<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Liverpool conurbation of which:</th>
<th>Liverpool City Nos</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Bootle Nos</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Birkenhead Nos</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Wallasey Nos</th>
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<td>20,823</td>
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<td>9,649</td>
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<td>1,783</td>
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<td>1,460</td>
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<td>90</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>5.54</td>
<td>12,730</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>1,223</td>
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<td></td>
<td>21,945</td>
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Source: Census of England and Wales Vol 10 Part II

Why is there no Socialism in the United States?

by Eric Foner
have entered into the 'why is there no socialism' quagmire have rarely been more
successful.¹

In the end, Marx and Engels remained optimistic about prospects for socialism
in the United States (Engels even advising the 'backward' workers of Britain to
learn from the example of the Knights of Labor.) Other observers, however,
believed that the nature of American society precluded the emergence of class-
based political ideologies on the European model. In 1867 E. L. Godkin, the
Irish-born editor of The Nation, sought to explain why, despite a wave of strikes
in the United States, the 'intense class feeling' so evident in Great Britain could
not exist in America:

There [in Europe] the workingman on a strike is not simply a laborer who
wants more wages: he is a member of a distinct order in society, engaged in
a sort of legal war with the other orders. . . . His employer is not simply a
capitalist in whose profits he is seeking a larger share: he is the member of a
hostile class, which . . . it is considered mean or traitorous for him to hope
to enter. This feeling, we need hardly say, does not exist in America. The
social line between the laborer and the capitalist here is very faintly drawn.
Most successful employers of labor have begun by being laborers themselves;
most laborers hope . . . to become employers. Moreover, there are . . . few
barriers of habit, manners or tradition between the artisan and those for
whom he works, so that he does not consider himself the member of an
'order.' Strikes, therefore, are in the United States more a matter of business,
and less a matter of sentiment, than in Europe. . . . Should the worst come
to the worst [the American worker] has the prairies behind him, a fact which
. . . diffuses through every workshop an independence of feeling, a confidence
in the future, of which the European knows nothing. Besides this, the
American working class are in the enjoyment of political power.²

I have quoted Godkin at some length, because the 'why is there no socialism'
debate has not advanced very far beyond the answers he proposed over a century
ago. Godkin touched upon nearly all the elements from which modern responses
to the question are generally formed: American ideology, social mobility, the
nature of the union movement, the political structure. In this essay, I propose to
examine the most recent trends in this seemingly timeless debate. The essay is not
meant as a history of socialism in the United States, or as an exhaustive survey
of the immense body of literature that now exists on the subject (since nearly
every work on American radicalism and labor explicitly or implicitly proposes an
answer to the question, 'why is there no socialism'). It will not examine expressions
of American radicalism, such as abolitionism and feminism, whose impact upon
American life has been far more profound than socialism. I hope, however, both
to draw attention to the most recent contributions to this debate, and to raise
questions about both the adequacy of specific explanations, and the underlying
premises upon which the entire discussion appears to rest. It might well be worth
raising at the outset the question whether the experience of socialism in the United
States is, in reality, exceptional, or whether it represents an extreme example of
the dilemma of socialism throughout western society.

To some extent, the 'why is there no socialism' debate remains inconclusive
because the participants define socialism in diverse, sometimes contradictory ways.

It is often unclear precisely what it is whose absence is to be explained. When
Sombart wrote, in the period before World War I, there existed a reasonably
unified body of socialist theory and political practice. But since the shattering of
the international labor and socialist movements by World War I, the Russian
Revolution, the rise of socialist and communist parties and, indeed, governments
hostile to one another but all claiming the mantle of 'socialism', and the emergence
of new forms of socialism in the 'Third World, it is impossible to contend that
'socialism' retains a coherent meaning. Socialism itself possesses a history, but too
often, contributors to the debate treat it as an ahistorical abstraction.

Nevertheless, by common consent, the extremely imprecise problem, 'why is
there no socialism in the United States' has been reduced to a discrete set of
questions. It does not mean, 'why has the United States not become a socialist
nation?', or even, 'why is there no revolutionary labor or political movement?'
Rather, the problem is generally defined as the absence in the United States of a
large, avowedly social democratic political party like the Labour party of Britain,
the French Socialist party, and the Communist party of Italy. From the strength
of such parties, moreover, American writers generally infer a mass socialist consci-
ousness among the working classes of these countries. Thus, 'why is there no
socialism?' really means, why is the United States the only advanced capitalist
nation whose political system lacks a social democratic presence and whose
working class lacks socialist class consciousness?

Posed this way, the question does seem to have a prima facie plausibility,
although, as I will suggest, it may well rest on assumptions about western European
politics and class relations that are out of date today and may never have been
fully accurate. One must, in other words, be wary of explanations for American
exceptionalism based upon trends and phenomena equally evident in other coun-
tries. But this is only one of the pitfalls that characterize many analyses of the
problem. Too often, it is assumed that a fairly simple, direct connection ought to
exist between the social structure, class ideologies, and political parties. Many
explanations of the connection exist, some, it is true, mutually exclusive. Poverty
is sometimes seen as a barrier to radicalism, sometimes as its most powerful
spur; social mobility sometimes is said to increase, sometimes to decrease class
awareness; ethnic cohesiveness is seen as an impediment to class solidarity, or as
the springboard from which it emerges. But whatever the specific argument,
disproportionate influence is too often assigned to a single element of the social
structure, and politics and ideology are too often viewed as simple reflections of
economic relationships.

Particularly in the case of the United States, the conflation of class, society
and politics has unfortunate consequences. One cannot assume that the absence
of a powerful social democratic party implies that American workers fully accept
the status quo (although, as we shall see, such an assumption is often made.)
Actually, what needs to be explained is the coexistence in American history of
workplace militancy and a politics organized around non-ideological parties appea-
lng to broad coalitions, rather than the interests of a particular class. David
Montgomery has expressed the problem succinctly: 'American workers in the
nineteenth century engaged in economic conflicts with their employers as fierce as
any known to the industrial world; yet in their political behavior they consistently
failed to exhibit a class consciousness.' Why was militancy in the factory so rarely
translated into the politics of class? Labor and socialist parties have emerged
in the United States, (indeed, Americans, in the late 1820s, created the first 'Workingmen's parties' in the world) but they have tended to be locally-oriented and short-lived. As Montgomery observes, the American form of socialism has centered on control of the workplace, rather than creating a working-class presence in politics. Why is there no socialism? Thus becomes a problem of explaining the disjuncture of industrial relations and political practice in the United States.

