many conservatives at the time, capitalism ensured masculinity via the male's "breadwinner" status and, therefore, men ought to defend capitalism.[74] From its beginnings, the Legion took a paternalistic attitude toward women's and children's issues. The ideal citizen was male, almost by default, since the Legionnaire's conception of active citizenship was martial and virile, while their writings made frequent references to manhood and honor. Legionnaire Marquis James's book about the history of the organization quoted a chaplain who described the ideal republic envisioned by the Legion as "the Kingdom of God on Earth where men

[73] Ryan, *Red War on the Family*, 60.
[74] Ibid, 44. See also pg. 183 n.105.

shall be men."[75] Since the Legionnaire's sense of self was forged in war, and only men fought in wars, women could only play an auxiliary role.

Both the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor were overwhelmingly male organizations. It is perhaps unsurprising that their ideas of Americanism and citizenship centered around activities that were almost exclusively male. The Legion and the AFL reinforced, through their activities and rhetoric, the prevailing assumptions about race and gender. They equated calls for racial equality or sexual modernism with radicalism, while masculinity, patriotism, and citizenship they thoroughly linked to capitalism, home ownership, the nuclear family, and the independent business owner, manager, or skilled laborer. Not unlike the multitude of conservative organization operating in the U.S. at the time, the ideal American was white, male, nationalistic, and independent.

Square Deal Americanism and Class

Where the American Legion and the AFL departed from their contemporaries was in their particular conception of Americanism as it pertained to class and labor relations. While most other conservative organizations sought either a reactionary return to a *laissez-faire* past or a full embrace of capital's war against labor through movements such as the American Plan and the open shop, the Legion and the AFL had a more nuanced understanding of productive relations. For both groups, Square Deal Americanism did not mean picking a side in the class war, but rather a denial that any such thing did, or should, exist. It meant rejecting class as a valid organizational paradigm. It also meant suggesting a new vision for labor relations that was rooted in nationalism rather than

[75] James, *History of the American Legion*, 57.

class. But rather than solving the "problem" of class conflict by scoffing at its very existence, they unwittingly took a position that was anything but class-blind and had real implications for class struggles in 1920s America.

In *Capitalism and Social* Democracy, Adam Przeworski argues that "ideological struggle is a struggle *about* class before it is a struggle *among* classes."[76] Alec Campbell applied this concept to the Legion, stating that the organization was not only "indifferent to class organization but supported 'Americanism' as a specific alternative to it, and were therefore directly participating in the battle over class."[77] This important insight frames how Square Deal Americanism is understood here. By putting forward a Square Deal Americanism as an alternative to class conflict, indeed by denying the validity of organizing based on class in the first place, the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor were making an important contribution to the struggle between classes, despite their attempts at class-blindness.

To deny class as a legitimate identity around which to rally is, almost by definition, to support the prevailing class system by discounting the grievances of those who aim to change the existing relations of production. The virulent anticommunism of the Legion and the AFL attest to this. However, this does not mean that that the American Legion, and most certainly the AFL, were simply capitalist henchmen. Yes, there were many Legion posts that acted as strikebreakers and vigilantes, and the AFL leadership did openly embrace capitalism. However, the position of each of these organizations was far more nuanced. Square Deal Americanism recognized that to protect the system,

[76] Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1993), 70.
[77] Alec Campbell, "The Sociopolitical Origins of the American Legion," *Theoretical Sociology* 39 (2010), 1-24.

important changes needed to be made and the relationship between capital and labor needed to be reformed.

> The preamble to the American Legion's constitution read:
>
> For God and Country, we associate ourselves together for the following purposes: To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; to maintain law and order; to foster and perpetuate a one hundred per cent Americanism; to preserve the memories and incidents of our association in the Great War; to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation; *to combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses;* to make right the master of might; to promote peace and good will on earth; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy; to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness (emphasis added).[78]

To be against both the "classes," a reference to the wealthy who place their own desires for profit above the good of the nation, and the "masses," a reference to advocates of reform or revolution in the name of the working class, was to adhere to a Square Deal Americanism. To appeal to class was to place one's own narrow class interests above that of the nation. Marquis James wrote that "class selfishness" was "as wrong and short-sighted as individual selfishness" and stated that the Legion would always "set its face against the supremacy of any class in our American life."[79]

[78] "Committee Reports and Resolutions Adopted at the First National Convention of the American Legion" (November, 1919), 13. Accessed via the American Legion Digital Archive.
[79] James, *History of the American Legion*, 75.

The Legion's antiradical activity has been well documented. Less well known are the well-off targets of the Legion's wrath. If workers calling for, or acting out, a general strike or the occupation of factories were dangerous, so too were the greedy employers who risked allowing a situation to descend into anarchy by refusing to negotiate with bona fide union organizations and to respect the legitimacy of their demands. In the years immediately following the war, Legion literature made frequent references to "war profiteers" who took advantage of the nation's involvement in the war to make exorbitant profits. They also heaped scorn upon those who were derelict in their duty to serve the nation during wartime and/or who, despite being able-bodied, hid behind their wealth.[80] One such person was Grover Cleveland Bergdoll. Bergdoll was the son of a German immigrant who inherited a large amount of money from his father's brewing business. Bergdoll, the "millionaire slacker of Philadelphia," who was arrested for dodging the draft but escaped, lived a luxurious life on the lam that included burlesque shows, fine food, and fast automobiles. That he was a German immigrant, rich, and a draft dodger made him the Legion's personification of an un-American. They offered a $500 reward for his capture.[81]

Another illustration of the Legion's "classes and masses" approach can be seen in the macabre humor of a 1919 cartoon. In a picture captioned as "Suggestion no.100,002 for Stimulating Attendance at Local Post Meetings: Hang a Few of These Birds," gallows

[80] In 1919, the Legion published an article exposing over 2,000 "alien slackers" who had avoided military service by withdrawing their naturalization papers. The Legion demanded their discovery and deportation. A cartoon attached to the article shows a large broom with the words "American Legion" written on the handle sweeping three individuals, labelled "alien slacker," "bolshevki," and "I.W.W." off of a dock labeled "U.S." and into the sea. The text below the image says "make it a clean sweep." See Charles D. Kelley, "A Starting Point for Slacker Drives: 2,000 Names, Addresses and Records Are Known Still Linger in Land They Renounced" in *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 17 (October 24, 1919), 8-9,33-34.
[81] Frederic L. Waters, "A New Act in the Bergdoll Farce: What Will the Investigation into the Escape of America's Arch Draft Dodger Disclose?" in *American Legion Weekly* 2, no. 20 (June 11, 1920), 1, 7-8.

were depicted with a line of people waiting their turn to be hanged. On the scaffold was a disheveled man labeled as an "alien slacker." Next in line was an "army clothing maker" in a fine suit, followed by a long-haired and bearded "bolshevist," and finally another wealthy man labelled "the bird who invented Canned Willie."[82] The alien, the radical, the slacker, and the war profiteer were all represented in this cartoon. Rich or poor, those who placed their own narrow interests above that of the nation were deemed worthy of hanging. This cartoon provides an example of the early vigilante spirit of the early Legion.

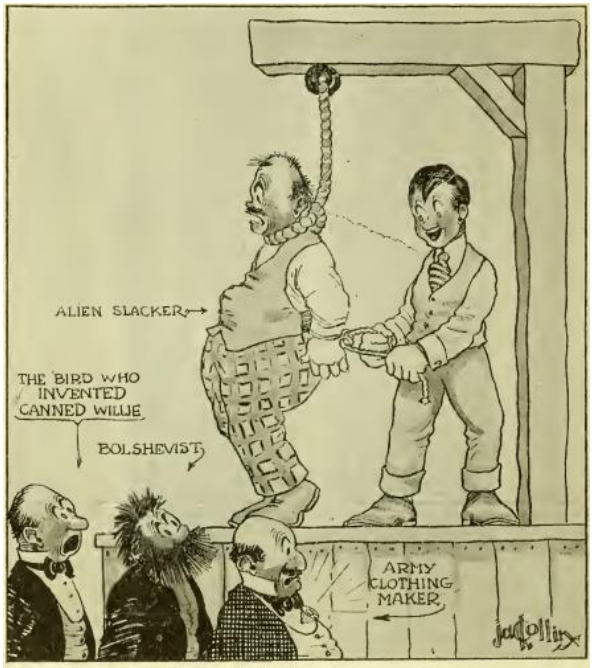

Figure 5. Gallows Humor. From *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 17 (October 24, 1919), 22.

