Workers' Struggles, Past and Present
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Asa Philip Randolph was the most influential black trade unionist in American history. He may also have been, next to W. E. B. Du Bois, the most important Afro-American socialist of the twentieth century. His accomplishments in black union organizing, militant journalism, and political protest were unequaled for decades. His controversial newspaper, The Messenger, published from 1917 to 1928, was the first Socialist journal to attract a widespread audience among black working- and middle-class people. In 1941 he led the Negro March on Washington Movement to protest racial discrimination in federal hiring policies, establishing a precedent which was to be revived over two decades later at the high point of the civil-rights movement. Early in his career, Randolph earned the hatred and fear of the capitalist elite and federal government officials. President Woodrow Wilson referred to the black socialist leader as "the most dangerous Negro in America."

Later in his life, Randolph's contributions to the Afro-American freedom struggle were severely criticized. In the late 1960s, young black industrial workers condemned Randolph and other black trade union leaders for not representing their problems and vital interests. To the black activists in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers he came to represent a modern Booker T. Washington, without the Tuskegee educator's skill at political
compromise and power. In 1968 when blacks demanded greater decision-making authority in New York's public school system and charged the United Federation of Teachers with racism, Randolph heartily defended the UFT and its leader, Albert Shanker. In 1976 he lent his support to Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a conservative, racist Democrat, when Moynihan was running for the U.S. Senate from New York. By then, Randolph's image as a radical Socialist and militant trade unionist had been utterly erased. Upon his death in May 1979, Vice President Walter Mondale glorified the black leader, declaring that "America can speak out for human rights around the world, without hypocrisy, because of the faith A. Philip Randolph . . . showed in our country."

Thus we approach the great legacy of Randolph with some sadness and uncertainty. So many questions are left unanswered by the path of his brilliant and yet contradictory career. Some Marxists suggest that the "decisive break" in Randolph's career occurred in 1919, when he parted company with other black Socialists like Grace Campbell, Cyril V. Briggs, and Frank Crosswaith, who joined the fledgling Communist Party. "The issue was clear cut," argued Irwin Silber of the Guardian, "not support for socialism in general or in the abstract, but support for and defense of the Bolshevik revolution." Randolph's decision to choose "the path of social democracy" was "the decisive turning point in a political life devoted to preventing revolutionary forces from winning leadership of the Black liberation struggle." As we shall observe, this split was not as decisive as Silber or others suggest. Randolph admired and supported the Russian Revolution for many years. Throughout his early career, especially in the periods 1919-1922 and 1935-1940, he welcomed the support of Marxist-Leninists, although differing with them politically. In general, there is much greater continuity of political ideology and practice from the younger to the older Randolph than is usually thought.

This essay does not attempt to present a comprehensive view of Randolph's political life. (Numerous books and articles document his long and productive career, usually in a very positive light.) Instead, this essay will examine Randolph's early career as a militant journalist, Socialist Party candidate, and trade unionist, from his arrival in New York in 1911 until the late 1920s. Many of Randolph's major accomplishments, such as founding the National Negro Congress during the Great Depression, the March on Washington Movement of 1941, and the civil-disobedience campaign against military conscription in 1948, are discussed here only briefly, if at all. This is because, first, the fundamental outlines of Randolph's Socialism and political activism were firmly established during an earlier period. The roots of his thought were in the chaotic experiences of World War I and its aftermath. Second, the foundations for subsequent black working-class activism and modern black nationalism were established in the twenties. The competing political forces in Harlem of that period—Garveyism, left
black nationalism, militant integrationism, Marxism-Leninism—are themes which recur within the black movement today. The political decisions Randolph made during the 1920s, for better or worse, set much of the pattern for Socialism and trade-union work within the black community. The attempt here is to criticize Randolph's emergent theory of social transformation during his formative decade of political activism and to develop an understanding of the consequences of his sometimes eclectic political practice. The legacy of Randolph's politics and trade unionism which is carried on by his protege Bayard Rustin will also be considered in this light.

A BLACK PROLETARIAT

The historical period of World World I and the immediate postwar years brought substantial changes to black Americans in general and to blacks in industrial labor in particular. For the first time in history, a substantial number of Southern, rural blacks were moving to the industrial urban North. Against the paternalistic advice of Booker T. Washington, almost half a million black men, women and children left the South before and during World War I. Simultaneously, writes Philip Foner, “the first black industrial working class in the United States came into existence.” The number of blacks employed in industry between 1910 to 1920 rose from 551,825 to 901,131. By 1920 about one third of all Afro-American workers were employed in industry. However, only about 15 percent of those workers held skilled or semiskilled jobs. The great majority of black workers earned a living in the very lowest paying and most physically difficult jobs.3

As the political economy of black America took a decisive shift toward the industrial North, competing political interests began organizing, leading, and interacting with the new black labor force. Broadly conceived, four potential political forces presented alternative agendas to black industrial workers during this period. They were: (1) the old Booker T. Washington-capitalist alliance, which included conservative black ministers, businessmen, and journalists who preached cooperation with the capitalist class; (2) the American Federation of Labor, which in theory called for organizing black workers, but in practice upheld a strict Jim Crow bar; (3) the Marxist trade unionist in the Workers party, later the Communist Party and many members of the Socialist Party, which advocated black-white labor unity; (4) independent all-black labor organizations, including black nationalist groups influenced by Marcus Garvey, which operated on the outside of the "House of Labor."

The success of Booker T. Washington in attracting white capital to his many enterprises, from the National Negro Business League to Tuskegee Institute, was dangerous for the new black working class in the North. Washington's Northern constituency, the aggressive but fragile black entrepreneurial elite, firmly supported a capitalist-Negro alliance against white labor. Washington had argued that blacks should appeal to white
employers to hire black workers, since they were "not inclined to trade unionism" and not in favor of strikes. (Tuskegee scientist and inventor George Washington Carver was a friend of auto industrialist Henry Ford.) Thus, a major black newspaper such as the Chicago Defender supported Washington's strategy of alliance with the capitalist class. Many prominent black ministers, Republican politicians, and businessmen counseled black workers to reject unionism. Despite this influence, the overwhelming majority of new immigrants from the rural South saw this strategy for what it was, a "dead end" Jim Crow policy which only perpetuated low economic status for the black working class.