Finally, there is the problem of proposed answers that simply explain too much. Descriptions of an unchanging American ideology, or timeless aspects of the American social order such as mobility, leave little room for understanding the powerful American radical tradition based upon cross-class movements and appeals to moral sentiment rather than economic interest. Nor can they explain those periods when socialist politics did attract widespread support. It is too little noted that at the time Sombart wrote there was, in fact, socialism in the United States. In the first fifteen years of this century, the American Socialist party appeared to rival those in Europe, except the German, in mass support and prospects for future growth. Around 1910, the American Socialist party had elected more officials than its English counterpart; certainly, Sombart's question might as readily have been asked about Britain as the United States before World War I. Thus, what must be explained is not simply why socialism is today absent from American politics, but why it once rose and fell. Such a definition of the question, I will argue, requires that we 'historicize' the problem of American socialism. Rather than assuming an unchanging pattern of American exceptionalism, we need to examine the key periods when American development diverged most markedly from that of Europe.

With these admonitions in mind, let us review some of the most prominent explanations for the weakness of socialism in the United States. Probably the most straightforward approach is the contention that the failure of socialism results from the success of American capitalism. Various aspects of the American social order, according to this argument, have led workers to identify their interests with the socio-economic status quo. This, indeed, was the burden of Sombart's own analysis. The economic condition of workers in the United States, he insisted, was far better than that of Europeans in terms of wages, housing, and diet. Socially, moreover, they were far less sharply distinguished from the middle class than their European counterparts. And finally, they were conscious of being able to move west if dissatisfied with their present conditions. The success of capitalism, Sombart believed, made the American worker 'a sober, calculating businessman, without ideals.' On the reefs of roast beef and apple pie, he added, 'socialistic utopias of every sort are sent to their doom.'

From Frederick Jackson Turner's 'frontier thesis,' which saw in the westward movement the key to American distinctiveness, to more recent studies attributing the failure of socialism to high rates of geographical and social mobility and the ability of American workers to acquire property, the success of capitalism has been seen as making the American working class complacent and rendering socialism irrelevant to American politics. As anyone who has lived in both America and Western Europe can testify, extremely high rates of geographical mobility are a distinctive feature of American life. In the nineteenth century, each decade witnessed a wholesale turnover of population in working-class neighborhoods, presumably with adverse effects on the possibility of creating permanent class institutions. Even today, the lure of the Sunbelt draws workers from the depressed industrial heartland, an example of the individual 'safety-valve' that Turner identified as the alternative to class conflict in the United States. A recent variant on the theme was the contention, popular during the 1960s, that the white working class had exchanged material security and a privileged status in relation to minorities at home and workers abroad, for a renunciation of economic and political radicalism. Socialism, according to this view, could come to the United States only as the indirect result of revolutions in the third world, or the activity of marginal social groups like migrant workers and welfare mothers, not yet absorbed into the American mainstream.

Plausible as they appear, the 'success of capitalism' and 'mobility' approaches raise as many questions as they answer. First, they rest upon assumptions about the standard of living of American workers that are rarely subjected to empirical verification. Have the wage levels and rates of social mobility of American workers always been significantly higher than in Western Europe? Vague references to the 'scarcity of labor' in the United States do not suffice to answer that question. Many immigrants complained that certain aspects of their lives – the length of the work day, the pace of factory labor – compared unfavorably with conditions at home.

More importantly, the precise implications of the ability to acquire property for class consciousness and socialism are far more problematic than is often assumed. A venerable tradition of analysis, dating back at least as far as Alexis de Tocqueville, insists that far from promoting political stability, social mobility is a destabilizing force, raising expectations faster than they can be satisfied and thus encouraging demands for further change. Certainly, recent American and European studies of labor history suggest that the better off workers – artisans in the nineteenth century, skilled factory workers in the twentieth, were most likely to take the lead in union organizing and radical politics. As for geographical mobility, until historians are able to generalize about the success or failure of those millions who have, over the decades, left American farms and cities in search of economic opportunity, the implications of the extraordinary turbulence of the American population must remain an open question. But in any case, the historian must beware of the temptation simply to deduce political ideology from social statistics or to assign disproportionate influence to a single aspect of the social structure. Indeed, the 'success of capitalism' formula can hardly explain the relative weakness of socialism during the Great Depression, which failed to produce a mass-based socialist movement, or the radicalism of the 1960s, which arose in a period of unparalleled affluence.

Even more popular than the 'social mobility' thesis is the contention that the very ethos of American life is inherently hostile to class consciousness, socialism, and radicalism of any kind. Probably the best known expression of this point of view is Louis Hartz's The Liberal Tradition in America. To summarize Hartz's argument very briefly, Americans were 'born equal', never having had to launch a revolution to obtain political democracy or social equality, with the result that American ideology has been dominated by a Lockean, individualistic outlook against which neither socialism on the left nor serious conservatism on the right could make any headway. A thoroughly bourgeois 'fragment' spun off by Europe, America possessed only one part of the European social order. Lacking a hereditary aristocracy and a dispossessed working class, it had no need for class ideologies and politics.
No feudalism, no socialism. This oft-repeated aphorism sums up Hartz’s contention that socialism arises from a vision, inherited from the feudal past, of a society based upon a structure of fixed orders and classes. Without a feudal tradition, and a sense of class oppression in the present, Americans are simply unable to think in class terms. Indeed, in its ideals of social mobility, individual fulfillment, and material acquisitiveness, American ideology produced a utopia more compelling than anything socialism could offer. Socialists called for a classless society; Americans, according to Hartz, were convinced they already lived in one.

Dominant in the 1950’s, the ‘consensus’ school of American historiography exemplified by Hartz has lately been supplanted by an interpretation of the American past marked less by ideological agreement than by persistent conflict among various racial and ethnic groups and classes. The rise of the new social and labor history, and a new sensitivity to the historical experience of blacks, women, and others ignored in Hartz’s formulation, have made historians extremely wary of broad generalizations about a unitary ‘American ideology.’ The work of Hartz, Richard Hofstadter and others appears to a generation of historians who came of age in the turmoil of the 1960’s as excessively celebratory of the American experience.

Actually, like Hofstadter’s The American Political Tradition, the first major expression of the consensus interpretation, The Liberal Tradition was not a celebration of American distinctiveness at all, but a devastating critique of a political culture incapable of producing anything approaching an original idea. There was a right-wing bias in much consensus writing (represented, for example, by Daniel Boorstin, who gloried in the native pragmatism that, he contended, enabled Americans to escape the disruptive political ideologies of Europe). But Hartz and Hofstadter, who shared Marxist backgrounds, believed America’s imprisonment within the confines of liberal ideology rendered it incapable of understanding the social realities of the modern world. They were concerned less with socialism and its failure than with affirming the underlying unities on which the American experience was girded, and with supplying a corrective to older interpretations that had mistaken the family quarrels of American political parties for ideological struggles over the nature of American society.

