

8-15-2008

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Nathan Godfried

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Recommended Citation

Godfried, Nathan (2008) "Fellow Traveler, Organic Intellectual: J. Raymond Walsh and Radio News Commentary in the 1940s," *Democratic Communiqué*: Vol. 22: Iss. 2, Article 2.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7275/democratic-communication.295>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/democratic-communication/vol22/iss2/2>

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Fellow Traveler, Organic Intellectual: J. Raymond Walsh and Radio News Commentary in the 1940s

Nathan Godfried

J. Raymond Walsh was a leftist radio news commentator during the latter half of the 1940s. Although often dismissed and denounced by contemporary critics as a fellow traveler of the air, Walsh's interpretations of local, national, and international events reflected his life experiences as an educator, economist, and trade union activist. The following article explores Walsh's commentaries on Cold War America in the context of his family background, education, and political activism. Rather than interpreting Walsh as a dupe of the Communist Party, the article suggests that he was an organic intellectual for counter-hegemonic groups during their war of position with the dominant economic and political forces in U.S. society.

Historians and communications scholars have remained intrigued by the relationship between mass media/culture and progressive politics. How and when, for example, have progressive forces used mass media/culture to contest the position of society's dominant political and economic classes?¹ Drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci, Michael Denning's study of U.S. society in the 1930s and 1940s found that radio, film, theater, music, and literature were important battle sites in a prolonged "war of position" between hegemonic forces and a counter-hegemonic "cultural front." This confluence of social democrats, communists, and liberals—based in industrial unionism and including intellectuals and cultural workers—embraced the causes of anti-fascism, labor rights, civil rights for racial minorities, and economic democracy.² The following article examines one aspect of the war of position by evaluating the efforts of a radio news commentator to use the mass media to challenge the developing orthodoxy of the Cold War. Although dismissed by contemporaries as a fellow traveler of the Communist Party, the economist, labor activist, and political commentator J. Raymond Walsh was an organic intellectual for counter-hegemonic forces.

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Gramsci and Organic Intellectuals

Almost a century ago Gramsci argued that “every social group” produced its own strata of intellectuals, “which gave it homogeneity and an awareness of its own” purpose. “Organic intellectuals”³ constituted either “the thinking and organising functionaries of a dominant class attempting to maintain its hegemony, or, alternatively, those of a ‘subaltern’ class striving to create an alternative” order.⁴ As intellectuals, they created, disseminated, and safeguarded “distinct forms of consciousness” reflecting their class origins or allegiances and the particular historical environment in which they emerged.⁵

The intellectual servants of power in modern capitalist societies have helped elites to assess the world’s condition and to develop a strategy for remedying structural defects, enhancing efficiency, and maintaining the status quo. As “the dominant group’s ‘deputies,’” they have legitimized the privileges and inequities of capitalism and tried to convince other social classes of the universality of their world views, strategies, and tactics.⁶ Intellectuals emerging from subordinated groups, on the other hand, have resisted and challenged the dominant structure. They have developed “a critical consciousness of the world, a desire to question and to change existing conditions, and a sense of collectivity with others in working to restructure society.”⁷ The reciprocal relationship between ideas and action, theory and political practice, is central to the work of organic intellectuals. Concrete experiences with racial discrimination and inequality, for example, shaped how African-American organic intellectuals analyzed and interpreted the world around them and then produced “oppositional ideas” that they spread “through social action.”⁸ Given how theory and practice interacted, Gramsci noted that the identity of organic intellectuals was “always relational and dynamic.” Specific historical conditions produced organic intellectuals and changed circumstances could lead to alterations in their roles.⁹

In their capacity to create and distribute political culture, journalists constituted an important layer of intellectuals. Gramsci characterized the press as “the most dynamic” and prominent part of “the ideological structure of a dominant class.”¹⁰ Scholars have examined how economic, social, and political forces pushed and pulled journalists to function as servants of state and corporate power.¹¹ Yet journalists also emerged from or identified with subordinated classes, seeking to challenge or rebel against the dominant system.¹² Mid-twentieth-century servants of power condemned the “political journalism” of such counter-hegemonic intellectuals, dismissing them out-of-hand as “fellow travelers.”¹³