[82] *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 17 (October 24, 1919), 22.

At the core of Square Deal Americanism was the recognition that capital and labor, so far as they were embodied in respectable and patriotic organizations, had legitimate grievances as well as the responsibility to cooperate for the good of the nation – for the sake of civilization itself. The Legion argued that when capital and labor fought, it created space for radicals to advance their agendas. As early as 1919, the Legion published an article in which it recognized that there was a distinction between "reds" and ordinary laborers. It argued that when capital and labor fight, the reds "creep into labor organizations" and magnify the complaints of the worker and have the potential to turn lamentable strikes into unacceptable "reign[s] of terror."[83] The Legion further distanced the "bona fide" trade union movement from radicalism by insisting that much red agitation was the result of the work of "Parlor Bolsheviks" and secret Russian money. Whether stemming from upper-class Communists or radicalized workers, the Legion declared that all "Bolshevik and Red agitators are opposed to all of the institutions of civilization."[84]

But the Legion also placed some blame on the other side of the equation. In 1921, a Legion article warned of the dangers of "classocracy," stating: "when we have a government by classes we have not democracy…democracy is a government by citizens, not by groups. Classes act for class interest. When the rich control the government they rule for the interests of the rich. The manufacturers want things done for the interests of the manufacturers, the farmers want things done for the interests of the farmers, the mine owners for the interest of the mine owners." It went on to demand that the government

[83] "The Awakening of Gulliver: Murder of Legion Men Stirs America to Consideration of Lilliputian Terrorists," *American Legion Weekly* 1, no. 26 (December 26, 1919), 10-11, 32-34.
[84] Ibid.

use the power of law to control the "inordinate increase of the power of wealth."[85] The conception of citizenship implied in Square Deal Americanism required the recognition of interrelated danger of too much power being vested in either capital or labor.

For capitalism to function and not be rent asunder by radicalism, cooperation between capital and labor was key. Indeed, the Legion firmly believed that capital and labor were inseparable.[86] Thus, the Legion looked to the war years, when capital and labor worked together with the government for the functioning of the war economy, as a model for the future. In 1929, National Commander O.L. Bodenhamer addressed the Legion during its annual Armistice Day celebration. Here, he pledged Legion support for the Reed-Wainwright Resolution, which called for the establishment of a committee consisting of representatives from capital, labor, and the state to study the issue of a universal draft in the event of war.[87] This type of cooperation, especially during wartime, was also advanced by George Berry when he spoke before the Legion as early as 1921. He described the AFL's opposition to "direct action" during wartime and the need for "the continuation of industry uninterrupted" by strikes, unless efforts at "conciliation" and "arbitration" failed.[88] This cooperation was part of the service to the nation that had existed in wartime that was to be continued during times of peace. As Berry, a Legionnaire and union man, himself noted, the "duties" of Americans during World War I "didn't end on the eleventh day of November."[89]

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[85] John Spencer Bassett, "Is the World Safer for Democracy?" in *American Legion Weekly* 3, no. 11 (March 18, 1921), 8, 22.
[86] Radkte, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment," 456.
[87] "Address of National Commander O.L. Bodenhamer of the American Legion at the Legion's National Armistice Day exercise at the Washington Auditorium on Armistice Night, November 11, 1929." Accessed via American Legion Digital Archives.
[88] *Summary of Proceedings from the Third Annual Convention of the American Legion, Kansas City, October 31, November 1 and 2* (1921), 13-14. American Legion Digital Archives.
[89] Ibid.

> Speaking before the University of Minnesota in 1926, William Green proclaimed: We want to make America great. We want to preserve American institutions. We want to make out of the working people of the country, as well as the teachers and students, a type of American citizenship that will guarantee in the future a preservation of American traditions and American institutions. We look with apprehension across the sea where class hatred has been developed, where enmity exists between employer and employee; where such conditions exist that we are not surprised to read each morning of some government having been overturned and a revolution taken place. We want stability here.[90]

Like the American Legion, the AFL also believed that class cooperation, rather than conflict, was an antidote to the instability that bred radicalism. A Square Deal Americanism required mutual respect, recognition, and sacrifice from both capital and labor in order to avert this potential crisis. Throughout the 1920s, the main, interconnected goals of the AFL were to maintain the position it had gained in public life during World War I, combat radicalism, and to convince employers and the public alike that AFL-affiliated unions were a loyal and constructive partner in the development of American industry, not its adversary. As the only true representative of the working American, the AFL had resources and expertise on hand to assist not only in the destruction of Socialism, but also to partner with business to ensure that the changing

[90] "Address by William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor to Student Body of the University of Minnesota," May 17, 1926. RG01-015, Box 2, Folder 16, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.

American economic landscape developed in ways that were equitable for both capital and labor.

That an employer would not automatically see the benefit in having such a partner was surprising to William Green. He openly questioned whether business owners who denied unions "think straight about the value of patriotic devotion and love of country."[91] In a speech at Harvard University, Green laid out his own version of the "classes and masses" argument. He denounced those who "preach class war and class struggle" as well as those who see ownership as a right that superseded all other rights. He stated that the AFL refused "to accept the oft-expounded theory that differences between capital and labor…are irreconcilable." Instead, he stressed that the relationship between capital and labor was "an interdependence so fixed and irrevocable" and called for "understanding and cooperation." He argued that cooperation was the "highest point of efficiency" and that the "ages-long conflict between [capital and labor] would be terminated" if only both sides could come to a "proper regard for the functional exercise of each." As for the labor movement, "it prefers the conference table to the strike field," he remarked and "the right of employers to control, direct, and manage industry and to receive a fair return upon invested capital must be willingly conceded." He hoped "through spirit" and "goodwill" and a sense of "joint responsibility," that the business community would agree to recognize organized labor as a partner in the mission for American prosperity.[92]

[91] William Green, "'Labor': Address Before Army Industrial College June 10, 1925, Washington D.C." RG01-015, Box 2, Folder 11, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.
[92] "Address of William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor, Before the Harvard Union, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass." March 20, 1925, RG01-015, Box 2, Folder 10, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.

Though Green preached cooperation as if it were gospel, these ideas can be traced back to the Gompers era. In 1917, in a letter to Woodrow Wilson, Gompers made the argument, as he would many times after, that if the "government and the employer generally" do not "deal with the representatives of the bona fide organized constructive labor movements of the country," they would face "the consequences of the so-called I.W.W. and all that it implies."[93] The "real" labor man, represented by the AFL, was the force that could stand up to the radicals who sought to undermine it. The unionist could not fully succeed in this endeavor, however, if employers tried to undermine, rather than work with, him. This is another iteration of the insurance argument, i.e. that organizations like the AFL were on the front lines of protecting America from radicalism, as well as the argument that conflict between capital and labor creates the conditions in which radicalism grows. Simultaneously, Gompers argued that where radicalism grew, reaction cast a wide net that threatened the gains made by Progressives and the bona fide trade union movement.[94] This vicious circle could only be broken by developing deeper labor-management cooperation.

Though the AFL may not have rhetorically rejected the language of class, they downplayed its importance and, in practice, operated more out of a sense of attaining a Square Deal for labor rather than as a vehicle for working-class power. In 1922, the *American Federationist* ran a review of a book which asked whether class conflict is a necessary category of analysis and claimed to refute the Marxist interpretation of history.

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[93] Samuel Gompers to Woodrow Wilson, August 10, 1917. RG01-03, Box 1, Folder 4, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.
[94] *American Federationist* 30 (1923), 503-508. This comes from a review of a book called "Reds Bring Reaction." The author of the review in the *Federationist* declared it "historically correct" and "profoundly accurate."