The work of the new labor and social history, as I have indicated, has battered the consensus interpretation. In contrast to the universal diffusion of liberal values, students of working-class culture have stressed the development of semi-autonomous working-class and ethnic cultures resting on an ethic of community and mutuality, rather than individualism and competition. The idea of an unchallenged bourgeois hegemony is also weakened when one considers that until the Civil War, the most powerful political class in the United States was composed of southern slaveholding planters, a group bourgeois in neither its relationship to labor nor its social ideology. Although the Old South was hardly ‘feudal’ (a term Hartz invokes without providing any precise definition), it was certainly pre-bourgeois in many respects. One might almost suggest that with its aristocratic social order and disfranchised laboring class, the South should, if Hartz is correct, have provided fertile soil for socialism.

Hartz’s thesis has also been weakened from an entirely different direction: intellectual history. Recent writing on eighteenth-century American ideology has not simply dethroned Locke from the pivotal ideological role accorded him by Hartz, but has virtually expelled him from the pantheon of early American thought. The political rhetoric of the American Revolution, according to recent studies, owed less to Lockean liberalism than to classical republicanism, an ideology that defined the pursuit of individual self-interest as a repudiation of that ‘virtue’ (devotion to the public good) indispensable in a republican citizenry. Eventually, liberalism triumphed as the dominant rhetoric of American political culture, but not until well into the nineteenth century, and as the result of a historical process whose outlines remain unclear. But if Hartz’s liberal consensus did not characterize all of American history, then other elements of his argument, such as the absence of a feudal past, lose much of their explanatory power. The notion of an overarching liberal consensus went far toward understanding the context within which Hartz wrote – America of the 1950’s – but has proved of little value in explaining the strength of challenges to the capitalist order ranging from the class violence of 1877 to the Knights of Labor, Populism, and the old Socialist Party.

Nonetheless, Hartz’s contention that even American radicals have been trapped within a liberal ideology devoted to the defense of individualism and private property is not entirely incompatible with recent studies of the radical tradition. From Tom Paine’s studied distinction between society and government (the former an unmixed blessing, the latter a necessary evil) to abolitionists’ critique of all social and political relationships embodying coercion, to the American anarchists whose individualist outlook differed so markedly from the class-oriented anarchist movements of Europe, a potent strand of the American radical tradition has rested upon hostility to the state and the defense of the free individual. The ideologies of nineteenth-century labor and farmers’ movements, and even early twentieth-century socialism itself, owed more to traditional republican notions of the equal citizen and the independent small producer, than to the coherent analysis of class-divided society.

Pre-capitalist culture, it appears, was the incubator of resistance to capitalist development in the United States. The world of the artisan and small farmer persisted in some parts of the United States into the twentieth century, and powerfully influenced American radical movements. The hallmarks of labor and Populist rhetoric were demands for ‘equal rights,’ anti-monopoly, land reform, and an end to the exploitation of producers by non-producers. These movements inherited an older republican tradition hostile to large accumulations of property, but viewing small property as the foundation of economic and civic autonomy. Perhaps we ought to stand Hartz on his head. Not the absence of non-liberal ideas, but the persistence of a radical vision resting on small property inhibited the rise of socialist ideologies. Recent studies of American socialism itself, indeed, stress the contrast between native-born socialists, whose outlook relied heavily on the older republican tradition, and more class-conscious immigrant socialists. According to Nick Salvatore, American socialists like Eugene V. Debs viewed corporate capitalism, not socialism, as the revolutionary force in American life, disrupting local communities, undermining the ideal of the independent citizen, and introducing class divisions into a previously homogeneous social order.

Salvatore and other recent writers are not reverting to a consensus view of American history, though their work explores the values native-born socialists shared with other Americans. But ironically, at the same time that one group of historians strongly influenced by the radicalism of the 1960s was dismantling the consensus view of the American past, another was resurrecting it, as a theory of
the ‘hegemony’ of middle-class or capitalist values in the United States. In one version of the consensus/hegemony approach, labor and capital were seen as united by an ideology of ‘corporate liberalism’ that, beneath an anti-business veneer, served the interests of the existing order. Government regulation of the economy, hailed by American reformers as a means of blunting capitalist rapaciousness, and seen by many radicals as a stepping stone to a fully planned economy and perhaps even socialism itself, was now interpreted as the vehicle through which capitalists were able to control the political economy without appearing to do so. Because of the resiliency of corporate liberalism, virtually all popular protest movements had been incorporated within the expanding capitalist order.\textsuperscript{15}

A somewhat different version of the ‘hegemony’ argument emphasizes culture rather than political ideology. The rise of mass culture, the mass media, and mass consumption in twentieth-century America, according to this view, not only rendered obsolete the socialist goal of building an alternative culture within capitalist society, but shaped the aspirations of workers, making leisure and consumption, rather than work or politics, the yardsticks of personal fulfillment. Recent studies of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American radical movements have focused not on such traditional concerns as political ideology and organizational history, but on the creation of ‘counter cultures’ within the larger society. Obviously influenced by the theory of hegemony (and in some cases, by a perhaps idealized understanding of the much-publicized cultural activities of the modern Italian Communist Party), these works have implied that the seedbed of socialist politics is a counter-hegemonic set of cultural institutions, rather than the polity or the workplace. But studies of the modern working class have emphasized the disintegration of ‘working-class culture.’ ‘Social life,’ contends one such analysis, ‘is no longer organized around the common relation to the production of both culture and commodities. The working class public sphere is dead.’\textsuperscript{16}

Unfortunately, the consensus interpretation in its radical ‘hegemony’ variants still suffers from the problem of homogenizing the American past and present. Indeed, in adopting the notion of hegemony from Gramsci, American historians have often transformed it from a subtle mode of exploring the ways class struggle is muted and channeled in modern society, into a substitute for it. The sophisticated analysis of a writer like Raymond Williams, who observes how diverse ideologies can survive even in the face of apparent ‘hegemony’, is conspicuously absent from American writing.\textsuperscript{17} The notion that mass culture and mass society render any kind of resistance impossible, moreover, can hardly explain the dissatisfactions reflected in the radicalism of the 1960s. In the end, the ‘hegemony’ argument too often ends up being circular. Rather than being demonstrated, the ‘hegemony’ of mass culture and liberal values is inferred from the ‘absence’ of protest, and then this absence is attributed to the self-same ‘hegemony.’