Fellow Travelers

In his *Odyssey of a Fellow Traveler* (1938), J. B. Matthews, an ex-Communist turned hired gun for public and private red hunters, denounced people who rarely joined the Communist Party (CP), but supported its various causes and sympathized with the Soviet Union. Matthews contended that fellow travelers engaged in “a

colossal piece of self-deception” in embracing the Soviet system and the American party. While “hopeless idiots” and “political chickens,” they also threatened to “work incalculable damage both to the physical and to the spiritual structure of American society.”¹⁴ The post-World War II red scare intensified these fears. In 1949, for example, the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. argued that the rise of “an international Communist conspiracy” transformed the fellow traveler “from a harmless and often beguiling character to a potentially sinister one.”¹⁵ Philosopher Sidney Hook, a former Marxist, warned that the activities of fellow travelers presented “a more serious threat to democratic life than those of” CP members. Disingenuous in applying one standard of conduct to the U.S.S.R. and “an entirely different one” to other nations, fellow travelers, according to Hook, lacked a sense of history and embraced “an unscientific, narrow empiricism,” while serving the interests of a foreign power.¹⁶

Fellow travelers fared only marginally better in historical hindsight. In a 1973 study of fellow traveling, David Caute defined his subjects as “true sons and daughters of the Enlightenment, of the doctrine of Progress.” While disillusioned with the inability of their own Western democratic and free market societies to fulfill their ideals of liberty, social justice, peace, and equality, the fellow travelers perceived the Soviet Union as a means to those ends. In conjuring up an attractive image of communist Russia, fellow travelers embraced neither communism nor revolution, but assumed “that what is good, progressive medicine for the backward East might kill the patient in the advanced, industrialized West.” While cherishing Western democratic liberties and rights, fellow travelers hoped that Communist ideas, by “the force of example and emulation,” would permeate the capitalist world. Caute insisted that fellow traveling always involved “bifocal lenses, double standards, and a myopic romanticism.”¹⁷

These assessments of fellow traveling eventually came under critical analysis. In 1988, David Roediger questioned the characterization of fellow travelers as “superficial, easily misled, and reactive in their politics and [as] seekers of vicarious pleasure through identification with the Russian Revolution.” He challenged scholars’ tendency to place the CP at the center of radical activity during the 1930s and 1940s while relegating fellow travelers to the periphery.¹⁸ David Blaazer’s study of Depression-era Great Britain refuted the myth that the non-Communist left’s participation in the Popular Front was “an aberration,” manipulated by the British CP. The most “numerous and strategically significant group to support the Popular Front campaign in Britain was not the Communist Party but the left of the Labour Party.”¹⁹ Similarly, Denning found that fellow travelers comprised the core of the American cultural/popular front. “The heart of the Popular Front as a social movement lay among those who were non-Communist socialists and independent leftists, working with Communists and with liberals.”²⁰

Other studies have begun to fill in some of the details of fellow traveling. Daniel Horowitz’s biography of Betty Friedan revealed that the future feminist “emerged out of the Old Left as someone who, in response to poverty, racial discrimination, and sexism, developed a commitment to social justice for idealistic reasons.”²¹ Paul Milkman’s study of the progressive newspaper, *PM*, suggested that leftist intellectuals and media outlets of the 1930s and 1940s saw anti-fascism as a

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key component of the political movements seeking to eliminate “class oppression, racial intolerance, and economic royalty.”²² The “anti-fascist agenda” of the political organizer and journalist Carey McWilliams, according to Daniel Geary, emphasized “civil liberties, ethnoracial democracy, and economic reconstruction,” while simultaneously bridging “gaps between Communists, New Dealers, and independent radicals.”²³