On paper, the American Federation of Labor sought to recruit the budding black proletariat to its cause; in actual practice it was scarcely less reactionary than the Ku Klux Klan. Between 1919 to 1927 the number of black locals in the AFL dropped from 161 to 21. Many unions had a long established Jim Crow policy. Sometimes blacks were admitted to separate lodges, and then forced under the authority of a white local. The new president of the AFL, the United Mine Workers' former secretary-treasurer William Green, was not a friend of black workers. Green had tolerated Ku Klux Klan influence within the UMW, and had never taken a strong stand against racial segregation. Green's concern for black labor was only stimulated in the 1920s when it appeared that many Afro-American workers were moving toward Marxism and/or independent trade union activism.¹

The only white groups which defended black workers' rights during this period were on the Left. Growing out of the militant tradition of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), thousands of socialist organizers of both races campaigned for worker unity against the issue of white racism. When the "Wobblies" split over the question of the Soviet revolution, many, such as William Z. Foster, joined the Communist Party. In 1920 Foster brought together a biracial coalition of Marxists and reformist trade union activists to create the Trade Union Educational League. The TUEL advocated the building of a workers' and farmers' political party, greater racial egalitarianism inside the AFL, and the creation of militant unions for non-craft workers. In 1925 the CP was also active in the formation of the American Negro Labor Congress, an all-black labor group which advocated the building of "interracial labor committees" to promote the introduction of black workers into previously segregated crafts. As the Communists grew more influential in organizing black workers, the fears of AFL leaders mounted.⁵

Related to these developments in the labor Left was the rapid growth of independent black workers' organizations. As thousands of black laborers came to the North, the base for all-black, militant activism in labor increased dramatically. In 1915 a national organization of black railroad workers was created, the Railway Men's Benevolent Association. Within five years it had 15,000 members. In 1917 the Colored Employees of America was founded,
one of the first of many groups which attempted to organize all black laborers. Two years later the National Brotherhood Workers of America was established, a coalition of black workers from almost every occupation, including blacks, electricians, dock workers, porters, riveters, and waiters. Until its demise in 1921, it represented a potential alternative to the racist policies of the AFL. To the left of these organizations, black radicals and Marxists urged the development of independent socialists strategies for black labor. Randolph's entire life must be viewed against this initial period of his activism, a time of tremendous growth and opportunities for black labor in the industrial North.

**RANDOLPH'S SOCIALISM**

Randolph's personal background conformed in most respects to that of other first-generation black immigrants from the South. Born in Crescent City, Florida, in 1889, he grew up in Jacksonville during the nadir of black-white relations. Inspired as a teenager by Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*, young Asa decided to leave the South and settle in New York City. Arriving in Harlem in the spring of 1911, Randolph first tried to become an actor. Failing at this, he drifted from one job to another. From 1912 to 1917 he attended courses at the City College of New York. A leftist philosophy professor, J. Salwyn Shapiro, acquainted Randolph with Marx's writings and other Socialist literature. His discovery of Socialism was so "exciting," he later reflected, that he studied "Marx as children read *Alice in Wonderland.*" He formed a group of radical "free thinkers" called the Independent Political Council, and began to follow the IWW closely. He began to identify himself with Harlem's premier black Socialist and "leading street-corner orator," Hubert Harrison. He joined the Socialist Party in the end of 1916, and began to lecture on black history and political economy at the Socialist Party's Rand School. By the beginning of World War I, Randolph and his new black friend, Chandler Owen, a fellow Socialist, had become "the most notorious street-corner radicals in Harlem, exceeding even Harrison in the boldness of their assault upon political and racial conditions in the country."

Randolph and Owen became involved in a series of efforts to organize black workers in their community. After several weeks' work they won the support of 600 black elevator operators for starting the United Brotherhood of Elevator and Switchboard Operators. The new union's demands included a minimum wage of $13 a week, and an eight-hour day. Receiving a federal charter from the AFL, the short-lived organization tried, and failed, to organize a strike to force recognition. Randolph and Owen were also active in the Headwaiters and Sidewaiters Society as editors of the union's journal, the *Hotel Messenger.* After a dispute with the Society's president, William White, the young Socialists were fired. Within two months, they organized their own monthly magazine, the *Messenger,* with the critical financial
support provided by Randolph’s wife, Lucille, who earned a living as a popular and successful Harlem hairdresser. Over the next months, the new publication acquired the enthusiastic support of older radicals like Harrison and younger militants like Jamaican Socialist W. A. Domingo. Between 1917 and 1918 the journal received the support of a wide variety of Harlem radicals and liberal black intellectuals of various shades: William Pickens, a field secretary of the NAACP; Robert W. Bagnall, NAACP director of branches; Wallace Thurman, Harlem Renaissance author; essayist George S. Schuyler, a Socialist who evolved into a right-wing, Goldwater Republican.

The theoretical basis for Randolph’s Socialism in his early years, between 1914 to 1920, was an uneven combination of traditional religious reformism, economic determinism, fervent internationalism, and Karl Marx. His father, the Reverend James Randolph, was a pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Upon his move to Harlem, the first organization he joined was the Epworth League, a social club whose principle activity was Bible study and prayer. Later friends recalled that Randolph was the outstanding participant in all Epworth forums. Throughout Randolph’s youth his father regarded him “as a fine prospect for the AME ministry.” Randolph rejected the orthodoxy of the cloth, but not the meaning of black spirituality in his politics. The language of the Old Testament would inform many of his speeches, as he deliberately used religious principles of brotherhood and humanism in organizing black workers. Even at the high point of their radicalism, Randolph and Owen spoke at black churches and worked closely with progressive clergy. “There are some Negro ministers,” the Messenger declared in March 1920, “who have vision, intelligence and courage. There [are] some upon whose souls the Republican Party has no mortgage.” Randolph continued to believe that the black church was “the most powerful and cohesive institution in Negro life.” Like his friend Norman Thomas, Randolph’s Socialism was never rooted in an atheistic outlook.

Like many other Socialists of the day, especially those influenced by the intellectual debates between Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky of German Social Democracy, Randolph believed that Socialism was a series of economic reforms taking place between management and labor. Through the vehicle of the trade union, the working class seized an increasingly greater share of the decision-making power within the means of production. The expression of working-class politics was, of course, the Socialist Party. The revolution against capital would be a revolt of the majority against the selfish interests of a tiny, isolated elite. Randolph’s definition of Socialism limited all of his subsequent work. If the Socialist Party was, as Randolph believed, the highest expression of working-class consciousness, and if blacks were profoundly working class, then no other political formation
could address blacks' interests as well as the party. Race and ethnicity played no role in the "scientific evolution" of class contradictions; class was an economic category without cultural or social forms. Randolph increasingly viewed any form of black nationalism as a major obstacle between white and black workers in the struggle toward socialist democracy.