An entirely different set of answers to the ‘why is there no socialism’ question derives from the sociology of the working class itself, and examines aspects of the American social order that make it difficult for workers to organize successfully. The assumption is that socialist politics is unlikely to emerge in the face of an internally divided working class. The traditional assumption that capitalist development must produce an increasingly homogenous proletariat with a single set of interests, represented by unions and a political party, has given way before a recognition of the many kinds of divisions and stratifications built into the capitalist labor process itself. Divisions between the skilled and unskilled, craft and industrial
workers, often reinforced by divisions along lines of race, ethnicity and gender, belie the notion of a unified working class. It is doubtful, however, that such divisions are very useful in explaining the unique features of American labor history, for it appears that similar segmentation exists in other advanced capitalist societies. The United States is hardly the only country where capitalist development has failed to produce a homogenous working class.18

Even more common than labor market segmentation as an explanation for the distinctive history of the American working class, is its racial and ethnic heterogeneity. The complex web of backgrounds from which the American proletariat emerged is often seen as rendering unity along class lines all but impossible. Although apparently straightforward, the notion that the exceptional diversity of the American working class has inhibited both class consciousness and socialist politics, actually encompasses a number of distinct approaches to American labor history.

On the simplest level, it is easy to point to the critical role racism and ethnic prejudices have played in shaping the history of American labor. For most of American history, black workers were systematically excluded by most unions. On the West Coast, prejudice against the Chinese shaped the labor movement, helping to solidify the domination of conservative skilled craft workers over a less-skilled majority. The racism of many labor organizations in turn fostered prejudice against unions among minority workers.19 And even in the case of white ethnic groups, differences of language, culture and tradition clearly made organization difficult early in this century, when massive immigration from southern and eastern Europe coincided with the rapid expansion and consolidation of monopoly capitalism. The constant redefinition and recreation of American labor (a process that continues today with new waves of immigration), also meant that working-class institutions and traditions had to be rebuilt and battles fought over and over again. ‘The making of the American working class’ (a subject yet to find its historian) was a process that occurred many times, rather than once.

The diverse backgrounds from which the American working class was forged is sometimes seen as affecting class consciousness in other ways as well. Racial and ethnic loyalties often drew men and women into cross-class alliances, while racism, nativism, and ethnic hostilities inherited from Europe all inhibited the development of a consciousness of workers’ collective interests. Immigrant groups created a complex network of ethnic social, religious and political institutions, diverting working-class energies from institutions like unions and radical political parties that explicitly sought to unite men and women across ethnic lines.20 Others contend that the cultural heritage of Catholic immigrants, who comprised so large a portion of the industrial working class, made them unresponsive to any form of political radicalism. In his pioneering study of Irish immigrants in nineteenth-century Boston, Oscar Handlin portrayed a religious community that saw efforts to change the world as at best futile and at worst sacrilegious. Handlin’s argument has sometimes been generalized to the proposition that ex-peasant immigrants are inherently indifferent or hostile to radical movements. (This contention begs the question of why, for instance, groups like Italian immigrants played so prominent a role in the creation of the labor and socialist movements in Argentina, while allegedly eschewing radicalism in the United States.) Another line of argument derives from the large numbers of early twentieth-century ‘new immigrants’ (Italians, Poles, Greeks, etc.) who were actually migrant laborers, planning only a brief stay in the United States. In 1910, for example, three-quarters as many Italians left for home as entered the United States. Not intending to make the United States a permanent haven, Gerald Rosenblum argues, these new immigrants reinforced the narrow ‘business’ orientation of American labor organizations: higher wages, not efforts at social change, were what attracted them to unions.21

Despite the popularity of what might be called the ‘ethnic’ interpretation of the weakness of American socialism, it is by no means clear that cultural divisions were an insuperable barrier to class consciousness or political socialism. Racism and ethnic prejudice are not, as they are sometimes treated, ‘transhistorical’ phenomena that exists independent of historical time and place. What needs to be studied is what kind of organizing and what conditions have allowed unions to overcome pre-existing prejudices. Unions organized on an industrial basis have under certain circumstances been able to bring black and white workers together. The Industrial Workers of the World managed to lead successful, militant strikes early in this century by recognizing that ethnicity can, under certain circumstances, generate distinctive forms of radical protest. This is especially true where class and ethnic lines coincide, as in turn-of-the-century American industrial communities. Ethnic group solidarity, Victor Greene has argued, actually increased militancy during strikes by immigrant workers in the Pennsylvania coal fields, and the IWW’s tactic of establishing strike committees composed of democratically-elected representatives from each ethnic group, brought to its strikes all the strength of the pre-existing network of immigrant institutions. So long as each group believed no one group was receiving favored treatment, the bonds of ethnicity in no way contradicted a willingness to work with others. Like many ‘global’ explanations of the failure of socialism, in other words, the ethnic approach proves too much: rather than investigating the specific circumstances under which racial and ethnic divisions inhibit class solidarity, it assumes that a diverse working class can never achieve unity in economic or political action.22

From the recent emphasis upon the resiliency of immigrant sub-cultures has emerged the latest explanation for the failure of American socialism. In The Radical Persuasion Aileen Krador, a former radical historian who has repudiated her earlier writings and taken a prominent role in a new conservative historians’ organization, argues that the very strength of ethnic cultures rendered political radicalism irrelevant to the immigrant proletariat. In early twentieth-century America, according to Krador, workers were able to create cultural enclaves so self-sufficient that they saw no need for far-reaching political change: all they wanted was to be left alone, enjoying relative local autonomy. Those radicals who tried to organize in lower-class communities were perceived either as misfits who had rejected their cultural inheritance or as representatives of a hostile outside environment. In a sense, Krador’s book represents a rightward, but in some ways logical, extension of the new social and labor history. Her emphasis upon the cultural resiliency of immigrant workers’ ethnic communities reflects a major reoccupation of recent historical writing, as does her subordination of political and ideological considerations to ones of culture. Correctly criticizing an older stereotype of the unified class-conscious proletariat, Krador substitutes another equally ahistorical construct, the self-satisfied, community-oriented worker, for whom the private sphere is sufficient unto itself and who is therefore uninterested in radical ideologies or political change.23

Related to the composition of the American working class, of course, is the
distinctive character of American trade unionism itself. Why, despite a history of labor violence unparalleled in Europe, does organized labor in the United States appear so much more conservative and apolitical than its European counterparts? Sometimes, attention is drawn to the exclusionary policies of American Federation of Labor unions, whose craft basis of organization reinforced pre-existing divisions between skilled and unskilled workers, and excluded large numbers of workers—blacks, women, new immigrants, etc., from the labor movement. Indeed, it has been argued by James O'Connor that, in a nation in which no more than a quarter of the workforce has ever belonged to trade unions, the higher wages of unionized workers are, in effect, subsidized by lower-paid non-union workers via inflation. Other writers contend that the problem is not the nature and role of unions per se, but the fact that labor leaders have constantly sought to undercut the militancy of the rank and file, preferring accommodations with capital to prolonged class struggle. Whether this is a question of the periphery of individual ‘mistrusts’ or the growth of bureaucratic structures isolating officials from their membership, the result has been a union movement uninterested in posing a political challenge to capital.