Recent historiography thus highlights the complexity of fellow traveling. Alan Wald has reminded scholars that “one cannot rely on a single factor, even if it is a question of [Communist] Party membership or non-membership at a certain point, as the fulcrum of analysis of work and lives. What is needed is a substantial amount of in-depth research into the long-term political activities and intellectual formation of the cultural workers.” Similarly, Blaazer has called for closer investigation into how “custom, culture, and reason” conditioned the behavior of interwar British left intellectuals.²⁴ Examining the intellectual development and politics of Raymond Walsh helps us to avoid stereotyping fellow travelers as political dupes, dilettantes, or sycophants and to recognize them as organic intellectuals. Representing the cultural front’s *plebeian* cohort, Walsh emerged from a working-class background and made his way into the “white-collar proletariat” whose members staffed mass cultural industries, intellectual institutions, and government agencies.²⁵

J. Raymond Walsh: Background

John Raymond Walsh was born into a working-class Catholic family in Beloit, Wisconsin, in 1901. His father and paternal grandfather had minimal education and toiled in the small industrial town’s various factories. Walsh’s mother, who had completed grade school, worked as a seamstress and eventually established a dress-making business in the home. An only child, Walsh recalled growing up in a “warm and protective environment.” Although lacking formal education, Walsh’s grandfather and father read widely and developed strong interests in politics and public affairs. In learning about Populism and Progressivism from them, Walsh became deeply influenced by the political tradition of Wisconsin’s Robert M. La Follette.²⁶ Family political discussions helped Walsh to formulate his own “ideas about a broader social democracy” and about the virtue of political dialogue.²⁷ Equally important, the Walsh men exposed the boy to a working-class consciousness because they recognized themselves as “mere working men obligated to serve under the direction of those who owned the plants and machinery.”²⁸

Formal education, while not a part of his parents’ lives, became important to Raymond Walsh. In high school he excelled academically while participating in the debate club, student politics, and choir. He became class president as a senior and graduated as valedictorian of his class in 1917. Financial considerations led Walsh to attend Beloit College where the tuition was low and he could live at home. He thrived in the school’s intellectual environment and remained active in student government, the debate team, and the choir and glee club. J. F. Crawford, a philosophy professor, commented that Walsh “was an unusually able student...thorough, ana-

lytical, inquiring and solid.” A voracious reader, he “gained comprehensive mastery of every subject he undertook.” After graduating college in 1921, Walsh taught social studies at high schools in Merrill and Appleton, Wisconsin. He joined the Appleton High School teachers’ association and served as its president. Pursuing an interest in singing, he took time off to earn a music degree in Chicago. By 1929, however, Walsh had become “restless and felt intellectually constrained.” Inspired by the attorney Clarence Darrow, Walsh applied to Harvard University Law School. His father distrusted lawyers and dissuaded him from pursuing a law degree. When he arrived in Cambridge in the fall 1929, Walsh switched from law to economics.²⁹

At Harvard, Walsh worked with the conservative economist Frank W. Taussig, becoming known as the latter’s “left-wing protégé.” He completed his Ph.D. in economics in 1934. While a graduate student Walsh taught part-time in the Economics Department (1930-1934) and, after securing his doctorate, he became a faculty instructor on a three-year appointment. Harvard students and faculty considered Walsh “an excellent and inspiring teacher of undergraduates.”³⁰ Given his background and the growing significance of working-class movements in the early 1930s, Walsh’s teaching and research interests turned to labor issues. He introduced and taught a course on labor economics in the department and began an investigation into the rise of industrial unions.

Walsh was a professional academic, but one with strong links to the labor movement. He helped to organize a faculty labor union—the Cambridge Union of University Teachers—in the fall of 1935, served as its first president, and led it into the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Harvard professor F. O. Matthiessen, who served as union vice-president, later recalled that young faculty members formed the union in order to affirm “the aims we held in common with the newly progressive labor movement,” to “demonstrate the falseness of the division between workers with their brains and workers with their hands,” and to “gain a deeper sense of being a functional part of society.” As union president, and later as regional vice-president of the AFT, Walsh worked with Boston area high school teachers, supporting their local organizing campaigns and speaking at their meetings. In 1936, he gave a keynote address before the AFT national convention in Philadelphia.³¹ Opposing the efforts of the Massachusetts legislature to impose a loyalty oath on teachers, Walsh testified at a committee hearing that such an oath might be used to deter teachers from participating in labor unions.³² Labor activism and opposition to loyalty oaths also drew Walsh to anti-fascist movements.³³