The outbreak of World War I deepened Randolph's commitment to militant pacifism and "revolutionary socialism." Like Debs, Randolph and Owen opposed World War I on the principle that "wars of contending national groups of capitalists are not the concern of the workers." The Messenger's first issue denounced the "capitalist origins" of the conflict in a fiery essay, "Who Shall Pay for the War?" The editors told black men that they should not serve when drafted, and charged that the Wilson administration's claim that it was "making the world safe for democracy [was] a sham, a mockery, a rape on decency and a travesty on common justice." In 1918 Randolph and Owen participated in a Socialist Party anti-war speaking tour. On August 4, 1918, the two were arrested by federal agents after a mass rally in Cleveland and charged with violating the Espionage Act. Freed with a warning, the young men continued their lecture tour, visiting Chicago, Milwaukee, Washington, D.C., and Boston, where black radical Monroe Trotter joined their mass anti-war rally. In mid-August, Postmaster General Albert Burleson denied second-class mailing privileges to the Messenger. Owen was drafted and sent to a Jim Crow army base in the South. Only the armistice kept Randolph out of the draft.

The Bolshevik Revolution inspired Harlem's radicals, seeming to vindicate their faith in revolutionary socialism. "Lenin and Trotsky ... are sagacious, statesmanlike and courageous leaders," the Messenger proclaimed in January 1918. "They are calling upon the people of every country to follow the lead of Russia; to throw off their exploiting rulers, to administer public utilities for the public welfare, to disgorge the exploiters and the profiteers." For several years, Randolph argued that the Communist revolution meant the "triumph of democracy in Russia." He praised the Soviet Army's defeat of the White Russians in 1920, stating that the capitalist opponents of Socialism "had not reckoned with the indomitable courage and the cold resolution born of the unconquerable love for liberty." Randolph boldly predicted that Bela Kun's Hungarian Communists would eventually defeat the Social Democrats and send the aristocracy "to that oblivion and obscurity from which they ought never to emerge"; he also believed that British capitalism was on the brink of "an impending financial revolution." Domestically, Randolph participated eagerly in the Socialist Party's activities. In 1917, the Messenger campaigned for Morris Hillquit, Socialist Party candidate for mayor. In 1920 Randolph ran as the party's candidate for state comptroller and polled 102,361 votes, only 1,000 less than Socialist presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs in the state! In 1921 he
ran another unsuccessful campaign for secretary of state. Despite these failures, Randolph's belief in a democratic socialist revolution remained uncompromised.

CONFlict WITH Du BoIS

Randolph's strong anti-war position led to a decisive break with Du Bois—the major black leader of the NAACP and Randolph's intellectual mentor—in 1918, when the editor of the Crisis urged black Americans to support the war effort. Up to this point, the Messenger had praised Du Bois as a race leader and opponent of "disfranchisement," condemning only his attitude on labor. "One has not seen where the doctor ever recognized the necessity of the Negro as a scab," Owen wrote, "allaying thereby the ill feeling against him by working white man." Now Du Bois's advocacy of the war crystallized Randolph's and Owen's opposition to his entire political line—from the "Talented Tenth" theory—the idea, used in The Souls of Black Folk, of a black intellectual leadership which would act as a vanguard for the black masses—to his views on segregation. By July 1918, Randolph condemned almost every major essay or book that Du Bois had ever written. Du Bois was a "political opportunist," simply representing "a good transition from Booker Washington's compromise methods to the era of the new Negro."

Never one to avoid a fight, Du Bois defended his anti-Socialist Party, anti-trade unionist, anti-Bolshevik, and prowar positions head on. As early as January 1912, when he was a member of the Socialist Party, Du Bois complained about racism within the organization. He left the party to endorse the election of Woodrow Wilson later that year. His opposition to trade unionism was well established. Du Bois's position on the war evolved from examination of the colonial and racist origins of the conflict. The destruction of the German empire, Du Bois reasoned, might have resulted in the possibility of greater African self-determination. Meanwhile, black Americans would be rewarded for their loyalty to America's war effort against Germany.

About Russian Socialism Du Bois was profoundly skeptical. After the "February Revolution" in early 1917, Du Bois suggested to his Crisis readers that the event "makes us wonder whether the German menace is to be followed by a Russian menace or not." Although he criticized Alexander Kerensky's "blood and iron methods" in governing Russia, he said nothing about the Bolsheviks' rise to power. When radical Harlem Renaissance writer Claude McKay questioned why Du Bois "seemed to neglect or sneer at the Russian Revolution," he replied curtly that he had "heard things which [were] frighten[ing]" about the upheaval. I am "not prepared to dogmatize with Marx or Lenin."

For the new Negro generation, these opinions relegated "the Doctor" to the status of "the old, me-too-Boss, hat-in-hand Negro generally repre-
A. Philip Randolph and Black American Socialism

Randolph declared that Du Bois was “comparatively ignorant of the world problems of sociological and economic significance.” In 1920, the *Messenger* charged that the *Crisis* had an editorial policy of “viciousness, petty meanness” and “suppression [of] facts pertaining to the NAACP.” It attacked Du Bois’s associates, especially field secretary William Pickens, as advocates of “sheer ‘claptrap.’” It laughed at Du Bois’s provincial liberalism and staid social conformity. By the end of Wilson’s administration, the Justice Department reported that the *Messenger* was “by long odds the most dangerous of all the Negro publications.” Throughout Harlem, Randolph and Owen became known as “Lenin and Trotsky,” the most revolutionary black Bolsheviks on the scene. Their political break from Du Bois seemed complete.

**RANDOLPH AND GARVEY**

Having declared war against Du Bois and the NAACP leadership, Randolph and Owen sought the support of other black activists in Harlem. They needed support because, by their own admission, Du Bois remained “the most distinguished Negro in the United States today.” Marcus Garvey seemed a likely addition to their struggle against the *Crisis*’s editor. Born in Jamaica, Garvey had established his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914. Inspired by the racial “self-help” slogans of Booker T. Washington, the young black nationalist eventually settled in New York City in 1916. Randolph claimed the distinction of having been the first prominent black radical to invite Garvey to Harlem. He recalled years later that “when he finished speaking... I could tell from watching him then that he was one of the greatest propagandists of his time.” Garvey was attracted to Harrison, who by 1917 had left the Socialist Party to form his own Left black nationalist movement, the Afro-American Liberty League. Although Garvey was one of the main speakers at the League’s first rally on June 12, 1917, he quickly established separate UNIA offices near the *Messenger* on 135th Street. Randolph and Garvey worked together in the International League of Darker Peoples, an organization which demanded that the African territories and colonized nations be represented at the Versailles peace conference. Some Garveyites began to assist Randolph’s efforts. Domingo, who was editor of Garvey’s *Negro World*, worked as a contributing editor on the *Messenger.* Randolph certainly welcomed Garvey’s public attacks on Du Bois as an “antebellum Negro.”