No one, however, has satisfactorily explained how and why a presumably militant rank and file constantly chooses moderate ‘mistrusts’ to represent it. And it should be noted that the implicit portrait of class-conscious workers betrayed again and again by a corrupt or moderate leadership assumes a unity and militancy among American workers that other approaches to the ‘failure of socialism’ question have discounted. One might, in fact, argue that at a number of points in American history, the image of a moderate leadership curbing a radical rank and file ought to be reversed. In the 1930s, for example, it is now clear that socialist and communist organizers played a pivotal role in galvanizing working-class protest and creating the CIO industrial unions.

Thus far, we have considered approaches to the question of socialism that focus upon the society or the workplace. An alternative point of view looks to the nature of the American political system since it is a political party whose absence is to be explained. Various aspects of American politics, it is argued, have made it difficult for labor or socialist parties to establish themselves effectively. First, there is the early achievement of political democracy in the United States, the ‘free gift of the ballot’ as Selig Perlman termed it. Unlike the situation in Europe, the vast majority of male American workers enjoyed the suffrage well before the advent of the industrial revolution. In England, class consciousness was galvanized, at least in part, by the struggle for the vote and the exclusion of workers from the suffrage paralleled and reinforced the sense of a class-divided society learned at the workplace. In the United States, however, the ‘lessons’ of the polls were the opposite of those of the economy. In the latter, the worker often perceived himself as a member of a distinct class; in the former, he thought of himself as an equal citizen of the republic. Alan Dawley, indeed, writes that ‘the ballot box was the coffin of class consciousness’ in nineteenth-century America. Not only were the major parties remarkably adept at absorbing labor leaders into political office, but the early achievement of political democracy gave workers a vested interest in the existing political order. American workers, according to this argument, developed a strong sense of their ‘rights’ in both policy and workplace, but were not convinced of the necessity of launching a direct national political challenge to capital. Perhaps labor parties never advanced beyond the local level in the United States because workers did not see the national state as being under the control of a hostile class. And even on the local level, Ira Katznelson argues, workers traditionally allocated economic issues to unions, while politics revolved not around questions of class, but rather the distribution of patronage among competing ethnic groups by urban political machines.

The unusual structure of American politics has also affected the possibilities for socialist parties. The electoral college method of choosing the president helps entrench the two-party system (since votes cast for a third candidate who cannot achieve a majority are ‘wasted’). The size and regional diversity of the country has made it difficult to translate local labor strength into national power. American political parties have proven remarkably adept at absorbing protest, adopting the demands of reformers in watered down form, and forcing radicals to choose in elections between the lesser of two evils. The contrast between the American 1930’s, when Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal made broad concessions to labor and thereby cemented an alliance with the union movement, and the conservative policies of Depression-era British governments, is only one example of the remarkable flexibility of American parties. To liberal historians, such actions vindicate the receptivity of the American political order to demands for reform; to radicals they often appear as frustrating barriers to truly radical change.

Other political factors have also inhibited the rise of labor and socialist politics. American historians have yet to assess the full implications of the disfranchisement of southern blacks from the late nineteenth century until the 1960’s. Here was a group comprising a significant portion of the American working class that, when given the opportunity, proved receptive to parties like the Populists which sought far-reaching changes in American life. Their exclusion from political participation shifted American politics to the right while entrenching within the Democratic party a powerful bloc of Southern reactionaries. At various times, immigrants and most migrant laborers have also been barred from voting. Industrial workers, moreover, have never formed anything approximating a majority of the American electorate. In a vast nation, predominantly rural until well into this century, parties resting exclusively upon labor could not hope to win national power. In 1900, the United States was already the world’s foremost industrial power, yet a majority of the population still lived in places with fewer than 2500 residents.

A final ‘political’ consideration often stressed by historians sympathetic to American socialism but minimized by those who are not, is outright repression. The Populists were deprived of electoral victories throughout the South by blatant fraud in the 1890’s. Violence by federal and state troops and private police forces suppressed strikes on many occasions, and court injunctions defeated many others. The first Red Scare of 1919–20, which jailed and deported radical leaders, devastated both the Socialist Party and IWW. The second, after World War II, effectively destroyed the Communist Party.

Each of these ‘political’ approaches contains an element of plausibility, but many suffer from a shortcoming shared by other explanations for the failure of socialism: they invoke aspects of American politics common to other countries to explain American exceptionalism. To take one example, virtually every European socialist movement suffered governmental repression at one time or another in its history, sometimes far more severe repression than anything experienced in the United States (very few American radicals, after all, were ever executed by the
both stand out as eras when the trajectory of socialist movements in the United States diverged most markedly from that of their European counterparts. Why did the Socialist and Communist parties fail to build upon their undoubted successes and establish themselves as permanent parts of the American body politic?

One kind of internal approach, associated most prominently with Daniel Bell, argues that American socialists and communists failed to attract broad support because of their sectarian orientation and concern with ideological purity rather than the give and take essential to success in American politics. 'In the world but not of it,' they eschewed reforms in favor of a preoccupation with socialist revolution, thereby isolating themselves more or less by choice. A somewhat analogous argument is that of James Weinstein, who begins by challenging Bell's portrait of the Socialist party, insisting that between 1900 and 1919 it acted as a traditional reformist party, taking ideology less seriously than the winning of votes. In the end, however, according to Weinstein, the party succumbed to the kind of ideological rigidity described by Bell, the attempt of one faction, allied with the Comintern, to impose the Soviet model of a highly-disciplined, ideologically correct party upon what had been a broad coalition in the mainstream of American politics.

Despite its success in winning local elections (the Socialist party by 1912 had elected some twelve hundred local officials and thirty-three state legislators, and controlled municipal governments in such cities as Schenectady, Milwaukee and Berkeley) and attracting a respectable vote for Eugene V. Debs for president in 1912 (900,000 ballots, or six per cent of the electorate), the Socialist party suffered from a number of internal weaknesses. Paul Buhle stresses the nativism of many Socialist party leaders and their unwillingness to reach out to the new immigrant proletariat. The party's electoral obsession, which led it to measure the advance of socialism almost solely in terms of the ballot box, led it to neglect organizing when votes were not at stake. Preoccupied with electoral strategies, the party failed to respond to the massive upheaval of the unskilled immigrant factory workers between 1909 and 1919. Where was the Socialist party at McKee's Rocks, Lawrence or the great steel strike of 1919? The Industrial Workers of the World demonstrated that it was possible to organize the new immigrant proletariat, but despite sympathy for the IWW on the part of Debs and other left-wing socialists, the two organizations went their separate ways. Here, indeed, was the underlying tragedy of those years: the militancy expressed in the IWW was never channeled for political purposes while socialist politics ignored the immigrant workers. Indeed, the Socialist party's strength lay not among factory workers but in an unusual amalgam of native-born small farmers, skilled workers in certain cities, ethnic groups from the Russian Empire like Finns and Jews, and professionals and intellectuals. Leon Trotsky was perhaps unkind when he remarked that the American Socialists were 'a party of dentists.' But its thinness among the industrial working class was certainly among the party's most debilitating weaknesses.