In 1937 Harvard officials chose not to recommend Walsh and another leftist economist for tenure-track positions. The decision generated a national controversy. Although university officials denied any effort at censoring the young faculty members for their extra-curricular activities, many observers believed otherwise. Walsh left Harvard and completed a book dealing with the emerging Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). He communicated with Clinton Golden of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee about starting a research section for the union, but nothing materialized at that time. After working part-time for the National Labor Relations Board and the Federal Reserve Board, Walsh returned to the academic world, first at Hobart and Smith Colleges (1938-1940) and then at Wil-

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liams College (1940-1942).³⁴

With American entry into World War II and the movement of his colleagues into war work, Walsh sought more active involvement in the union movement and in social and economic change. In February 1942, he became Director of Education and Research for the CIO. Walsh's book on the rise of the CIO had recommended that union officials establish a national research and publicity bureau to support the labor movement's many goals and to offset anti-union propaganda.³⁵ Philip Murray, CIO president, assigned Walsh the task of implementing these recommendations. Walsh's labor organizing activities had reinforced his academic interest in industrial unionism; his scholarship on the topic led to his eventual employment in the CIO.³⁶

Union officials found Walsh to be "jovial and scholarly" and an excellent speaker. During the war, he represented the CIO at public forums, including congressional committee hearings and national radio discussion programs.³⁷ Walsh helped create the CIO Political Action Committee (PAC) under the chairmanship of Sidney Hillman in 1943 and then served as its research and education director.³⁸ While the CIO-PAC effort to re-elect Franklin Roosevelt in 1944 may have contained, as Denning suggested, the genesis of a social democratic politics in the United States, it also succeeded in undermining a movement for an independent labor party. Walsh helped supervise the committee's research, plan its activities and pamphlets, and edit its publications.³⁹ In all these capacities, Walsh drew on his knowledge of economics, his critical assessment of American capitalism, and his willingness to work with an array of allies, including Communists, in a collective effort to alter the dominant socio-economic system.

Communists, at both the grass-roots and leadership levels, played a vital role in the formation and development of the CIO. And, from its inception, the union had experienced a power struggle between Communists and their opponents.⁴⁰ Walsh's tenure in the CIO (1942-1945) coincided with a relative lull in the clash between the left and right. Nevertheless, Walsh became a target of the two factions as they struggled to influence Philip Murray. James B. Carey, CIO secretary-treasurer, led the anti-Communist group, aided by Clinton Golden. CIO counsel Lee Pressman and Publicity Director Len De Caux represented the left wing.⁴¹ Carey, in particular, looked to Walsh as the "white hope" who would "assist in clearing out the Communists." Walsh, however, rejected Carey's prodding and tried to remain "aloof from" the internal conflict.⁴²

As he maneuvered between anti-Communists and Communists, Walsh became immersed in the CIO-PAC's campaign to re-elect FDR and to enhance Democratic Party control over Congress. He formulated a "People's Program" that advocated a postwar peace based upon Roosevelt's Four Freedoms and the Good Neighbor Policy; aid to underdeveloped nations and war-torn countries; political asylum to the world's persecuted minorities; guaranteed employment, health care, housing, and education to all U.S. citizens; and civil rights for racial minorities. The CIO-PAC pushed to register workers and to generate a massive union turnout in November. Walsh and his colleagues "mapped out a program of nationwide propaganda" and used existing union organizations and publications, millions of pieces of supplemental election literature, and a grass-roots get-out-the-vote campaign to imple-

ment it. They aimed to contact every eligible voter, “precinct by precinct, ward by ward, and door to door.” CIO-PAC workers adeptly combined “doorbell-ringing with a social message.”⁴³