The first major disagreement between the black nationalists and Randolph probably occurred over the creation of the Liberty Party, an all-black political coalition of former Socialists, Republicans, and Democrats, in late 1920. The stated slogan of the party was “Race First”; it advocated running a black presidential candidate and independent candidates at local levels. Randolph condemned the notion on all conceivable grounds. First, the Negro party was criticized because it had no prospects for support from
white workers. "A party that has no hope of becoming a majority has no justification for independent action; for it can never hope to be of positive benefit to its supporters." Second, the party had no economic platform. Third, the proposition of a Negro president was "tragically inane, senseless, foolish, absurd and preposterous. It is inconceivable that alleged intelligent, young colored men could take such obvious, stupendous political folly seriously." Last, the Liberty Party consisted of "opportunists, discredited political failures who are now trying to capitalize race prejudice of the Negro." The basis for this vituperative attack was Randolph's view that it was in the interests of "Negro workers to join and vote for the Socialist Party."38

It is probable that Harrison's Liberty League supported the new party. Another more menacing factor, of course, was Garvey, who had long been a proponent of an all-black political party.39 J. W. H. Easton, the UNIA leader for U.S. blacks, was the party's nominee for president. "The idea of a separate, race-conscious, political organization, rather than the Liberty Party per se, was the real issue. Randolph and Owen had begun to view black nationalism as being even more dangerous than the threat presented by Du Bois and his Crisis.

The Messenger began to challenge the Garvey movement for hegemony within Harlem's black working-class population. In December 1920, Randolph issued an editorial, "The Garvey Movement: A Promise or a Menace," which argued that "the class-struggle nature of the Negro problem" was missing from the UNIA's work. Revolutionary black nationalism "invites an unspeakably violent revulsion of hostile opposition from whites against blacks." In Randolph's view, any all-black organization could "only misdirect the political power of the Negro. All party platforms are chiefly concerned with economic questions" and not with race. Therefore, the Messenger concluded, Garvey's entire program "deserves the condemnation and repudiation of all Negroes."41 Relations with Garveyites swiftly worsened. Randolph insisted that Garvey's advocacy of an independent Africa for the Africans was unrealistic, because the Africans do not possess "the ability . . . to assume the responsibilities and duties of a sovereign nation."42 By mid-1922 the Messenger concentrated on opposition to Garvey. "Here's notice that the Messenger is firing the opening gun in a campaign to drive Garvey and Garveyism in all its sinister viciousness from the American soil."43

Nowhere in the black press of the time was the anti-Garvey campaign expressed so bluntly, and with such anti-West Indian sentiments, as in the Messenger. Every significant aspect of Garvey's program was denounced as "foolish," "vicious," "without brains," or "sheer folly." The UNIA's proposal for a Booker T. Washington University will have "neither students nor teachers" since the former "will not trust it to give out knowledge" and the latter "will not trust it to give out pay." Garvey's wildest claim, that the
UNIA had 4.5 million dues-paying members, proved that he was "a consummate liar or a notorious crook." But Randolph failed to explain the reasons for Garvey's massive popularity among black workers in Harlem, and ignored the hard evidence of the UNIA's progressive positions on African and international affairs.

**RANDOLPH BREAKS WITH BOLSHEVISM**

As the Bolshevik Revolution forced the creation of a Third International, Randolph felt himself pulled gradually toward the Right. For the first time in several years he was no longer "the first voice of radical, revolutionary, economic and political action among Negroes in America." Revolutionary black activists outside both UNIA and Messenger factions were making political waves across Harlem. In the fall of 1917 Cyril V. Briggs founded the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), a leftist and black nationalist group. A native of the Dutch West Indies and a former editorial writer for the New York *Amsterdam News*, Briggs began to edit his own nationalist journal, the *Crusader*. Many members of the ABB, which included Lovett Fort-Whiteman, Richard B. Moore, and Otto Huiswood, were quickly recruited into the newly formed Workers, or Communist, Party. (Harrison did not go over to the Communists, according to Harold Cruse, but he did "assist" them in certain situations.) By 1922, the Communists had begun "to assail Garvey's program as reactionary, escapist and utopian" while simultaneously trying "to influence, collaborate with, or undermine his movement." As Marxist-Leninists, the ABB also attacked Randolph's firm ties with the Socialist Party, his reformist and quasi-religious theories for social transformation, his bitter hostility toward black nationalism, and growing tendency toward political and economic conservatism.

The *Messenger* turned on its former Left friends almost as viciously as it had turned against Garvey. Declaring all black Communists "a menace to the workers, themselves and the race," Randolph judged their policies "utterly senseless, unsound, unscientific, dangerous and ridiculous." Black Marxist "extremists" were hopelessly out of touch with the mentality of Negro laborers, since the latter had not "even grasped the fundamentals and necessity of simple trade and industrial unionism!" As further proof that "Communism can be of no earthly benefit to either white or Negro workers," Randolph pointed out that the Soviet Union's new economic policy of "State Capitalism" had replaced the radical socialist economics of the war communist years.

Opposition to "Communists boring into Negro labor" united Randolph and Du Bois. Their joint opposition to Garvey's success was even stronger, and drove them back into some collaboration. There was no indication that Du Bois had changed his views on any of the major points that had separated him from Randolph during the war. If anything, Du Bois's opposition to
"State Socialism" and the "class struggle," and his advocacy of black "capital accumulation to effectively fight racism," placed him to the economic right of many Garveyites, and perhaps even Garvey himself at this time. But the distance that had separated Randolph and Du Bois had now narrowed due to Garvey's gospel of black nationalism. The Crisis and the Messenger concurred in opposition to all forms of racial separatism and distrust of Garvey's business methods and honesty.

Working closely with the NAACP's assistant secretary, Walter White, Randolph coordinated an elaborate campaign against Garvey, which included the distribution of anti-Garvey handbills throughout Harlem. In January 1923, Randolph, Owen, Pickens, and several other black leaders drafted a memorandum to Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty asking for the conviction of Marcus Garvey on charges of mail fraud, various criminal activities, and "racial bigotry." Garvey was eventually convicted of mail fraud, and imprisoned in February 1925. By the late 1920s the UNIA had virtually collapsed, partially due to Randolph's anti-Garvey activities. The irony of this entire episode was that Randolph, a would-be leader of the black working class, had participated in the destruction of the largest black workers' and peasants' organization in American history.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

Unlike Garvey, Randolph at first met with little success in his efforts to organize black workers. Randolph and Owen created the Friends of Negro Freedom in 1920, a biracial group which promoted black entrance into trade unions and held lectures on economic and political issues. Friends of Negro Freedom included Domingo, Baltimore Afro-American newspaper editor Carl Murphy, and black intellectual Archibald Grimke. In 1923 Randolph attempted unsuccessfully to establish a United Negro Trades organization to bring black workers into independent trade unions. Finally, in August, 1925, a few Pullman porters asked Randolph to help them establish the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Despite the fact that several black Pullman employees such as W. H. Des Verney and Ashley Totten had been more instrumental in organizing rank-and-file support for the Brotherhood, Randolph was named president. The initial prospects for this union's success looked just as dim as all the other groups that Randolph had led, however. The eleven thousand black porters working on Pullman cars faced the united opposition of the federal government, the Pullman Company, and its black conservative allies.