The book was given a positive, but not uncritical review in the *Federationist*. The book itself was written by an anti-Marxist Socialist. Though the reviewer was not willing to disregard class struggle in its entirety, he conceded that there were indeed issues between employer and employee. What he said, however, was that "new modes of conciliation and arbitration, state interference, efforts of third parties toward the fostering of industrial goodwill" might temporarily make things better until both sides can be "brought to see eye to eye what is each man's due." He preferred to "lift this struggle to a higher plane; to give it more civilized standards and rules of warfare."[95] The reviewer's vision was less utopian than the Legion's or Green's and can serve as an example of the diversity of opinion within the AFL. Nonetheless, the reviewer preferred to see class cooperation over class conflict and saw in the "modes of conciliation" of his day possibilities to raise the struggle to "higher plane[s]."

The AFL argued that "the best safeguard of any nation against autocracy and dictatorship, whether of an organized plutocracy or a misguided section of the working people, is a strong, intelligent and well organized trade union movement."[96] This was the union's version of the "classes and masses" argument. The loyalty of the AFL was to the nation and the principles of democratic government. It did not see itself as an instrument of class rule. The organized labor movement would strive to have a seat at the table, alongside capital, to make the nation a better place. Gompers himself argued along these lines in "Capital, Labor, Consumer: How Can All Three Cooperate for Increased Production, a World Necessity?" in 1919. Setting the stage for Green's arguments years later, Gompers called for "cooperation" on the basis of "goodwill" and argued that a

[95] *American Federationist* 29 (1922), 922-925.
[96] "Trade Unions and Bolshevism" in *American Federationist* 26 (1919), 1131.

strong worker's organization working alongside capital was the key to "progress."[97] In some cases, it even appeared that Gompers rejected the term "class" altogether. In a response to a letter from Congressman Asher Howard, Gompers objected to Howard's use of the term "laboring classes" as if "the men who work for wages are in a class apart from those who employ them."[98]

Though the AFL never did abandon the term "class," nor did its leaders stop using the language of class in their writings and speeches, it is clear that their intentions were far different from those of the Socialists and other radicals. Indeed, their vision of class cooperation looked much closer to the class-blind version for which the American Legion advocated explicitly. In this can be found a common Square Deal Americanism, where organizing on the basis of class was replaced by appeals to higher national greatness through industrial efficiency, shared prosperity, and the elimination of the existential threat posed by Communism, all to be accomplished by an alliance of labor and capital. This brand of Americanism went beyond race and national origin to encompass a rejection of any loyalty to class (and, by extension, internationalism) over one's country (a conception that deeply linked with capitalism and patriarchy). What's more, both groups put forward arguments which suggested that the failure to cooperate was a *cause* of the very radicalism that had threatened capitalist countries and had even overthrown a few of them, around the globe. And although the likelihood of Socialist revolution in the United States in the 1920s was remote, both groups stressed the importance of vigilance, should the need for a force to ideologically, and perhaps physically, repel a Communist

[97] Samuel Gompers, "Capital, Labor, Consumer: How Can All Three Cooperate for Increased Production, a World Necessity?" in *American Federationist* 26 (1919), 1025-1028.
[98] Samuel Gompers to Asher Howard, August 29, 1919, RG01-015, Box 6, Folder 19, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.

surge arise. When such a force arose across the Atlantic in Italy, it carried with it some ideas that found a friendly audience among some of the men of the Legion and the AFL.

Chapter 5

The American Legion, The AFL, and Fascism

The American Legion and the American Federation of Labor were far from the only organizations that, acutely fearing the radical changes to society advocated by proponents of Socialism, began to conceive of new methods for constructing productive relations that aimed at eliminating class strife. Ideologically, imagining such methods meant denying or downplaying the importance of class while promoting nationalism as an alternative. Practically, it meant experimenting with various forms of corporatism. The Italian Fascists, under the leadership of Benito Mussolini, spent the 1920s and 1930s working toward this goal. After violently repressing Socialists, Communists, and Anarchists across Italy, the Fascists sought to eliminate forever the basis for their existence by finding new ways of structuring relations between capital, labor, and the state to eliminate class enmity. Such efforts gained the Fascists early, if cautious, commendation from the leaders of the AFL as well as less reserved praise from Legionnaires. This is not to suggest that the AFL or the Legion were Fascist, but rather to posit that, at least in the early 1920s, the continuum of conservative thought, as focused as it was on combating left-wing radicalism, contained space for an international communication of and openness to Fascist ideas. Examining how the AFL and the Legion interacted with Fascist ideas can illuminate ways in which Fascism influenced American conservatism.

Richard Steigmann-Gall's article "Star Spangled Fascism: American Interwar Political Extremism in Comparative Perspective" makes the case that U.S. historians often overlook the value of using Fascism as a category of analysis. He argues that examining the American manifestations of Fascism during the interwar years allows

historians to better understand the period in an international context.[1] Though Fascism did not take hold in America the way that it did in Italy and Germany, studying its presence in the U.S. can illuminate the "social, cultural and economic impulses that…provided the seedbed of fascism."[2] Outside of far left critiques and, later, Stalinist charges of "Social Fascism," the AFL remained free of charges of Fascism. Indeed, the union quickly became an outspoken opponent of the ideology. Yet Samuel Gompers's initial reaction to Italian Fascism was a bit more ambivalent than his, and others', later criticisms. Also, the anticommunism, nationalism, and corporatism of the AFL placed the organization in a position of some ideological overlap with the Italian Fascists. As a result, the union dedicated some time to defining its position vis-à-vis Fascism.[3]

The American Legion, unlike the AFL, was occasionally labelled as some variation of "Fascist" by its critics. This is understandable, considering that the Legion, like the Italian Fascisti, was composed of veterans who felt their particular calling lay in expanding their wartime service to peacetime by fighting to rid their nation of the threat of Socialism and to foster a new nationalism. The vigilantism and Americanism activities of the Legion attest to this. This militant activity, coupled with early statements of praise for Mussolini's Fascisti made by the Legion's National Commander Alvin Owsley, led many to conclude that the Legion was the American version of Fascism.

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[1] Richard Steigmann-Gall, "Star-Spangled Fascism: American Interwar Political Extremism in Comparative Perspective," *Social History* 42, no. 1 (2017).
[2] Ibid.
[3] When exploring the history of Fascism, there is a vast amount of literature to sift through. The following works were particularly helpful in crafting how this paper understands fascism: John Patrick Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), Alexander De Grande, *Italian Fascism: Its Origins & Development* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), *A Primer of Italian Fascism.* Edited by Jeffrey T. Schnapp. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

Of course, officially the Legion pledged allegiance to no "ism" other than Americanism. By the 1930s the organization had become a vocal opponent of Fascism. Scholars have been divided over what to make of the American Legion's early flirtation with Fascism. Early works, such as William Gellerman's *American Legion as Educator* and Norman Hapgood's *Professional Patriots* painted the Legion in a Fascist light.[4] Works produced by the Legion, or written by Legionnaires, either ignore the issue, refute it, or simply balk at the very question.[5] More measured scholarship denies that the Legion was Fascist but points to the kernels of truth found within such a claim. Stiegman-Gall describes the 1920s and 1930s as a "fascist phase" for the Legion.[6] Sarah Churchwell portrays the organization as having Fascist leanings driven by "national bigotry, arrogance, selfishness, racial antagonisms, fears, hatreds and suspicions," but stops short of calling them outright "Fascist."[7] William Pencak argues that the Legion did not seek "radical social change," but rather to uphold "traditional values." This stance, coupled with the context of a stable U.S. democracy, means the Legion ought to be understood as more traditionally conservative rather than Fascist.[8]

Fascism developed out of specific circumstances in Europe and took on different characteristics in each country where it took root. Unlike Italy and later Germany, the

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[4]See William Gellerman, *The American Legion as Educator* (New York: Bureau of Publications Teachers College, Columbia University, 1938) and Norman Hapgood, ed., *Professional Patriots,* comp. Sidney Howard and John Hearley (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927).
[5] See Thomas A. Rumer, *The American Legion: An Official History, 1919-1989* (New York: M. Evans, 1990); Raymond Moley, *The American Legion Story* (New York: Meredith Publishing Company, 1966)*;* George Seay Wheat, *The Story of the American Legion* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1919) and National Americanism Commission of the American Legion, comp., *Isms: A Review of Alien Isms, Revolutionary Communism and their Active Sympathizers in the United States* (Indianapolis, 1937).
[6] Steigman-Gall, "Star Spangled Fascism," 112-113.
[7] Sarah Churchwell, *Behold, America: A History of America First and the American Dream* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 149.
[8] William Pencak, *For God and Country: The American Legion: 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 20-23.