The pressures of writing economic and political reports, representing the CIO in an array of public and private venues, meeting the demands of an election year campaign, and navigating between the CIO’s right and left wings took a toll on Walsh. In addition, Walsh wished to find a more suitable outlet for, as CIO-PAC’s Katherine Ellickson observed, his “unique abilities as a speaker.” He resigned as Director of Education and Research in January, 1945, although he continued on as economic adviser and CIO representative to organizations such as the National Planning Association, until mid-1946.⁴⁴

Early in 1945 Walsh began a five-year stint as news commentator for New York City radio station WMCA. Nathan Straus, owner of the independent station and the former head of the U.S. Housing Authority, asked Walsh to join the news staff despite the latter’s lack of training as a journalist. Straus perceived that Walsh’s academic, union, and political experience, along with his desire for intellectual discussion and his well-trained baritone voice, would produce interesting and worthwhile radio. WMCA was developing a reputation in New York City for thoughtful public affairs programming. For his part, a regular radio program offered Walsh an opportunity to secure a broader audience for his work. The years at the CIO had increased Walsh’s understanding of domestic and international issues. A radio program provided an ideal venue in which to help the working- and middle-class public to understand local, national, and international events and policies—the prerequisite for changes in public policy. Walsh quickly grew confident in his new role, writing his own scripts and experimenting with straight commentary, interview, and debate formats.⁴⁵

As Walsh worked at WMCA, he appeared on other stations’ public affairs programming, including panel discussion and debate shows such as *Wake Up America*. The brainchild of Fred G. Clark and his American Economic Foundation, both advocates of free market and libertarian ideas, the program aired over the National Broadcasting Company and other networks from 1940 to 1947. Consisting of a moderator and two experts—including academics, journalists, economists, politicians, and business and union leaders—the show focused on contemporary economic and political questions.⁴⁶ Articulate, personable, and knowledgeable, Walsh was a natural for the program. He participated in a dozen shows between April 1944 and March 1947, covering a variety of topics from the presidential election to the relationship between capitalism and the American worker.⁴⁷

Whether offering commentary on his own WMCA program or on other public affairs shows, Walsh’s critical assessments of contemporary issues were informed by his background, education, and work career. Experiences at Harvard and the CIO reinforced social democratic leanings inherited from his family. His involvement in union organizing and the movement against fascism profoundly affected his life. Like many contemporary activists, Walsh conflated anti-fascism with global cooperation and peace, civil rights, civil liberties, workers’ rights, social reform, and the welfare state.⁴⁸ He believed that a vibrant labor movement protected against fascism. In his CIO book Walsh hypothesized that economic depression

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would generate popular, mass movements demanding major societal reforms. “Fearing democracy in the hands of their critics,” capitalists “will reach out and strangle it. Economic power will arm itself with political despotism. This is the essence of Fascism.”⁴⁹ Anti-fascist and pro-democratic values permeated Walsh’s political activities and news commentaries. When he spoke on labor issues, he did so from the vantage point of active engagement in union struggles; when addressing foreign affairs, his comments reflected his growing knowledge about international politics and economics.

Walsh’s move to radio did not end his political activism. On the contrary, Walsh played an important role in the expansion of the CIO-PAC. In the summer of 1944 Sidney Hillman announced the formation of the National Citizens Political Action Committee (NCPAC). The new organ raised funds for the Democratic presidential ticket and aligned middle-class professionals—including academics, clergy, businesspeople, farmers, and consumers—with New Deal principles. Initially, many of the executive committee members of the NCPAC, including Hillman, also served on the CIO-PAC. By the end of 1944, NCPAC had almost 4,200 members and had become a permanent organization. Walsh served as a vice-chair of the NCPAC and chair of the New York State organization.⁵⁰

Although the news commentator’s left-wing views reflected his continuing political activism and intellectual interests, he clearly knew and appreciated that the Communist Party took similar stands on contemporary issues. His experiences in the CIO-PAC and NCPAC certainly reinforced this knowledge. Walsh supported the Popular Front concept, defining it as an effort to unify small businesspeople, farmers, workers, and unaligned liberal and progressives into a movement to address problems of war and peace, depression and prosperity. He opposed organizations that advocated or placed limitations on the liberties of American citizens.⁵¹