Another explanation for the decline of American socialism focuses on the crisis brought about by World War I. The Socialists' principled opposition to America's participation in the war fundamentally transformed the party, alienating many native-born members and intellectuals, while attracting a new constituency among immigrant workers. Ironically, at the moment of its final collapse, the
Socialist party for the first time accurately reflected the composition of the American proletariat.

Opposition to the war laid the party open to the massive repression that was, at least in part, responsible for its demise. One may speculate whether, had American Socialists, like their European counterparts, supported the war and perhaps even entered a coalition wartime government as junior partners, as the Labour party in Britain did, they might have shielded themselves from repression and established their political legitimacy. (Of course, given the experience of our own times, one may well ask whether participation in governing an imperialist nation involves a socialist party in an inevitable sacrifice of principle, at least so far as foreign policy is concerned.) What is clear is an outcome fraught with irony, in view of the assumption that American socialism is so much weaker than that of Europe. Of the two great ‘isms’ created by the nineteenth century – socialism and nationalism – the latter in western Europe proved far the stronger in 1914. Socialism internationalism was crucified on the cross of socialist support for the war effort. Was the American party’s opposition to the war a courageous act of suicide? At least, history ought to record that the American Socialist party went to its death not because there was less socialism in the United States than in Europe, but because, apart from the Russian Bolsheviks, the American was the party that remained most true to socialist principles.

If the period before World War I represented one opportunity for the development of a mass socialist party in the United States, the 1930’s appears to represent another. By the mid-thirties, the Communist party had established itself as the major force on the socialist left. The achievements of the communists, recent research has made clear, were indeed impressive. Moving far beyond the electoral emphasis of the old Socialist party, they understood that struggle, on a variety of fronts is the most effective means of mass mobilization and education. In contrast to the socialists’ isolation from the militant struggles of the pre-World War I years, the communists took the lead in a remarkable array of activities – union-building, demonstrations of the unemployed, civil rights agitation, aid to republican Spain, etc. Indeed, the wide variety of their activities becomes all the more amazing when it is remembered that the party at its pre-war peak numbered well under 100,000 members. 30

Given the massive militancy of the CIO and range of party concerns, why did a larger socialist or labor political presence not emerge from the Great Depression? Some accounts stress the resiliency of the political system itself, the way President Roosevelt managed to absorb labor militancy into a redefined Democratic party coalition. Others point to the internecine warfare between AFL and CIO unions as sabotaging efforts toward the creation of an independent labor party. Still others blame the Communist party’s quest for legitimacy, especially in its Popular Front period. The party’s determination to forge an alliance of all anti-fascist elements, including the Democratic party, and its ideological emphasis upon American nationalism (‘Communism is twentieth-century Americanism’ as the mid-thirties slogan went), foreclosed the possibility of independent socialist politics. According to James Weinstein, here also lay a cardinal difference between the old socialists, who at least had made socialism a part of American political discourse, and the 1930s communists, who saw themselves as the left wing of the New Deal coalition. 31

But like the old Socialist party, the communists were unable to cut the gordian knot of the relationship between nationalism and socialism. On the one hand, the party achieved primacy on the Left partially by virtue of its relationship with the USSR, the only existing socialist state. On the other, the Soviet connection proved a point of vulnerability, opening the party to repression as ‘un-American’ after World War II, and leading to inevitable questions as to whether specific policies reflected American or Soviet interests and realities. It is not clear, however, how much emphasis ought to be put on the Soviet connection for the party’s failure to grow in size. After all, every Communist party in the world had to deal with the Comintern. What is certain is that the CP was most successful precisely when it was most American. As Maurice Isserman’s recent study demonstrates, the Popular Front, whatever its relationship to socialist ideology, was exactly the policy that most American communists desired, and the party’s membership was highest in the mid-1930s and again toward the end of World War II, precisely when socialism and nationalism coincided. Indeed, recent studies of the war years criticize the party for subordinating labor militancy to the war effort and a quest for nationalist legitimacy, via the no-strike pledge. 32 (The implicit assumption that calls for greater efforts to win the war alienated American workers concerned only with their paychecks may, however, be open to question.)

Through the no-strike pledge, subordination of criticism of the Roosevelt administration, and the decision to transform itself into a party into a ‘political association’ the Communist party sought ‘legitimacy’ – a permanent foothold in American politics – during World War II. The experience of war and the resistance movements did legitimate European Communist parties as defenders of their nations (no one, whatever his political outlook, could call the French or Italian Communist parties ‘un-French’ or ‘un-Italian’ after the experience of World War II). But American communists ended up with the worst of both worlds. The no-strike pledge alienated shop-floor militants, without winning ‘legitimacy’ from those with the power to dispense it, the price, perhaps, of trying to exist at all at the very focal point of world imperialism. The party remained vulnerable to the wave of repression that began with the onset of the Cold War. The base communists had laboriously created in the labor movement was effectively destroyed, with disastrous consequences for the entire direction of the post-war labor movement.

Let us return, in conclusion, to our original question. Why is there no socialism in the United States? As we have seen, all the explanations that have been proposed – the internal and the external, the social, ideological, economic, and cultural – have a certain merit, and all seem to have weaknesses as well. Nor can we simply add them all together in a kind of mixed salad and feel satisfied with the result. Perhaps the debate has gone on for so long and so inconclusively because the question itself is fundamentally flawed. Perhaps beginning our investigation with a negative question inevitably invites ahistorical answers.

Like a kindred question that has bedeviled the study of American slavery – why were there no slave rebellions in the United States? – the socialism question rests on a number of assumptions that may not survive careful analysis. The rise of socialism, or the outbreak of slave rebellions, are defined as normal occurrences, whose absence needs to be explained. In the case of slavery, the question is premised upon the conviction that the ‘normal’ human response to severe repression is armed rebellion, an assumption for which human history, unfortunately, does not offer much support. In the case of socialism, the premise is that under capitalism, the working class will develop class consciousness, expressed in unions
and a labor or socialist political party, and that consequently the failure of either to emerge must be the result of some outside interference. No one asks, for example, ‘why is there no feminism in Europe?’ (a legitimate question when either independent feminist movements or the historical participation of women in socialist parties in Europe and the United States are compared) because socialism is held to be an inevitable, universal development under capitalism while feminism is assumed to emerge from local, contingencies that vary from country to country.