United States's political system remained relatively stable following World War I. The interrelated goals of stabilizing the economy, marginalizing radical leftists, and placing the state in a position of global military and economic strength could be accomplished within existing structures, albeit with the implementation of some important reforms. Thus, both the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor remained committed to democracy. This, perhaps more than anything else, precludes the labelling of either organization as "Fascist." Still, there remain important similarities in social composition, ideology, and historical circumstance that invite exploration.

Social Composition

The most obvious comparisons can be found between the Fascists and the Legion. When the Italian Fascists first organized in 1919, the bulk of their membership consisted of Italian veterans, like Mussolini himself. The Fascists, like the Legionnaires in America, felt their mission was to bring the martial skills gained during wartime service back home to defeat the growing Socialist threat. Both placed great emphasis on masculinity, prioritizing action and virility, feeling that the struggle against Communism was nothing less than a war they were uniquely suited to help wage. Though the Fascists were far more violent, both organizations took the law into their own hands and physically assaulted, and even killed, radicals in their respective countries, especially during the turbulent years immediately following the war. The similarities between the American Red Scare and Italy's Two Red Years are apparent.

Both the Legion and the Italian Fascists were cross-class organizations but were disproportionately comprised of middle- and upper-class individuals, especially in their leadership. When the Paris Caucus of the American Legion was organized, despite efforts

to get the participation of enlisted men, only 47 out of 450 men ranked below lieutenant.[9] Though the numbers increased, the early years of the Legion saw an underrepresentation of enlisted men. The list of occupations of delegates to the later St. Louis Caucus reveals disproportionate representation of elite and middle-class professions as well, with business executives, bankers, lawyers, engineers, salesmen, merchants, journalists, students, clerks and public employees, being among the top occupations listed.[10] Names of well-known American elites, including Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., Franklin D'Olier, and Eric Fisher Wood took leadership roles in the organization.[11] Alec Campbell's article "The Sociopolitical Origins of the American Legion," argues that the Legion was founded and led by *rentier* capitalists, "old money" individuals who lived on assets and inheritances (as opposed to "new money" industrialists) who he calls "the Establishment." These "patricians sought to protect themselves from both the new industrialists within their class and the new working class outside of it while simultaneously looking for a bridge across the class divide in the interests of peace and stability."[12] As for the 843,013 dues paying members by 1920, most were middle-class professionals and thus *not* representative of the general American public at the time, who were mostly workers.[13] Like the Italian Fascists, the Legion was strongest in small towns

[9] Pencak, *For God and Country,* 54.
[10] "Occupations of Delegates at the St. Louis Caucus Held by More than One Person" in Pencack, *For God and Country,* 339. It is perhaps unsurprising as working-class veterans would not largely have been unable to dedicate time off from work and pay the dues rates required by the Legion.
[11] "Men Present at Roosevelt Dinner Party in Paris, February 15,1919" in Gellerman, *Legion as Educator,* 267.
[12] Alec Campbell, "The Sociopolitical Origins of the American Legion," *Theoretical Sociology* 39 (2010), 1-24.
[13] This fact is pointed out by most scholars. While Campbell notes that the "Establishment" led and controlled the Legion (and were responsible for 69% of the money that came from the original $257,000 loan) (see "Sociopolitical Origins of the American Legion," 12-13), others insist that the Legion was at least numerically and, according to some, ideologically, a middle-class organization.

and rural areas and among white collar professionals, self-employed businessmen, and other solidly middle-class groups.[14]

The early Fascist movement was also largely composed of middle-class elements. In 1921, 21.4% of the National Fascist Party, having now shorn itself of its former left-wing political goals, consisted of landowners, tradesmen, and artisans. 2.8% were industrialists, while students, professionals, white-collar workers and state employees made up around 34.4% of the party.[15] 24.6% were agricultural workers, which included farmers of all sorts, including small tenant farmers and sharecroppers who opposed the kind of collectivization called for by Socialist peasant leagues. Only 15.6% of the party was made up of workers.[16] John Pollard concludes from this data that "Fascism was essentially the political expression of disgruntled middle -and lower-middle-class elements…who felt threatened by 'big business' but also by the other 'big battalions' – the working-class movement organized in Socialist councils and government-subsidized workers' cooperatives."[17] Its support (that is, until it took federal and then, by extension, local power) was strongest in rural areas and small towns and weakest among industrial cities with large working-class populations.[18]

By 1921, at the Third Congress of the Fascists in Italy, workers made up 24% of the membership. These workers were primarily farm workers suspicious of Socialist collectivization plans.[19] This means that there was some worker support of Fascism,

[14] Pencak, *For God and Country,* 16-17.
[15] Quoted from state statistics in John Pollard, *The Fascist Experience in Italy* (London: Routledge, 1998), 34.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Alexander De Grande, *Italian Fascism: Its Origins & Development* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 32-33.

though the movement was, as historian Alexander DeGrande argues, an alliance of the middle and upper classes against Socialism.[20] The relationship between trade unions and Fascism was severely strained, as unions were often targets of Fascist violence. Mussolini's followers sought to replace independent trade unionism with a "nationalist syndicalism" characterized by "a society of producers which transcended any particular class," where producers and managers would be organized together into "mixed syndicates" that would form the "basis for a new political and economic order dedicated to the achievement of maximum national expansion."[21] This created a bit of a dilemma for people like Samuel Gompers, who travelled to Italy, was in communication with Fascists, and paid close attention to developments there. The idea of state- or party-controlled unions sat uncomfortably with him, but the nationalism, antisocialism, modernism, and class collaborationism of the Fascists appealed to him. Indeed, the Fascist unionist Egisto Rossi was thoroughly, though ultimately erroneously, convinced that Gompers was a natural ally since their ideas were so aligned.[22] It was not immediately obvious where Gompers, and American labor in general, would land on the issue of Fascism.

By 1927, after the Fascists had taken state power, driven the leftists underground and eliminated independent unionism, an Italian "Labor Charter" was announced. It made a number of illuminating proclamations. First, it declared the Italian nation to be an "organism having ends, a life, and a means of action superior in power and duration to the single individuals or groups of individuals that compose it." Next, it declared work a

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid, xiv.
[22] Egisto Rossi to Samuel Gompers, July 16, 1923 in Ronald Radosh, "Corporatism, Liberal and Fascist, As Seen by Samuel Gompers," *Studies on the Left* (Summer 1963), 69-70.

"social duty" and proclaimed the sole purpose of production to be the "growth of national power." It declared that "only unions legally recognized and subject to state control have the right to legally represent the whole category of employers and workers for which they are constituted." It in no uncertain terms upheld the supremacy of "private property" and declared that Fascist "corporations" constituted "the unitary organization of all the forces of production and represent the totality of their interests." Most importantly, the "Labor Charter" declared that it "embodies the feelings of solidarity that bind together the various factors of production. It harmonizes the opposing interests of employers and workers, subordinating them to the higher interests of production."[23] The "Labor Charter" represented the codification of the Fascists' rejection of Socialism and its rejection of class as a category of analysis. This was an example of the Italian version of winning the "battle over class."

The form that Italian Fascism took and the ideology it espoused was largely derived from its middle-class composition and its historical alliance with the industrial and agricultural elites to eliminate the Socialist "threat" to Italy. Historian Donny Gluckstein, in a book on Nazi Germany, describes the historical role of the petty-bourgeoise. Gluckstein states that this class has the "potential to play a variety of political roles, from far left to far right." He continues:

> In the English and French revolutions it formed the most radical wings in Cromwell's New Model Army and the Jacobin clubs. In 1930s Germany it would tend to support Nazism. Such volatility arises from its position between two key

[23] The above quotes come from the "Labor Charter (1927)" quoted in Jeffrey T. Schnapp, ed., *A Primer of Italian Fascism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000),308-313.