While acknowledging Communists’ leading role in organizing labor unions and in opposing racial discrimination and fascism, Walsh objected to the Communist Party’s totalitarianism. Recognizing that most Americans abhorred Communism’s “repugnant political attributes” and refused to abandon private property in the short-run, Walsh sought another road to democratic socialism. He embraced John Maynard Keynes’s emphasis on expanding the welfare state. Encountering the British economist’s concepts at Harvard in the mid-1930s, Walsh realized that Keynes’s ideas provided “the analytical framework” that he and his colleagues “had been seeking” to bolster their support for New Deal reforms. Moreover, Keynesianism “seemed to offer hope” that “unrestrained capitalism could be curbed without violence or loss of individual freedom.”⁵² Even though he rejected Communism as an option, Walsh welcomed the opportunity to discuss political and economic issues with Communists, as well as conservative capitalists.

The participation of Walsh in CIO-PAC activities and in campaigns against fascism and for workplace democracy and social justice influenced the content of his news analyses. His commitment to peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union and thus to continued political dialogue with the Communists after World War II framed much of his commentary on foreign affairs. From the perspective of contemporary critics, however, Walsh’s effort to seek reconciliation with the Soviets and to defend the presence of leftists in trade unions and professional organizations

echoed the official position of the CP and the Soviet Union. In 1947 Columbia University's John H. Childs denounced Walsh as a "frank apologist for the Communist line." *Counterattack*, the newsletter of the red-hunting private firm, American Business Consultants, Inc., attacked Walsh as a defender of Communism. Sidney Hook implied that Walsh was either a "professional friend of the Communists" or an "incorrigible muddlehead." And Louis Budenz, the former editor of the Communist publication the *Daily Worker*, alleged that Walsh "was under Communist Party discipline" throughout the 1940s.⁵³ While a cursory reading of his commentaries reveals similarities with the *Daily Worker*, a more careful examination demonstrates how Walsh brought his own independent thought and political insight and experience to a particular subject.

Radio News Commentary in the 1940s

Walsh began his radio commentaries as World War II neared its end. The war and the concomitant heavy government spending on the military pulled the United States out of the Great Depression and helped to make the nation into the world economic power. In the process, America's corporate capitalist sector increased its power and legitimacy within society. Business and political leaders sought to secure an American-defined world order of economic internationalism and collective security. But foreign and domestic obstacles to these goals quickly emerged. A recalcitrant Soviet Union, a defeated Germany and Japan, and an anti-imperialist and nationalist Third World threatened to obstruct American hegemony abroad. Working-class organs, civil rights activists, and other groups committed to continued social reform posed different challenges and threats at home. State and corporate officials became concerned with managing or containing these domestic and foreign obstacles to their vision of a postwar order.⁵⁴

In 1945 most Americans seemed ambivalent about establishing a permanent war economy, supporting foreign expansion, halting social and economic reforms, or eradicating radicals and dissidents. Instead they appeared preoccupied with the demobilization of the armed forces, controlling skyrocketing prices for basic commodities, building affordable and decent housing, creating new jobs, expanding educational opportunities, and providing medical care for all, as well as insuring a peaceful world order. Walsh and other leftists believed that the world of the popular/cultural front had the potential to address the needs of the American people and thus provide "the basis for an expanded welfare state" and "an alternative to the rigid pursuit of the Cold War." The immediate postwar period, Ellen Schrecker suggests, offered the American people "more political options than they would ever have again." And radio news commentary became a central venue for the public discussion of these options.⁵⁵

Radio broadcasting already was deeply entrenched in the nation's political culture by 1940. Moreover, as Susan Douglas explains, wartime news broadcasts and commentaries "played a central role—both in [their] content and focus, and in the kind of listening [they] encouraged—in shifting American public opinion away from isolationism" and toward internationalism.⁵⁶ Radio stations and networks re-

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sponded to the demand for war-related news by enlarging the size of their news staffs. By 1945, radio had emerged as “the principal source of news for most Americans,” giving them unprecedented opportunities to hear news and news commentary.⁵⁷