In the end, of course, ‘why is there no socialism’ rests upon an interpretation of history that accords socialism a privileged position among radical movements because it arises inexorably out of the inner logic of capitalist development, and holds out the promise of a far-reaching social revolution. To the Marxist paradigm that underlies this vision, I have no objection. But it does seem to me that the empirical evidence that justifies the question – the existence of mass Labour, Socialist and Communist parties in western Europe and not in the United States – fundamentally contradicts the Marxist foundation of the question. A Marxist question, in other words, arises from a non-Marxist outcome, for the ‘absence’ to be explained is not socialism (a revolutionary transformation of society) but the existence of political parties of a decidedly social democratic bent that aim at no such transformation. The Left parties of Western Europe have without doubt improved the conditions of life of their constituents, but they have proved incapable of using their impressive political strength to reshape fundamentally their societies. They have, one might say, promoted liberalism and egalitarianism more successfully than socialism, and presented themselves as the proponents of modernization and social rationalization rather than class rule, thus operating in ways more analogous to American political parties than either Americans or Europeans would care to admit. The issue for Western European socialist parties is not precisely socialism, but the equitable distribution of the products of capitalism. In other words, one might well ask not ‘why is there no socialism in the United States,’ but, ‘why has there been no socialist transformation in any advanced capitalist society?’

To put the question this way challenges another underlying premise of the socialism question: American exceptionalism. Too often in American historical writing, ‘Europe’ is posited as an unchanging class-conscious monolith in contrast to the liberal, bourgeois United States. In much American writing, ‘Europe’ equals France, and ‘France’ equals the French Revolution. The heroic struggles of European workers and socialists are highlighted and the more recent erosion of working-class consciousness and socialist ideology ignored. Too often, American historians equate the official doctrine of ‘revolutionary’ labor movements, such as the French earlier in this century, or political platforms calling for collective ownership of the means of production, with a pervasive socialist consciousness among a majority of workers. They ignore the fact that large numbers of European workers have always voted for ‘bourgeois’ parties. American commentators often cite the history of British labor as one example of class-conscious ‘European’ working-class development, unaware of the debates among British writers about what some see as an exceptional absence of socialism compared with the continent. Certainly, recent events demonstrate that ‘the containment of . . . working-class movements within the limits of trade union economism and social democratic reformism’ is hardly unique to the United States.33

To abandon American exceptionalism as an organizing theme is not, of course,
to assert that the history of every capitalist nation is identical. The history of the
United States is, in important ways, unique, as is that of England, France, Germany, and every other country. But a preoccupation with the exceptional
elements of the American experience obscures those common patterns and
processes that transcend national boundaries, most notably the global expansion of
capitalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and its political and ideological
ramifications. It also diverts attention from the Americanizing influences so
prominent in Western Europe during the past generation. America, Sombart
wrote, was not 'the land of our future.' Are not the economies, and the working
classes, of both America and Europe today being transformed by the decline of
old basic industries, the backbone of traditional unionism and socialism? Is not
European politics, like European popular culture, becoming more and more
'American,' with single-issue movements rising to prominence and political parties,
even those calling themselves socialist, emphasizing the personalities of their
leaders and their appeal to the entire electorate, rather than a carefully-delimited
ideology representing the interests of a particular social class? Western European
Socialist and Communist parties today occupy points on the political spectrum
ranging from distinctly moderate (the Italian, Danish and Portuguese Socialist
parties) to various shades of left and some, like the British Labour party, are
bitterly divided against themselves. In such a situation it is not at all clear that
'socialism' retains any clearly-defined political content.

Perhaps, because mass politics, mass culture, and mass consumption came to
America before it did to Europe, American socialists were the first to face the
paradox of how to define socialist politics in a capitalist democracy. Perhaps, in
the dissipation of class ideologies, Europe is now catching up with a historical
process already experienced in the United States. Perhaps future expressions of
radicalism in Europe will embody less a traditional socialist ideology than an
'American' appeal to libertarian and moral values and resistance to disabilities
based upon race and gender. Or perhaps a continuing world economic crisis will
propel politics in both Western Europe and America down a more class-oriented
path. Only time will tell whether the United States has been behind Europe in
the development of socialism, or ahead of it, in socialism's decline.

NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the conference on 'Why is there no socialism
in the United States' in May 1983, organized by the Centre d'Etudes Nord-Américaines,
École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, and will be published in the proceedings
of the conference.

1 Among the many reviews of the 'why is there no socialism?' debate, two of the
better recent surveys are: Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Why No Socialism in the United States?',
in Sources of Contemporary Radicalism, Seweryn Bialer and Sophia Sluzer, ed., New York:
Bobbs-Merrill, 1977, 31–149, which contains an interesting section on how Marx, Engels, and other Euro-
pean socialists viewed the problem, and Jerome Karabel, 'The Failure of American Socialism
Reconsidered,' Socialist Register, 1979, 204–27. See also R. Laurence Moore, European
Socialists and the American Promised Land, New York 1970. An excellent collection of
discussions of the history of American socialism and introduction to the Sombart question
is John H. M. Laslett and Seymour M. Lipset, ed. Failure of a Dream?: Essays in the History
of American Socialism, Garden City, N.Y., 1974. Still indispensable for the history of
socialism in the United States is Donald D. Egbert and Stow Persons, ed., Socialism and

American Life, 2 vols., Princeton, 1952, the second volume of which consists of an exhaustive
bibliography.


3 David Montgomery, 'The Shuttle and the Cross: Weavers and Artisans in the
Kensington "Riots" of 1844,' Journal of Social History, V (Summer, 1972); Montgomery,
Workers Control in America, New York 1979. James R. Green, The World of the Worker,
New York 1980, also stresses the predominance of 'control' issues in labor struggles.
An excellent study of the rise and fall of local labor parties in the 1880s is Leonard Frink,

4 Werner Sombart's original essay has recently been printed, for the first time in its
entirety, in English translation: Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?, White
Plains 1976.

5 The view that the acquisition of property and high rates of geographical mobility explain
the failure of socialism is expressed, for example, in Stephan Thernstrom's influential
Poverty and Progress, Cambridge 1964. Peter Knights, The Plain People of Boston,
1830–1860, New York 1971, exemplifies a host of studies of the high rate of population
turnover in nineteenth-century American cities. See also the self-congratulatory conservative
version of the 'success of capitalism' argument in James Nuechterlein, 'Radical Historians,'
Commentary, October, 1980.