> social classes. The middle class can identify with the workers, because it too lacks the wealth and the privilege of the capitalists, falls into debt with the banks, or is a victim of big capital in the unequal competition to survive. However, there can be another influence. As Engels put it, 'The petty bourgeois, artisans and shopkeepers hope to climb, to swindle their way into the big bourgeoise; they are afraid of being thrown down into the proletariat, hovering between fear and hope'. The middle class can also identify with the capitalist class because both own property (even if the disparity in size of property is great) and it sees itself as superior to the working class in wealth and education.[24]

One would expect, then, to find evidence of what Daniel Guerin calls "anti-capitalist capitalism," a middle-class attack on "idle" financial capitalists (rather than on *productive* capitalists) whose usurious practices hold back workers and entrepreneurs alike.[25] Such a stance could appeal to the working class while remaining relatively innocuous to capitalism as a system. Certainly, one can see the expression of such ideas within the writings, speeches, and activities of the AFL and the Legion.

Like the Square Deal Americanism seen in the United States, Italian Fascism held contempt for both lower-class revolutionaries and self-serving business interests. It also largely embraced the technological and productive changes of the early twentieth century. While the 1921 "Fascist Agrarian Program" declared support for "Large-scale farming" and stated "Generally speaking, large-scale industrial enterprises are healthy," both the 1919 "Platform of the Fasci di Combattimento" and 1920 "Postulates of the

[24] Donny Gluckstein, *The Nazis, Capitalism, and the Working Class* (Chicago, Ill.: Haymarket Books, 2012), 10.
[25] Daniel Guerin, *Fascism and Big Business* (New York: Monad Press, 1973), 82-83.

Fascist Program" contained a call for a one-time "large progressive tax on capital."[26] Even the decidedly more conservative "Program of the National Fascist Party" contained provisions calling for workplace safety regulations, welfare policy, worker representation, and restrictions on inherited income.[27] In his days at *Poplo d'Italia,* Mussolini raged against stock market speculation and "idle income."[28] Amidst the chaos and fear of the "Two Red Years" and disgruntlement over the condition of Italy after World War I, Fascist corporatist policies and "anti-capitalist capitalist" ideology provided an alternative which promised spiritual revival through nationalism and class harmony.

Both the AFL and the Legion eventually denounced Fascism. The AFL was much quicker to arrive at this conclusion, as Fascism in Italy had proven to be quite the enemy of labor. Gompers and Green found dictatorship and the loss of union independence a price too high to pay for the national revival and class harmony attempted in Italy. The Legion, too, found the lack of democracy troubling, though was far more willing to give Fascism time to prove itself before fully denouncing it in the 1930s. Both organizations had difficulty accepting the almost spiritual worship of the state that Fascism demanded, as that did not square with the republican notions of citizenship they adhered to. Service to the state was one thing, subordination to it was another thing altogether. The stability of American democracy made the Italian model unviable in America. Both the Legion and the AFL weighed, measured, and even offered some guarded praise for Fascism before ultimately rejecting it. But the very fact that it was given consideration, even some praise, indicates some overlap of ideology worth exploring.

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[26] Quoted in Pollard, *Fascist Experience,* 30-31
[27] *Primer on Italian Fascism,* 3-18.
[28] Guerin, *Fascism and Big Business,* 83.

The AFL and Fascism

The Italian Vice-Commander General of Emigration and labor leader Egisto Rossi wrote to Gompers, whom he called an "old friend and 'brother,'" in 1923. He and Gompers had met previously in Italy, when Gompers was working to overcome the "opposition and lack of sympathy" for his ideas found there. Rossi stressed that his and Gompers's enemies were the same. Both men were trying to free labor from "the clutches of Bolshevist propagandists," he stated, and to reorganize labor on a "purely economical and national basis." Because of this, Rossi solicited sympathy from Gompers by stating "you are hence in a position to understand the difficulty which our Italian reformers have had to overcome."[29] Like the AFL, Italian Fascists were endeavoring to work alongside employers and in cooperation with the state – though this last piece was seen as a positive good for Fascists but a necessary evil to be avoided if possible by the AFL – to increase the quality and volume of production as well as provide for the national welfare. Rossi stressed the compatibility of the two movements:

> The present labor organizations which are springing up under the auspices of Fascism are, I firmly believe, much more in accordance with the spirit of American labor unions than were the old ones, most of which have become political organizations affiliated with Moscow, and the leaders of which were out and out Communists, caring not a snap of their fingers for the welfare and prosperity of the country to which they belong. The present Government's policy is anything but that of an oppressor of labor… [30]

[29] Rossi to Gompers, in Radosh, 69-70.
[30] Ibid.

One can sense from this letter a bit of anxiety, however. Rossi acknowledged "passing political differences" and hoped to give to Gompers a better understanding of his position and to earn the

> support of men like yourself who have constantly and consistently maintained that the true interests of workingmen are not served by radicals who speculate on the ignorance of the masses to further their selfish political ambition, but rather – by the steady uplifting through better social legislation and more just working conditions of the mental and moral atmosphere surrounding labor, whose welfare can never be realized except by making it concurrent with that of the majority of citizens of the whole country.[31]

It is clear that Gompers's opinion held some weight, and Rossi felt that he could be won over to the cause of the Fascist solution to labor strife. He was mostly wrong. Though Gompers refused to offer any "moral or material" support for anti-Fascist forces, he was not pro-Fascist.[32] Early on, the *American Federationist* lamented the violence of the Fascists in the Italian countryside.[33] The AFL passed a resolution denouncing Fascism in 1923, which Gompers fully endorsed. He was not without some sympathy, however, for the particular plight of Italy; he blamed Communists for the Fascist violence plaguing the nation. "Radicalism brings on its own reaction, and that is the state of affairs in Italy," he wrote.[34]

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[31] Ibid.
[32] Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 116.
[33] "The Vendetta of the Fascisti" in *American Federationist* 29 (1922), 912.
[34] Samuel Gompers, "Why Labor Opposes Soviet Recognition" in *American Federationist* 30 (1923), 811.

The fullest expression of Gompers's thoughts on Fascism can be found in an article he wrote for the *Federationist* toward the end of his life. In "An Analysis of Fascism," Gompers laid out his understanding of Fascism in a review of a book on the subject published at the time. He conceded that there were some constructive aspects to Fascism and believed that, if not for the Fascists, the Bolsheviks would have succeeded in Italy. He also stressed that Americans would have a difficult time understanding the "political situation such as that which existed in Italy where the parliamentary system had become little more than a joke." Gompers wrote of the national unity achieved by the Fascists, even though it was, regrettably, accomplished through dictatorship. It was his understanding that the authoritarianism of Mussolini was lamentable, but perhaps necessary given the situation. He wrote:

> However repugnant may be the idea of dictatorship and the man on horseback, American trade unionists will at least find it possible to have some sympathy with the policies of a man whose dominating purpose is to get something done; to do rather than to theorize; to build a working, producing civilization instead of a disorganized, theorizing aggregation of conflicting groups. Whatever else may be said about the Italy of the Fascists it is at least…an Italy that is at work rapidly constructing a nation of collaborating units of usefulness.[35]

Gompers admired that the Fascists were men of action. He also appreciated their drive for unity, rational production, and nationalism. That the Fascists were attempting to create a society that "'does not consider the bourgeoisie or the proletariat and their special interests, but recognizes producers and production, and throws open the state, not to

[35] Samuel Gompers, "An Analysis of Fascism" in *American Federationist* 30 (1923), 927-933.

classes, but to functions, assigning social duties to capital and labour…" sat comfortably with him. He even denied the charge that the Fascists were interested in creating a "super state" that took direct control over production, using a quote from Mussolini himself to make this point.[36] Historian John P. Diggins summarizes Gompers's view of Fascism in this way:

> Because he wanted to integrate the worker into the industrial order, because he believed that representation should be based on functional economic units, and because he accepted a corporate society based on national cohesion and social harmony, Gompers saw Fascism as a model of class reconciliation that vindicated his own trade union philosophy.[37]

While it might be a bit overstated to say that Gompers saw Fascism as a "model," it is nonetheless true that Gompers and the Fascists had multiply intelligible views of ideal labor relations.