More news commentary did not guarantee diversified opinions. As early as 1943, news commentator Quincy Howe observed that sponsors favored analysts whose perspectives aligned with those of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). Conservative commentators tended to secure a sponsor first and “an audience afterward.” Pressure to maximize the audience seduced other commentators “to slant” their interpretations into line with those of their sponsors. These developments, according to Howe, explained why networks replaced liberal commentators with conservative ones and why sponsors grabbed “the news programs with a conservative slant as they never snapped up the programs with a liberal slant.”⁵⁸ In mid-1945, *Variety* found that conservative or reactionary news commentators outnumbered liberal commentators 3 to 1, although the majority of commentators fell somewhere in between.⁵⁹ A survey of network commentators taken in late 1947, found that only three “liberal” commentators remained on the air, while seven “reactionaries” still plied their trade. The liberals—Cecil Brown, Leland Stowe, and Raymond Swing—broadcast over a minimum of 155 stations to an estimated audience of 4.5 million people. The reactionaries, including Gabriel Heatter, H. V. Kaltenborn, Fulton Lewis, Jr., and Lowell Thomas, had access to some 1,724 stations and over 31 million listeners.⁶⁰

Mainstream intellectuals attributed a postwar decline in the number of radio news shows to market forces. Between January 1945 and January 1947 the number of network radio news and commentary shows dropped from 46 to 30. Norbert Muhlen, editor of a newsletter on radio, asserted that economic laws mandated that the “‘marginal producer,’ the commentator with the smallest audience or with the most decreasing audience, had to go out of business.”⁶¹ This defense of the free market notwithstanding, no reliable evidence existed at the time to prove that commentators with a leftist or liberal orientation—who were suffering the most casualties in the contraction of radio commentary during the late 1940s—were losing audiences more than conservative commentators.

For much of the 1940s, conservative news commentators, with ready support from corporate sponsors and advertising agencies, found relatively easy access to vast radio audiences via the major networks. They used their airtime to crusade against New Deal liberalism, Communism, and social reform and in favor of private property rights, the prerogatives of business owners, a red scare, and American interventionism abroad.⁶² To the extent that liberal or leftist radio commentators remained on the air, they tended to broadcast on local stations in large urban markets. And, as the Cold War intensified, they found life on the airwaves much more challenging.

Anti-Communist crusaders increasingly attacked fellow travelers in the mass media. In the fall of 1945, the House of Representatives’ Committee on Un-American Activities asked to review the scripts of seven New York City radio commentators—including Raymond Walsh—in order to expose their alleged Communist orientation. Two years later, NAM chairman Robert R. Watson urged radio

broadcasting officials “to clean out the remaining Communists and fellow travelers that still affect public opinion.”⁶³ The leading trade journal for the broadcasting industry similarly warned radio executives to screen “every man who has access to the microphone.” Given that “Communists are being routed out of Government, by Presidential edict,” asserted *Broadcasting*, “they have no place in our American radio structure.”⁶⁴ Raymond Walsh and a handful of other leftist news commentators, nevertheless, continued to battle for the counter-hegemonic ideals of the popular/cultural front.

Walsh’s Cold War Commentaries

As World War II ended, news commentators confronted several controversial public policy issues. Among these were the questions dealing with atomic weapons: Should the United States maintain a nuclear monopoly or should it share the “secret” of the bomb? Should military officials or civilian scientists determine policy? Mainstream newspapers argued that Soviet machinations made impossible global cooperation on atomic energy. They demanded monopolizing the bomb as the best protection for U.S. interests, even if this meant an international arms race.⁶⁵ The *Daily Worker* denounced America’s atomic monopoly and proclaimed that the Soviet Union would develop atomic energy and “exploit its capacities for good rather than evil.”⁶⁶ In the summer of 1946 the U.S. representative to the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission, Bernard Baruch, proposed that “atomic energy be controlled through international management of the necessary raw materials and inspection by international agencies.”⁶⁷ The United States, however, intended to continue testing and constructing nuclear weapons and never specified when it would relinquish its atomic monopoly to an international authority.⁶⁸