6 A recent investigation; Peter Shergold, Working-Class Life: The 'American Standard'
in Comparative Perspecive, 1899–1913, Pittsburgh 1982, concludes that skilled workers in
Pittsburgh did enjoy higher wages than their English counterparts, but that the unskilled did
not.

7 For an interesting recent example, see Ronald Schatz, 'Union Pioneers: The Foun-
ders of Local Unions at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1933–37,' Journal of American
History, LXVI (December, 1979), 586-602.

8 The idea that the West functioned as an effective safety valve for eastern labor was
disproven nearly fifty years ago in Carter G. Goodrich and Sol Davidson, 'The Wage Earner
in the Westward Movement,' Political Science Quarterly, L (1935), 161–85 and LI (1936),
61–116. Quantitative methods have become far more sophisticated since then, but students
of geographical mobility are still generally unable to ascertain whether men and women
who moved in search of economic opportunity actually succeeded in bettering their conditions of
life. The essential raw material for such studies is the manuscript census returns, using which
it is easy to discover that an extremely high percentage of urban working-class populations
had 'disappeared' from one census to the next (a period of ten years). But not knowing
where these individuals went, it is impossible to locate them in the next census, to determine
their occupation, wealth, etc.

9 Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America, New York, 1955. The 'fragment'
argument is expanded in Hartz's The Founding of New Societies, New York 1964. One may
wonder, however, why Australia, another 'bourgeois fragment' society did give rise to
depotent Labour party.

10 Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition, New York 1948; Daniel

11 The 'pre-bourgeois' character of the Old South is argued effectively in the works
of Eugene D. Genovese, See The Political Economy of Slavery, New York 1965; The World

12 Much of this work was inspired by Herbert G. Gutman, Work, Culture and Society in

13 The most significant revisionist works on the ideology of the American Revolution
are J. G. A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment, Princeton 1975, which sees republicanism
spreading well into the nineteenth century as an organizing paradigm of American political
thought, and Pocock, The Creation of the Classics: The Crisis of Authority in the American Republic,
1780–1787, Chapel Hill, 1969, which dates the 'end of classical politics' and the triumph of liberalism from the
adoption of the federal Constitution in 1788. Joyce Appleby has recently sought to resurrect
the idea of a dominant liberal ideology, in a more sophisticated formulation than Hartz's.
See her 'Commercial Farming and the Agrarian Myth in the Early Republic,' Journal of American
History, LXVIII (March, 1982).

14 For the individualist strain in American radicalism, see Eric Foner, Tom Paine and
Revolutionary America, New York 1976; Ychoshua Arieli, Individualism and Nationalism
especially those of the American Federation of Labor. For the 1930’s, see Schatz, ‘Union Pioneers,’ and Bert Cochran, Labor and Communism, Princeton, 1977, which, while unsympathetic to communist unionists, provides convincing evidence of their pivotal role in creating CIO unions. Melyn Dubofsky questions the extent of rank-and-file militancy during the Depression in ‘Not So “Turbulent Years”’: Another Look at the American 1930’s,’ Amerikastudien, XXIV (1980), 12–20.


26 For Roosevelt’s flexibility, see Mike Davis, ‘The Banister Marriage of American Labor and the Democratic Party,’ New Left Review, 124, (November–December, 1980), 43–83; Allan Brinkley, Voices of Protest, New York 1982, demonstrates the hold of FDR on voters otherwise attracted to radicalism. Christopher Lasch, ‘Radicalism in America: in The Agony of the American Left, New York 1969, is excellent on how apparent concessions to radical groups rarely involve fundamental social change. The electoral college system, in which the party carrying a state wins the state’s entire electoral vote for its presidential candidate, penalizes third parties whose strength is widely dispersed, while allowing regionally-concentrated third parties to carry enough states to disrupt a presidential election by throwing the contest into the House of Representatives (as happens when no candidate receives a majority of the electoral vote.)


30 The astonishing variety of party activities comes through even in hostile accounts like Cochran, Labor and Communism. See also Mark Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression, Urbana 1983, and Radical History Review, 23 (1980), an issue devoted to the history of Communist parties in Europe and the United States.


34 This was the arresting thesis of Lewis Corey, an American communist who wrote during the 1930’s under the name Louis Fraina. He argued that classical socialism was a
stage in the development of capitalism, a stage the United States, because of the extremely rapid expansion of capitalism in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in effect leaped over. In Europe, classical socialism of the Second International variety assisted the bourgeoisie in completing the bourgeois-democratic revolution, a historical task unnecessary in the United States. Harvey Klehr, "Leninism, Lewis Corey, and the Failure of American Socialism," Labor History, XVIII (Spring 1977), 249–56.

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The Communist Party and the Agrarian Question in Southern Italy, 1943–48*
by Paul Ginsborg

On 17 March 1944, Palmiro Togliatti, the astute, erudite and somewhat disdainful leader of the Italian Communist party, returned to Italy from Moscow after more than eighteen years in exile. He reached a country which was undergoing the worst crisis since Unification, with its territory invaded from both North and South. In the South, the Allies had landed in Sicily on 10 July 1943, and by March 1944 had advanced as far as Monte Cassino, 130 kilometres from Rome. With them in the South was the king of Italy, Victor Emanuel III, a monarch deeply tainted with responsibility for Fascism’s triumph in 1922, but who, fearful for the survival of his dynasty, had successfully deposed Mussolini in July 1943 and come to terms with the Allies. Victor Emanuel and his prime minister, Pietro Badoglio – 'the little King and the old Marshal', as brigadier-general Holmes mockingly described them – had established the Kingdom of the South, to which the Allies, as they moved up the peninsula, gradually handed over governmental responsibility. Northern and central Italy was occupied by the Germans. They had rescued Mussolini and made him head of the puppet republic of Salò, named after a small resort on the western shore of Lake Garda. In Nazi-occupied Italy the Resistance movement, mainly Communist, grew slowly despite very heavy casualties. By the spring of 1944 it numbered some 20–30,000 members.

On his return, Togliatti’s first political action was to declare in the famous *volta di Salerno*, the turning-point of Salerno, that until the end of the war his party was willing to serve under the king in a government of national unity. This declaration has been called a turning-point because the previous policy of the three principal left-wing, anti-Fascist parties – the Communists, Socialists and the Action party – had been to boycott the Kingdom of the South. (The Action party was a small middle class grouping of democrats and radicals, very active in the Resistance.) Togliatti argued instead that unity of “intention,” not of “party,” was necessary. 

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