Still, Gompers expressed concern for the autocratic tendencies of the regime. He was deeply suspicious of the Fascist attempts to strip unions of their independence and subordinate them to the state. Gompers's corporatism centered around the voluntary cooperation between organized labor and capital, with the state playing a mediatory role as needed. Still, he could not hide his admiration for the overarching goals of Fascism, at least in terms of class harmony and the restructuring of labor relations. He concluded his article by stating: "Whatever may the opinion about the Fascist movement, and there can be in the American trade union movement but one opinion of autocracy and

[36] Ibid.
[37] Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 172.

dictatorship…certainly the promises of industrial democracy in Italy, pledged in declarations and phrases which might easily enough have been taken from the mouths of American trade unionists." Gompers recommended the book to his readers, stating it "one of tremendous and exciting interest."[38]

William Green was less ambivalent about his feelings toward Fascism. In 1925, he published an anti-Fascist pamphlet which invoked a strong response. Green received many letters, some commending him for his clear rebuke of Fascism, others condemning him for his failure to see its benefits. Some even suggested Green was a traitor to his race.[39] Green stressed in no uncertain terms that he opposed Fascism because of the dictatorship and the "unfreedom" of labor unions in Italy. He also spoke out against Italian Fascist policies that prevented "Italian immigrants to the United States from being naturalized."[40] American Fascists, most of them Italian-Americans, wrote to Green with surprise and dismay at his opposition to the ideology. Feeling that the aims of Fascism and the AFL were so aligned, many wrote to Green to try to educate him about the mission and benefits of Fascism. He remained unconvinced. He declined an invitation to meet with the president of the Fascisti League of North America, a Mr. I. Revel, stressing that it would be of no use. Neither side was willing to change their mind.[41]

Fascists who wrote to Green were shocked that he was not more appreciative of the way the Fascists in Italy crushed the Bolsheviks. They accused him of ignorance and

[38] Gompers, "An Analysis of Fascism," 927-933.
[39] RG1-015, Box 4, Folder 1, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.
[40] Ibid.
[41] William Green to I. Revel, RG1-015, Box 4, Folder 1, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.

of succumbing to "red propaganda."[42] One even sent Green a rather scathing note suggesting he wasn't truly "American" and expressed anger over "white races…slaughtering" each other.[43] He also had his share of admirers who praised his commitment to democracy, even encouraging him to use his influence to convince the U.S. government to place greater pressure on the Italian regime. Green remained convinced, especially by the mid-1920s, of the ability to achieve his vision of corporatism within the existing political and economic structures of America. Therefore, Fascism seemed far from urgently necessary, let alone an appealing alternative. Though it shared similar, but not identical, end goals, the AFL concluded that Fascist means were too extreme for American application.

The American Legion and Fascism

In 1937, the National Americanism Commission of the American Legion published a book called *Isms: A Review of Alien Isms, Revolutionary Communism and their Active Sympathizers in the United States.* Despite an early statement declaring the Legion's opposition to Fascism, the book dedicated hundreds of pages to anticommunism while providing only a handful pages on Fascism. Despite the fact that book eventually went on to detail "definite attempts to set up a defense in the United States for their [Fascist] form of government," the authors introduced the section on Fascism with the following:

[42] RG1-015, Box 4, Folder 3, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD. An open letter to Green, published in *Il Grido Della Stripe* also accused him of falling for leftist propaganda. See RG1-015, Box 4, Folder 1, George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.
[43] Ibid.

> Members of the American Legion and other American citizens are not concerned over the form of government adopted by the two nations referred to in the definition of Fascism. It is none of our business what form of government foreign nations see fit to adopt. Our concern enters the picture only when or if the agency of government or citizens of one or more of those foreign powers attempt to spread propaganda in the United States designed to forcibly change our form of government.[44]

The authors of the book were well aware that their coverage of Communism and Fascism were far from equal. They addressed this discrepancy in the book but made no effort to justify it other than to say that they "sought authentic information from every conceivable source in order to provide factual data for you on Fascist activities under foreign control in this country."[45] Granted, there were more sources on Communism available, as Fascism was relatively new and fledgling. Yet, the imbalance, as well as the authors' own statements, make clear the bias of the work. Indeed, this lopsided treatment is illustrative of the ambiguous relationship between the Legion and Fascism. Seeing Fascism as an important counterweight to Communism, as well as sharing important ideological and sociological similarities with it, the Legion had difficulty denouncing Fascism with the same finality as it held for Communism.

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[44] National Americanism Commission of the American Legion, comp., *Isms: A Review of Alien Isms, Revolutionary Communism and their Active Sympathizers in the United States* (Indianapolis, 1937), 252, digital file.
[45] Ibid.

Alvin Owsley, who acted as National Commander of the American Legion from 1922 to 1923, once declared to the press: "if ever needed, the American Legion stands ready to protect the country's institutions and ideals as the Fascisti dealt with the obstructionists who imperiled Italy."[46] He went on to state that the Legion was willing to take over the country by force if necessary, adding: "do not forget that the Fascisti are to Italy what the American Legion is to the United States."[47] Years later, John McQuigg, Legion National Commander from 1925-1926, proclaimed: "the Fascisti are the Legionnaires of Italy. Their aims and ideals, though not their methods, are identical with those of the American Legionnaires."[48] It was clear that in the minds of at least some Legionnaires the Legion had a historical role similar to that of the Fascists in Europe.

Beyond words, there were also numerous actions, real as well as symbolic, that provide evidence that the Legion had some sympathy for Fascism. On at least two occasions, in 1923 and 1930, Benito Mussolini was invited to speak at the American Legion National Convention.[49] In 1923, the American Legion (alongside the Grand Army of the Republic) was even planning to escort American Fascists in a parade in New York.[50] Armando Diaz, the Italian general and future minister of war under Mussolini was one of the key guests, alongside other WWI military leaders such as General Pershing and Marshall Foch, at the 1921 Legion Convention.[51] Mussolini himself was

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[46] Quoted in William Pencak, *For God and Country: The American Legion 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 21; *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 206.
[47] Quoted in Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism,* 206.
[48] Quoted in Pencak, *For God and Country,* 21.
[49] See Ibid and Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism,* 206.
[50] Samuel Gompers wrote a letter to the National Commander of the Legion to ask that the Legion withdraw its support for such action, fearing a clash between the Fascists and union counter-protestors. See "Gompers Opposes March of Fascisti," *New York Times* (May 26, 1923), 8.
[51] Marquis James, *A History of the American Legion* (New York: William Green, 1923), 229-230.

even made an "honorary member" by Colonel William Eastwood, who pinned a Legion button on his lapel.[52]

Not all Legionnaires shared Owsley and McQuigg's views, which seem to represent an extreme. Nonetheless, Fascist arguments were welcomed by many Legionnaires earlier and for much longer than those in the AFL. While some Legionnaires, such as J.G.B. Morse, were able to look past Fascism's "excesses" and praise the Fascists' ability to unite as brothers-in-arms to defeat the Communists and assure the "safety and progress" of Italy, others were not.[53] A featured articled titled "This Fascisti Business" by Thomas Ryan ran in the March 16, 1923 edition of the *American Legion Weekly*.[54] Ryan's article thoroughly demonstrated the ambivalence of the attitude of some Legionnaires toward the Italian Fascists. Generally admiring of their strength, their patriotism (particularly as Italy seemed poised to go to war with Yugoslavia), and their camaraderie, Ryan praised the historic role played by the Fascists in Italy:

> When the Communists virtually ruled over Italy in 1920 and 1921, they set up a detestable tyranny. Railways could not carry troops. Officers were forbidden to wear arms, and men with war medals were spat on and beaten. The national flag was never seen. Tenants seized the estates, workmen the factories, and produced only what they pleased. In grappling with the Communist frenzy the Fascisti passed through an heroic stage. A few Italians had never abandoned the dream of

[52] Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 206. It is important to note that this action was not applauded by everyone in the Legion.
[53] J.G.B. Morse, "Stick Together! A Legionnaire Reads a Lesson for America's Four-and-a-Half Million Veterans in the Desperate Plight of Their Allied Comrades in Arms," *American Legion Weekly* Vol.3, No. 32 (August 12, 1921), 3-4, 22.
[54] Thomas Ryan, "This Fascisti Business," *American Legion Weekly*, Vol. 5, No.11 (March 16, 1923),5-6, 25-26.