Given Randolph's early inability to build a successful and popular mass organization of black workers, it is not surprising that he began to reassess his overall theoretical outlook and political practice. Gradually, Socialism was given less emphasis in his writings; by 1923 the Messenger had succeeded in attracting several black businessmen and merchants to advertise in its pages. Articles by Emmett J. Scott, the former secretary of Booker T.
Washington, and even Robert Russa Moton, of Tuskegee, began appearing in the journal. 52 Quietly, editorial policies began to change. In January 1925, Randolph declared that “Negro businessmen are rapidly rising to the high mark of responsibility.” Many black entrepreneurs were “splendid, courteous,” and a “delight to deal with.” 53 Randolph’s blanket condemnation of the AFL and his earlier critical descriptions of Gompers—a “conservative, reactionary and chief strikebreaker”—mellowed into fawning praise. The AFL was no longer “a machine for the propagation of race prejudice,” but a progressive and democratic force. Randolph banned articles critical of William Green, newly elected AFL leader. 54

The editors endorsed Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes’ five-million-dollar fund drive by defending Washington’s position on industrial education against Du Bois’s Talented Tenth ideal. “Dr. Du Bois has probably been responsible for a great deal of misunderstanding about industrial education in America,” they argued. “We need more brick masons, carpenters, plasterers, plumbers, than we do physicians; more cooks than lawyers; more tailors and dressmakers than pupils.” 55 Yet there were only 40,000 black secondary and elementary teachers, 3,200 black physicians and 900 black lawyers in the United States at this time. Only 50 percent of black children between the ages of five and twenty were enrolled in school: 25 percent of all adult blacks in the South were illiterate. 56 Randolph had moved toward a defense of private property and capitalism—a posture which he would never relinquish.

Thus Randolph persuaded the Brotherhood to apply for an international charter from the AFL in 1928, after it had spent several years as an independent, all-black union. The AFL rejected the application for equal membership, and instead proposed a “compromise” of “federal union” status inside the organization. Despite criticism from leftists, black workers, and some journalists, Randolph agreed to these terms. Both parties got something in the deal: Green and the AFL acquired a major black union, silencing their Marxist and black critics like Du Bois; Randolph received the promise of assistance from organized white labor in his growing struggle with the Pullman Company.

Randolph built the Brotherhood with characteristic enthusiasm. Appeals to porters to join were made in racial and religious terms. “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free,” was the slogan on Brotherhood stationery. In language reminiscent of some Garveyites, the Brotherhood’s literature declared its faith in God and the Negro race: “Fight on brave souls! Long live the Brotherhood! Stand upon thy feet and the God of Truth and Justice and Victory will speak unto thee!” 57 Randolph’s efforts to organize the porters received a boost in 1926, when the Garland Fund, administered by the American Civil Liberties Union, donated $10,000 to the Brotherhood. The money allowed Randolph to hire Frank W. Crosswaith, a West Indian Socialist and graduate of the Party’s Rand School in New
Organizing the Unorganized

York City, as a professional organizer and executive secretary of the Brotherhood. Randolph also benefited from many intelligent and creative leaders among the porters: Morris “Dad” Moore and C. L. Dellums of Oakland; T. T. Patterson of New York City; Des Verney, and Totten. Chief among them was Milton Webster. Two years Randolph’s senior, he had been fired by Pullman because of his militancy. In the twenties he became a bailiff and was one of Chicago’s influential black Republican leaders. As assistant general organizer of the Brotherhood and chief organizer for the Chicago area, next only to Randolph, the aggressive yet politically conservative Webster became the major spokesperson for the porters.

Randolph’s leadership was soon tested against the Pullman Company. After the Board of Mediation, established by the Railway Labor Act of 1926, ruled the following year that the parties could not reach an agreement and recommended voluntary arbitration, Randolph’s only alternative was to call a strike to force Pullman Company into collective bargaining. The strike was set for June 8, 1928.

Across the country, porters were excited at the prospect of a confrontation between themselves and the Pullman Company. Despite red-baiting against Randolph, random firings, and veiled threats, the porters backed the Brotherhood leadership almost unanimously. The strike vote, 6,053 to 17, astonished even Randolph. Some porters made plans for a long siege, even blocking the use of strikebreakers. Ashley Totten and his associates in Kansas City began collecting “sawed-off shotguns, railroad iron taps, boxes of matches, knives and billy clubs” and storing them in a local black-owned building. Facing the prospect of an extensive and probably violent strike which would disrupt Pullman railroad service nationwide, Randolph began to have doubts. Could an all-black workers’ strike succeed without some measure of white trade-union and working-class support? Three hours before the scheduled strike, Green sent Randolph a telegram stating that “conditions were not favorable” for a strike. He suggested that the Brotherhood engage in “a campaign of education and public enlightenment regarding the justice of your cause.” Randolph called the strike off.

It is difficult to know whether the strike would have been successful. Throughout the remainder of his life, Randolph insisted that the possibilities were nil. The historical evidence points in the opposite direction, however. William H. Harris’s research on Brotherhood correspondence suggests that Webster had a great deal of difficulty in convincing his local members not to strike by themselves. “Aside from disruption of peak travel, what could be more damaging to interstate commerce than to tie up the rails during the time when both national political parties were holding conventions in such remote cities as Houston and Kansas City?” Harris asked. “Even the Pullman Company recognized this as a potential danger.” The union was “in shambles after the abortive strike.” The Messenger was forced to halt publication; porters lost confidence in the Brotherhood and stopped
paying their regular dues. Black newspapers like the New York Argus attacked the leadership of “A. Piffle Randolph.” The Communists accused him of “betraying Negro workers in the interest of the labor fakers.” The American Negro Labor Congress charged that Randolph had “forsaken the policy of militant struggle in the interest of the workers for the policy of class collaboration with the bosses and bluffing with the strike.” Within four years, the Brotherhood’s membership declined from almost 7,000 to only 771 in 1932.

It was only in April 1937 that the Pullman Company agreed to bargain seriously with the Brotherhood. On August 25 of that same year Pullman agreed to reduce the porters’ monthly work load from 400 to 240 hours, and provide a substantial pay increase. But many of his critics, black and white, suggested that these and other accomplishments would have been achieved much sooner if A. Philip Randolph had had a little less faith in the system and a little more confidence in the militancy of the black working class.

NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLES

In the Depression, Randolph again exhibited courage and some of his former political independence. Contrary to Du Bois, Randolph charged that “the New Deal is no remedy” to black people’s problems. It did not “change the profit system,” nor “place human rights above property rights.” Assisted by Alain Locke, Ralph Bunche, and other Left-oriented black intellectuals, Randolph initiated the National Negro Congress in February, 1936. Hundreds of black trade unionists, radical civic reformers, and communists participated in a black united front in blunt opposition both to Roosevelt’s “welfare capitalism” and to the do-nothing acquiescence of the NAACP. Despite the breakup of the Congress in the early 1940s over the issue of “Communist control,” the organization represented one of the most advanced coalitions of black activists ever assembled.

With the onset of World War II in Europe, the Roosevelt administration began expanding production in defense industries. Prior to America’s direct involvement in the war, thousands of new jobs were created in industrial, clerical, and technical fields related to wartime production. Black workers were largely kept out of these positions because of a tacit policy of Jim Crow followed by white labor, big business, and the federal government. Although Congress had forbidden racial discrimination in the appropriation of funds for defense training, the law was essentially a dead letter. With Randolph’s resignation from the National Negro Congress in 1940, he turned his energies toward the issue of black employment in defense industries with federal contracts. Working again with Walter White, who by this time was secretary and dictatorial leader of the NAACP, Randolph sought to influence Roosevelt to initiate action against white racism.

By January 1941, Randolph was prepared to take what was, for that
time, radical action. Randolph urged blacks to organize a militant march in Washington, D.C., on July 1 to protest the discrimination against black workers. The idea of a “March on Washington Movement” seized the imagination of the black working class, the unemployed, and even the petty bourgeoisie. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was the central force behind the campaign. Hundreds of March-on-Washington Movement meetings were held in black churches, union halls, and community centers. With able support, Randolph succeeded in committing over 100,000 black people to the march. Foner observes that the “March on Washington Movement represented the first occasion in American history when a black labor organization assumed leadership of the struggle of the Negro masses on a national scale and became the spokesman for all black Americans, conservative and radical alike.” Neither Garvey, Washington, nor Du Bois had ever succeeded in forging a popular coalition of the black business and professional elites, the working class, and rural blacks toward a single, progressive cause.

The driving force behind the 1941 March on Washington was black nationalism. Taking another page from Garvey’s book, Randolph insisted that only blacks participate in the march. It was important for blacks to show white America that they were able to build an effective, militant, national organization without white assistance. C. L. Dellums explained that the Brotherhood informed its “white friends over the country why this had to be a Negro march. It had to be for the inspiration of Negroes yet unborn.” White progressives and trade unionists were asked to offer “moral support, to stand on the sidelines and cheer us on.”

The demand for an end to discrimination in defense plants appealed to the typical black industrial worker who, like porters in the 1920s, was on the verge of class consciousness. But its expression among blacks was nationalism, a force involving religious, cultural, and ethnic qualities which Randolph was forced to deal with in a concrete manner. Randolph’s biographer emphasizes that “a certain strain of black nationalism . . . ran through his social and religious heritage.” Not surprisingly, “when the chips were down,” Randolph had to return to his own origins to find the means to understand his own constituency and to articulate their aspirations. His biographer writes, “It is a wonder that black nationalism did not become the central activating force and principle of Randolph’s political life.”

Roosevelt used his considerable power to force the organizers to stop the march. As black workers in Harlem, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and every major city prepared for the confrontation, Roosevelt finally agreed to sign an executive order prohibiting the “discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries because of race, creed, color or national origin.” The Democratic administration promised to create the Fair Employment Practices Committee, a commission which would supervise the compliance of federal contractors with the executive order. Although this
was not everything that the March on Washington Movement had asked for, Randolph and other leaders agreed to call off the demonstration on June 24.79

Historians August Meier and Elliott Rudwick point to the March on Washington Movement as the real foundation for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. "Though its career was brief, the former organization prefigured things to come in three ways," they note. It was, first, "an avowedly all-Negro movement"; second, it involved the direct "action of the black masses"; third, "it concerned itself with the economic problems of the urban slum-dwellers."70 Two additional points can be made. The FEPC was the beginning of today's Federal Office of Contracts Compliance Programs, the Department of Labor's affirmative-action watchdog. The principle of equal opportunity for black people in employment was, for the first time, considered a civil right. Randolph's ideology behind the march also "prefigures" the 1950–1960s because of the impact of Gandhi's approach to social change. In an address before March-on-Washington associates given in Detroit in September 1942, Randolph called attention to "the strategy and maneuver of the people of India with mass civil disobedience and non-cooperation." Huge, nonviolent demonstrations "in theaters, hotels, restaurants, and amusement places" could be a potential means to gain full equality. Years before Martin Luther King, Jr., Randolph envisioned the basic principles of satyagraha applied to the fight against Jim Crow.

Yet for all his foresight and commitment to the ideals of black struggle, Randolph's subsequent political behavior did little to promote the creation of a permanent organization. The March-on-Washington Movement's last major conference was in October 1946, and it lapsed completely the next year. Randolph's ongoing fights with AFL officials still produced meager results. As in the past, Randolph's failure to carry out the threat of militant action compromised the pursuit of his long-range goals. Even at the peak of his influence throughout black America, during the March-on-Washington Movement of 1940–1941, Randolph failed to establish a mass-based, permanent force which promoted his rhetorical commitment to democratic socialism and black economic equality. Again and again, especially later in his career, he failed to trust the deep militancy of the black working-class masses, relying instead upon tactical agreements with white presidents, corporate executives, and labor bureaucrats. Curiously, like Booker T. Washington, Randolph always preferred class compromise to class struggle.

With the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War, Randolph's creative contributions to the struggle for black freedom had largely ended. Like other labor leaders and Socialists such as Norman Thomas, Randolph capitulated to the posture of extreme anti-Communism. Randolph and Thomas traveled to the Far East lecturing against the evils of radical trade unionism, for instance, under what later was revealed to be the
Organizing the Unorganized

auspices of the CIA. Randolph became an acknowledged “elder statesman” during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s. Making his peace with those black leaders he had formerly opposed in the NAACP and Urban League, he had little to offer in the way of guidance or political theory to a new generation of black radicals, the rebels of SNCC, CORE, and SCLC. Ironically, it was during this period that Du Bois, now in his eighties, moved toward a thoroughly radical condemnation of America’s political economy. The old so-called “political opportunist” had become the active proponent of world peace and international liberation, while his “Young Turk” critic had become a defender of the conservative status quo.