> a Greater Italy, an empire which would embrace all outposts of the Italian race. Malta should be annexed from Great Britain; Nice, Savoy and Corsica might be taken from France someday, and Dalmatia from Jugoslavia. They didn't stop there. An Italian doge had once set his banner on Constantinople. There are plenty of Italians in Egypt. Djibouti, a French port in East Africa, would be useful to the Italian colony of Eritrea. And within easy distance of Sicily is the French protectorate of Tunisia, where Italians have migrated. These Greater Italians patriotically mourned for the present state of their country. They realized that the slogan: "Mothe: Italy! Restore her at home and abroad!" would rally the decent citizens to their standard.[55]

Ryan was nevertheless concerned by the D'Annunzio incident (when, under no legal sanction, an Italian proto-Fascist named Gabriele D'Annunzio led a band of volunteers to take the city of Fiume in the name of Italy), the level of vigilante violence, and the *way* in which Fascists used their power once they had it. He wrote that "there was some point to it. Only the thing went too far." It was also deeply concerning to him that the Italians were attempting to spread this violent Fascism beyond the borders of Italy, though he made an exception for Hungary, where he believed there to be "tactical reason" to spread Fascism there.[56] This led Ryan to conclude that, though the Italian case was special and there were valid reasons for Fascism to take root there, it was far preferable for democracy and the rule of law to prevail. He concluded: "If there is any

[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid. Ryan's article provides a hint of things to come. He regretted that Fascism in Bavaria and in Hungary took the form of "Jew-baiting," He stated that "Mussolini had never disgraced Fascism at home" by resorting to Anti-Semitism.

moral to draw—and morals are not safe when we write of our own times—it is that private citizens can not usurp the government's functions without weakening respect for all government. If the time comes when private citizens must act, they must lay down their arms as soon as order is restored."[57] This statement says a lot about how Legionnaires saw themselves: loyal patriots, but willing to use force to preserve their vision of order if needed.

Other Legionnaires took a somewhat different view of Italy. Frederick Palmer denounced Mussolini in a 1925 editorial. There he wrote about how "Mussolini rules forty million Italians by the force of his two million Fascisti. He prevents free speech; he censors the press; he has recently expelled an American newspaper correspondent who was not 'tractable'; he is subverting democracy in a way which may one day cost Italy dear."[58] Along with this denunciation, however, he took the position that, so long as Mussolini was not attempting to "develop an American Fascist dictatorship under his direction," then it was better to "let each nation work out its own problems."[59] There were also ethnic and nationalist barriers to the Legion's embrace of Fascism. Since so many Fascists in America were of Italian descent, Legionnaires feared that support for Fascism among Italian-Americans risked divided loyalties. When Americanism clashed with loyalty to Italian Fascism, such as when the New York State Grand Lodge of the Sons of Italy broke with the Supreme Council over Fascism, the Legion supported those willing to break with their home country in the name of Americanism, praising "men of Italian descent in America who propose to be Americans before they are Fascisti!" There

[57] Ibid.
[58] Frederick Palmer, "A Personal Page," *American Legion Weekly* 7, no 24 (August 21, 1925), 9.
[59] Ibid.

was “no room…for such influences from any other country” as far as many Legionnaires were concerned.[60]

One Legionnaire wrote with prophetic wisdom about new reports of a man named “Hitler, a Bavarian Mussolini,” who was “hailed as a prophet and political economic savior, whose symbol is the blackjack instead of the fasces. There are also hints of 400,000 hidden military rifles in Bavaria and 150 cannon, and predictions are made that Hitler's legionaries will set smoldering Europe ablaze once more.”[61] What inoculated America from this trend toward dictatorship was her relative stability. Yet the ever-vigilant Legionnaires warned that Americans should not rest upon those laurels. The same editorial in the *American Legion Weekly* warned:

> More than any other country, the United States still maintains a comparative political stability. While nations overseas, morally bankrupt as well as financially bankrupt, fall under the trusteeships of dictators who gain power by the club and blackjack, we are working an adjustment by constitutional methods, and there is no reason for misgivings. Our flexible system of government may be subjected to considerable strain, but it was planned and built strong enough to stand any tests which may be anticipated. But this is no time for Pharisaical indifference by Americans. Contemplating chaos from the Mediterranean to the Arctic, our task—to be executed devoutly—is at least to put our own house in order.[62]

[60] Frederick Palmer, “No Two Ways in This,” *American Legion Weekly* 7, no. 36 (September 4, 1925), 11.
[61] “By Force or By Law?” *American Legion Weekly* 4, no. 50 (December 15, 1922), 10.
[62] Ibid.

Diggins argues that the support Fascism received by American businessmen "must be understood as part of the philosophy of the 'New Economic Era', when "businessmen easily adopted the rhetoric of reform and posed as the new progressives."[63] Fascist ideology occupied similar terrain as the Square Deal Americanism embodied in groups like the AFL and the American Legion. The changing landscape of the American economy and society in the 1920s saw the ethos of the Progressive Era appropriated toward conservative ends that bolstered American capitalism. Groups like the American Legion and the American Federation of Labor played a crucial role in not only marginalizing and defeating leftwing organizations, but also defeating leftist ideologies by undercutting their very basis: the centrality of class conflict. The corporatist alternative of Square Deal Americanism, though more rhetoric than reality, was an important part of conservative thought in the 1920s. Though Square Deal Americanism was not Fascist, the ideas embodied in it share important ideas and ought to be understood in communication with each other.

The men of both organizations would also have likely identified with the hypermasculinity embodied in the Fascists. Diggins writes: "As the man of action Mussolini also became a masculine hero of both muscle and mind…apologists characterized him as courageous, resolute, and bold and the opposition as weak, feeble, and decadent."[64] The AFL's advocacy for a "family wage" and its reluctance to organize women in any large capacity attests to its fundamental vision of the American worker as male. For the Legion, its conception of the citizen was intimately linked to masculinity. It saw military service as a model for citizenship, thus rendering its vision masculine by

[63] Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 167.
[64] Ibid, 61.

default. As Nehls notes, the Legion's advocacy for military preparedness had the "goal of restoring masculinity to softening elite American men and instilling the lower classes and foreign born with a sense of civic duty."[65] The ideal citizen was rational, selfless, and possessed an admirable work ethic, all traits Legionnaires associated with manhood.[66] As the decade progressed, the Legion began to associate manhood with capitalism and consumption. Kim Neilsen demonstrates that even in their dress and performative activities, such as was shown in cartoons of Legionnaires "playing the manly game of baseball while in military uniform," the Legionnaire exuded masculinity.[67]

It was in service to the nation, and in a willingness to take action with force if necessary, that the Legion's masculine conception of citizenship resembles that of the Fascists. Nielsen writes: "The heroism of the American Legion, and the masculine patriotism its members sought to attain, was one for which some U.S. men and all U.S. women were ineligible. It was a heroism and patriotism dependent on male strength, military service, a specific political viewpoint, and the forging experience of battle."[68] While the strain of anti-intellectualism that ran through Italian Fascism was not as apparent in the Legion, both nonetheless prioritized manly action and service to the strength of the state over more effeminate commitments to intellectualism, pacifism, and internationalism. The men of the Legion and the AFL, like the Fascists abroad, consciously cultivated their image as warriors against radicalism and standard bearers for patriotic duty. This attitude, alongside the above-mentioned shared corporatist ideas,

[65] Nehls, "Grand and Glorious Feeling," 53-54.
[66] Ibid, 155.
[67] Kim E. Nielsen, "What's a Patriotic Man to Do?: Patriotic Masculinities of the Post-WWI Red Scare," *Men and Masculinities* 6, no. 3 (January 2004), 240-253.
[68] Ibid, 246.

helps explain early words of guarded praise for Fascism from the leadership of both the AFL and the American Legion.

Ultimately, corporatist rhetoric in the U.S. could be integrated into the prevailing norms of a stable and prosperous decade. This option was not available to Italians. Where in Italy Fascist corporatism was seen as a solution to an existential threat, a means of saving an unstable society from an impending Socialism, in the United States, Square Deal Americanism was seen as a way of fighting off the threat of a marginal Socialism while extending and redistributing the gains of a flourishing nation. Thus, Fascism was not necessary for achieving class harmony. Still, Owsley's words leave one wondering if things could have turned out differently, if groups like the American Legion or even the AFL would have turned to Fascism if Socialism every truly came close to transforming the American economy, family, and society.

Conclusion

As the 1920s gave way to the 1930s, the Great Depression and the deepening of Fascist authoritarianism in Europe drove a further wedge between Fascism and the American Legion and American Federation of Labor. Still, both organizations remained resolute in their anticommunism and commitment to Americanism projects. Though they worked closely together during the 1920s, this fellowship could not erase the fact that the Legion was on the rise and the AFL was on the decline. This state if affairs would change during the 1930s, as the Great Depression brought about a fresh wave of organizing and the New Deal brought new legality to labor unions. The legacy of the 1920s became ever more relevant, however, as the 1940s and 1950s saw new purges within the union ranks and a new Red Scare enveloped America. The ideology fostered by the American Legion and the AFL during the 1920s played a role in making this possible.

This project sought to demonstrate a number of important points about the Legion, the AFL, and conservative ideology in American during the 1920s. First, it explored the role played by the AFL and the American Legion during the Red Scare of 1919-1920. The AFL, capitalizing on the place of power and influence it gained during World War I, embraced its position as the front line in the fight against Communism. Working alongside the government and through organizations like the National Civic Federation, the AFL both sent and received information that would help identify and defeat leftwing organization attempts. The Legion, born in 1919 amid the postwar Red Scare, saw itself as continuing its wartime service by bringing its military skill to bear down upon "reds" of all shades. It was at this time that the Legion engaged in vigilante violence as well as acted as deputized support for law enforcement, engaging in activity ranging from surveillance, to strikebreaking, and even the lynching of radicals. Both organizations entered the 1920s thoroughly shaped by the experience of the war as well as the worldwide uptick in revolutionary activity, which stoked fears of immigrants and an international Communist plot for world domination. Despite sometimes finding themselves on opposite sides of a strike, the general anticommunism and distinction between legitimate and illegitimate (read: Socialist-inspired) labor activity shared by both organizations brought them closer together by the early years of the decade. But this anti-radical spirit did not end with the Red Scare. Instead, both groups played an important role in carrying Red Scare attitudes well into the 1920s.

This "alliance" went beyond just a generalized anticommunism, however. The second major goal of this project was to highlight the various activities the two groups cooperatively engaged in. Both groups pushed for legislation that would create patriotic

holidays to compete with working-class radical holidays like May Day. They also sought to instill the politics of patriotism in schools, such as can be seen in the joint contribution of the organizations to the establishment and content of American Education Week. Both groups took part in calling for public projects and recreational activities, from parks to baseball leagues, in the name of Americanism. The Legion also joined the AFL in pushing for child labor laws while the AFL joined the Legion in its quest to gain adjusted compensation for veterans. The majority-male organizations shared similar values regarding the nuclear family, a "family wage", and patriarchal structures. They even partnered with other groups in a joint banking venture. Finally, nowhere were they closer than on immigration restriction, both lobbying in support of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924. The AFL and the Legion were united not just in what they were against, but also in the image of Americanism they sought to instill throughout the country.

The Americanism of the AFL and the Legion was not the same as the Americanism espoused by other "100 per cent Americanism" organizations of the day, such as the K.K.K or the Grand Army of the Republic. Surely, they shared the general racism, sexism, and xenophobia common at the time, even if the Legion and the AFL didn't harbor the Anti-Semitism or Anti-Catholic attitudes, nor the Protestant moralizing, of the Klan. The third major aim of this project was to suggest that the Americanism of the Legion and the AFL contained a specific class character. What can be called a Square Deal Americanism emanated from both groups, an ideological orientation characterized by propagation of class-blindness and the attempt to erase class conflict and replace it with economic nationalism and corporatist labor relations. This ideological orientation

was fundamentally conservative, concerned with bolstering American capitalism, social relations, and patriarchal structures.

Yet, Square Deal Americanism was not a reactionary ideology. It sought no return to a *laissez-faire* past or Victorian morality. Instead, it embraced New Era capitalism, consumerism, and technological modernism. The Legion and the AFL saw themselves as heirs of the Progressive tradition and can be rightfully understood as "progressive conservative" ideological apparatuses. Square Deal Americanism offered a vision of a future America awash with shared prosperity brought about by a cordial relationship between capital and labor, who had finally understood their interconnectedness and mutual interest. This vision was the antithesis of the Communist worldview and the fulfillment of American republican values. The realization of this vision was limited by the power imbalance between capital and labor in the U.S., where business owners were much more inclined to support the open shop movement over Square Deal Americanism. It was this very type of businessman who invoked the ire of the Legion and the AFL, for his shortsightedness, lack of patriotism, and the invitation to radicalism brought about by this selfishness. Thus, the Square Deal Americanism of the Legion and the AFL can be understood as a middle-class rejection of both the wealthy "classes" and the revolutionary "masses."

These two organizations were not the only groups raging against the "classes" and the "masses," longing for an alternative to class conflict and the elimination of Socialism. The arguments put forward by the Square Deal Americanism of the Legion and the AFL would have rung a number of harmonic notes with the rising Fascist movements in Europe. Leaders of the AFL and the Legion paid close attention to the development of

Fascism and, initially, spoke words of praise for the Fascists' ability to crush Communist movements, unify their nations, and rally a martial manhood to challenge effeminate pacifism and internationalism. Though both organizations would ultimately denounce Fascism, unable to accept its undemocratic and wantonly violent nature, as well as its demand that all people and organizations not only provide service to the state, but subordinate themselves to it, their early flirtations with its ideas are noteworthy. Understanding this history helps demonstrate the historical contingency and trans-Atlantic communication of such ideas. Historians can look more closely at Fascism as a mode of analysis in American history and see that Fascist-adjacent, if not outright Fascist, ideas were embodied in a number of very "American" organizations. Though conditions in America largely precluded the development of Fascism, its ideas were considered, debated, and versions of its arguments found expression (as well as rejection) in both the Legion and the AFL. This is an important part of the history of American conservatism that deserves better understanding.

So it came to be that a part of conservatism in America embraced the legacy of the Progressive Era and the First World War and shaped itself around a forward-thinking philosophy of Square Deal Americanism. It experimented with corporatist ideas as a means to both eliminate the Socialist threat and to instill a renewed nationalism centered around class harmony. The American Legion and the American Federation of Labor, both separately and together, sought to manifest this philosophy through a combination of programs, lobbying efforts, legislation, public relations campaigns, and even physical violence. Their efforts, succeeding in some areas while failing in others, produced results that had very real effects on countless people. The institutional place in American life

that both the AFL and the Legion went on to enjoy in the 1930s, 40s, and beyond, can be traced back to the actions of both groups during the 1920s. In modern America, the lack of any serious Socialist movement, the prevalence of business unionism, and the deep ideological connection between capitalism and Americanism can, at least in part, be traced back to the efforts of the AFL and the Legion. Every time Labor Day is celebrated in September rather than in May, every time a proposal for a social safety net program is decried as "un-American," every time the Pledge of Allegiance is spoken in an American school, or every time a community comes together in a red, white, and blue bespeckled ballfield to watch an innocuous baseball game sponsored by the American Legion, one can see the legacy of the political, social, class, and ideological struggles of the 1920s.

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