Since the 1960s, Randolph’s role in the AFL-CIO hierarchy has been filled by his trusted assistant, Bayard Rustin. Like his mentor, Rustin is a Socialist and pacifist with a long history of principled and at times even courageous struggle. As a participant in CORE’s “Journey of Reconciliation” campaign of 1946, he tested local Jim Crow laws by sitting in white sections on interstate buses in the South. With other early “freedom riders” he received a 30-day jail term on a North Carolina chain gang. Rustin was one of the major organizers of the 1963 March on Washington, and inspired a generation of younger black activists like SNCC’s Stokely Carmichael and Phil Hutchings. But when he became head of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, founded by George Meany and the AFL-CIO in 1965, he acquired the language and outlook of white labor’s elites. Rustin bitterly denounced Malcolm X as a “racist,” and condemned the Black Power movement as “anti-white” and “inconsistent.” Rustin and Randolph defended the Vietnam War and criticized King for linking domestic civil rights with America’s involvement in Southeast Asia.

In the 1970s Rustin’s position within the black movement drifted increasingly toward the Right. At the September 1972 convention of the International Association of Machinists, he attacked black rank-and-file activists and defended the AFL-CIO’s shabby record on integration. The next year he was critical of the creation of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, arguing that the Randolph Institute should be viewed as the “catalyst” for black advancement in union leadership positions. On the international front, at the time of Randolph’s death in 1979, Rustin participated in a “Freedom House” delegation to Zimbabwe which declared that the white minority regime’s fraudulent elections were democratic. Cruse analyzed him best in 1968, observing that “Rustin’s problem is that in thirty years he has learned nothing new. He has done nothing creative in radical theory in American terms.” Put another way, Rustin is a victim of what Marx postulated in “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”; that “all great personages occur, as it were, twice—the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.” Randolph’s life is tragic, because of his greatness and yet untapped potential. Rustin’s is a caricature, in another historical period, of that lost greatness.
Despite Randolph's changes and shifting images certain consistencies remain. Throughout his career, Randolph perceived union organizing as a "top-down" rather than a mass-based strategy. Although he was not a porter, he asked for, and received, the presidency of the Brotherhood in 1925; he left the presidency of the National Negro Congress after realizing that he could no longer control the leftists in it. He consistently preferred compromise and gradual reform to confrontation and class/race struggle. The capitulation of the Brotherhood's 1928 strike and the 1941 March on Washington were the most outstanding instances, but not the only ones. He made a similar compromise in December 1965, after the establishment of the Randolph Institute. After years of criticizing the racial policies of the AFL-CIO, Randolph reversed himself at the San Francisco national convention by announcing that racism had virtually disappeared from organized labor.

Another of Randolph's central characteristics was his inability to appreciate the relationship between black nationalism, black culture, and the struggle for Socialism. Randolph's and Owen's editorials in the Messenger declared that "unions are not based upon race lines, but upon class lines," and that "the history of the labor movement in America proves that the employing class recognize no race lines." This crude and historically false oversimplification led Randolph into pragmatic alliances not only with the white Marxists, but also with the AFL after 1923, and later the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. His successes in winning higher wages and shorter working hours for the Brotherhood were achieved at the expense of building an autonomous, all-black protest movement which was critical of both racism and capitalism. The Messenger's vicious attacks against Garvey did not stop hundreds of thousands of rural and urban black workers from defending black nationalism. Randolph was ill equipped to understand the rank-and-file revolt of black industrial workers in the past two decades who were influenced by Malcolm X, Franz Fanon, and their Black Power disciples.

Cruse's comments on the entire generation of Harlem radicals, both in politics and the arts, are an appropriate critique of Randolph as well. Because "the Negro intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance could not see the implications of cultural revolution as a political demand," Cruse notes, "they failed to grasp the radical potential of their own movement." Like the Renaissance poets and novelists, Randolph was hesitant to place black culture, ethnicity, and nationalism on the same agenda with other social and political concerns. "Having no cultural philosophy of their own, they remained under the tutelage of irrelevant white radical ideas." 74

This same assessment was also made by Du Bois in 1933. He criticized the literary Renaissance as "literature written for the benefit of white readers, and starting primarily from the white point of view. It never had a real Negro constituency and it did not grow out of the inmost heart and frank
experience of Negroes. . . .” Similarly, Randolph’s economic determinism, his political pattern of compromise and reconciliation, his narrow definitions of class and culture, proved harmful throughout his entire career. In the first Negro March on Washington when he did turn to the black workers with an avowedly nationalistic style and a program for political confrontation of the segregationist status quo, he was dramatically successful. When he overcame his Socialist Party training and used the language of the black church and Southern black political protest traditions to appeal to his Brotherhood’s rank and file, he reached a potentially revolutionary force. But his ambiguous hostility toward the Negro’s nationalism negated the full potential of his efforts.

Randolph’s contribution to the ongoing struggle for black self-determination was unique and important. His activities in creating the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the National Negro Congress, and the March on Washington Movement of 1940–1941 were necessary preconditions for the black activism of the 1950s and 1960s. Harold Cruse is correct that “not a single Negro publication in existence today matches the depth of the old Messenger.” Randolph was the first great leader of the black urban working class. But unlike Du Bois, he was unable to reevaluate himself and his movement dialectically; ultimately he became a prisoner of his own limited vision for black America.

In the next stage of history, black working people and activists must transcend Randolph’s contradictions. If they succeed, as they must, they will begin to realize the possibilities of socialism within the means and relations of production. In doing so, they will carry out the legacy of Randolph that he was unable to achieve for himself and his own generation.

NOTES


A. Philip Randolph and Black American Socialism


4. Ibid., pp. 169–172.


6. Ibid., pp. 147–160.


8. Ibid., pp. 76–77; Harris, Keeping the Faith, pp. 28–29. In 1944 Randolph commented that his “extensive reading of Socialist literature” was one of the “fundamental forces that had shaped his life.” The Socialist Party theorists and authors he named included Morris Hillquit, Algernon Lee, Norman Thomas, Frank Crosswaith, and Eugene V. Debs. Until 1964, when he voted for Lyndon Johnson, he had consistently endorsed the Socialist Party ticket. Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, p. 343.


10. Ibid., pp. 48, 59.


12. Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, p. 25. Randolph stopped attending church within a year after his arrival in Harlem in 1911. But in December 1957, the Reverend Richard Allen Hildebrand, an AME minister in Harlem received a request from Randolph to become a member of his church. Randolph seldom attended, if ever; nevertheless, he probably rested somewhat easier with the spiritual knowledge that he was a member.


16. “The Russian Triumph,” Messenger, March 1920, pp. 3–4. Randolph’s mechanistic, economic determinism is evident in his faulty commentary on the Bolsheviks and the coming American revolution. “The Government of the United States . . . is located in Wall Street. When the large combinations of wealth—the trusts, monopolies and cartels are broken up . . . a new government will then spring forth just as the Soviet Government was an inevitable consequence of the breaking up of the great estates of Russia and assigning the land to the peasants, and the factories to the workers. It is as impossible to have a political machine which does not reflect the economic organization of a country, as it is to make a sewing machine grind flour.” “The Negro Radicals,” Messenger, Oct. 1919, p. 17.


20. One of Du Bois’s most controversial prowar editorials was “Close Ranks,” published in the July 1918 issue of the Crisis. He argued, “Let us, while this war lasts, forget our social grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy.”


37. Martin, Race First, p. 182. After Harrison's newspaper, The Voice, closed in 1919, Garvey offered him a position on the Negro World. During 1920–1921 Harrison was "joint editor" of the paper. Martin, Race First, p. 92.


40. "The Garvey Movement: A Promise or a Menace," Messenger, Dec. 1920, p. 171. Throughout the entire history of the Messenger one finds an anti-nationalistic bias. Randolph and Owen even took the extreme position that the greatest danger to American Socialism and the trade union movement was not the racist, conservative white worker, but the Negro! "Negroes must learn to differentiate between white capitalists and white workers," the editors declared. Since they do not, "this makes the Negro both a menace to the radicals and the capitalists. For inasmuch as he thinks that all white men are his enemies, he is as inclined to direct his hate at white employers as he is to direct it at white workers." In the Messenger's opinion, the only hope was for organized labor to "harness the discontent of Negroes and direct it into the working-class channels for working-class emancipation." "The Negro—A Menace to Radicalism," Messenger, May-June 1919, p. 20.
41. Ibid., pp. 170–172.
42. Editorial, Messenger, Nov. 1922, p. 523.
44. A. Philip Randolph, “The Only Way to Redeem Africa,” Messenger, Jan. 1923, pp. 568–570, and Feb. 1923, pp. 612–614. Du Bois’s comments against the Garvey organization were provocative. He defended the Negro World against Attorney General Palmer’s attacks during the Red Summer of 1919, and in late 1920 described Garvey as “an honest and sincere man with a tremendous vision, great dynamic force, stubborn determination and unselfish desire to serve.” In 1921, he admitted that the “main lines” of the UNIA’s activities “are perfectly feasible.” It was only in 1922 and 1923, when Garvey began to consider the Ku Klux Klan as a potential ally to the black liberation movement, that Du Bois registered his strongest denunciations. See “Radicals,” Crisis, Dec. 1919; “Marcus Garvey,” a two-part essay in Crisis, Dec. 1920 and Jan. 1921; “Back to Africa,” Century Magazine, Feb. 1923, pp. 539–548.
45. Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, p. 82.
46. Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (New York, 1967), pp. 45, 75. At its peak in 1921, the ABB had 2,500 members in 56 chapters throughout the country. It demanded the right for black self-defense, “absolute race equality,” a “free Africa,” and political suffrage. In many respects, its platform was strikingly similar to the agendas of Malcolm X’s Organization of Afro-American Unity, over 40 years later. See “Cyril Briggs and the African Blood Brotherhood,” WPA Writers’ Project No. 1, Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library.
47. Ibid., p. 46.
48. The final break between the black Marxist-Leninists and Social Democrats does not come in early 1919, as many have suggested, but much later. As late as mid-1920 Briggs was a participant in Randolph’s Friends of Negro Freedom. Martin, Race First, p. 320.
49. “The Menace of Negro Communists,” Messenger, Aug. 1923, p. 784. The division between black Socialists and Communists tended to be along ethnic as well as political lines. Cruse observes that “after 1919, the split among Negro Socialists tended to take a more or less American Negro vs. West Indian Negro character. The Americans, led by Randolph, refused to join the Communists, while the West Indians—Moore, Briggs and Huiswoud—did.” There were several exceptions; Fort-Whiteman, an American, joined the Communists. It is interesting to note that Cruse does not fully discuss the fate of Harrison, a revolutionary Socialist who abandoned the Socialist Party because of its racism and never joined the Marxist-Leninists; a black nationalist who nevertheless did not wholeheartedly embrace the Garvey phenomenon. His primary concerns were generating independent black political activity and developing a greater race-consciousness among all Socialists. See H. Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, p. 118.
52. Emmett J. Scott, “The Business Side of a University,” Messenger, Nov. 1923, p. 864. Early in its career, the Messenger was not reticent in its denunciations of Moton. “Moton has neither the courage, education or the opportunity to do any-
thing fundamental in the interest of the Negro," Randolph declared in 1919. "He counsels satisfaction, not intelligent discontent: he is ignorant of the fact that progress has taken place among any people in proportion as they have become discontented with their position. . . ." "Robert Russa Moton," *Messenger*, July 1919, p. 31.


57. Brazeal, *The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters*, p. 40. At this time Randolph also began a modest effort within the AFL to drum up support for the Brotherhood's position against Pullman. See Randolph, "Case of the Pullman Porter," *American Federationist*, Nov. 1926, pp. 1334–1339.

58. Ibid., p. 18; Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, p. 140. Crosswaith eventually became a member of New York City's Housing Authority, appointed by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia in the early forties. Earlier, he had been a leading political opponent of Marcus Garvey, and revolutionary Socialist Party theorist.


60. Robert L. Vann, conservative black editor of the Pittsburgh *Courier*, argued that "the company will not deal with [Randolph] because of his history as a socialist. It is known that American capital will not negotiate with socialists." *Courier*, April 14, 1927. A more fundamental reason was provided by one lower-level Pullman boss to his black employees: "Remember, this is a white man's country, white people run it, will keep on running it, and this company will never sit down around the same table with Randolph as long as he's black." Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, p. 181.


63. Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, p. 112.

64. Ibid., pp. 113, 114.


66. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, pp. 204–205. It should be noted as well that after 1928 Randolph remained "the dominant figure" in the Brotherhood, but no longer wielded "absolute power." Webster demanded and won the right to have all
major union decisions made within the Brotherhood's Policy Committee, which he chaired. Historian William H. Harris describes Randolph as the union's "national black leader," whereas Webster was "a union organizer. Randolph thought in wider terms; he saw the problem of black in the totality of American society, whereas Webster thought mainly of the porters and of finding ways to improve their conditions at Pullman."


69. Ibid., pp. 254-255.
70. Ibid., pp. 241-261.

72. On the question of Malcolm, we confront again the inconsistencies of Randolph's views on black nationalism. According to one source, Randolph was "a friend and admirer of Malcolm" even during his years as minister of Harlem's Temple Number Seven of the Nation of Islam. In 1962, Randolph invited him to serve on the Committee on Social and Economic Unity, a multiethnic coalition in Harlem. Several conservative black ministers threatened to leave when Malcolm arrived. Randolph replied that he would leave immediately if Malcolm was denied a voice on the committee. See Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, pp. 13-14.