Most of the American press uncritically embraced what they characterized as the “generous and idealistic” Baruch Plan. Communist Party organs found it deeply flawed and insisted that the United States sought “a world monopoly in the field of atomic energy.”⁶⁹ Raymond Walsh considered Baruch’s proposals “creative and stirring.” But he noted that the United States was asking that other nations

...take our word that eventually we would hand over the bombs we are now piling up at a fast rate. We asked other nations to hand over their uranium deposits, and their dangerous secrets first in order that the International Authority might come into being. Notably we asked the Soviet Union to do this, and to permit a geographic survey of her country by the international body, in return for a promise that some years hence, unless we change our mind, we will do likewise and give up the bomb, and what we know about its manufacture.⁷⁰

Walsh found U.S. proposals “inadequate to the needs we confront” because they

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failed “to provide a full basis of confidence among the great nations of the world.”⁷¹ The desire to find an international solution to the issue of the atomic bomb/energy reflected Walsh’s commitment to maintaining the grand alliance that had quashed fascism during the war.

Walsh’s interest in international affairs dated from his participation in anti-fascist campaigns in the mid-1930s and continued throughout the war and postwar eras. In late September 1946, some 300 delegates from 35 states met in Chicago for the Conference of Progressives—called at the behest of Philip Murray, former New Deal official Harold Ickes, and Walter White of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Walsh, who crafted the foreign policy section of the program, approached the topic from the perspective of the CIO-PAC and the 1944 people’s program. In general, he suggested that the United States return to Franklin Roosevelt’s legacy of “world good-neighborliness” and “mutual trust among the great powers.” More specifically, Walsh urged dismantling the German and Japanese war machines, especially their large industrial corporations; extending U.S. reconstruction aid to allies; creating an international relief agency; quarantining fascist Spain and Argentina; decolonizing the Third World; ending U.S. support for military dictatorships in Latin America; and outlawing atomic weapons.⁷²

The conference statement and subsequent commentaries on the developing Cold War reflected Walsh’s belief in the necessity for multilateral cooperation on global problems. His thinking fit a political pragmatist’s response to international developments, not a naive mimicking of the CP position. On the topic of the Cold War, Walsh’s observations often resembled the position of mainstream commentators such as Walter Lippmann. Arguing from a historical vantage point, Walsh maintained that Soviet policies represented a rational effort to secure friendly governments along borders that an expansionist Germany twice had violated within thirty years. Russian military victories placed much of Eastern Europe under Soviet domination and only a “total war or a very long range evolution” would pry that sphere of influence from the hands of the U.S.S.R. Given that *fait accompli*, the United States and its allies “had no choice but to accept and deal with it as best as they might.” Consequently, Walsh urged the United States to seek cooperation, not confrontation with the Soviet Union. Hard line policies, he believed, would produce resistance, an arms race, and possibly another global war.⁷³

Walsh’s commentary on former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s March 1946 speech in Fulton, Missouri created a controversy. While acknowledging Churchill’s sound wartime leadership, Walsh observed that the speech “was like Hitler in an Oxford suit.” Walsh reminded WMCA’s audience that Churchill was a dedicated imperialist and opponent of working-class democracy and a welfare state. Churchill’s call for a crusade by “Christian civilization” to tear aside “the iron curtain” rested, like his summons for Europe to fight the German threat in 1914 and 1938, not on a commitment to democracy, but rather on a devotion to the British Empire. Such policies, concluded Walsh, “are not the policies of the American people, and should not be the policies of the officials of the government.” Creating “hatred between America and Russia [would] break the United Nations and make war” and that would serve only the advantage of reactionary forces seeking to

restore their power in Europe and elsewhere. Walsh warned that the coming months would witness “repeated Red Scares and an effort to blitzkrieg Americans into war.”⁷⁴

President Harry Truman’s March 1947 speech proclaiming the U.S. role as global policeman appeared to Walsh as almost “hysterical” and “terrifying,” amounting to a virtual “declaration of war.”⁷⁵ The Truman Doctrine proved particularly problematic to Walsh because it demanded bolstering Greece’s political reactionaries. “We don’t serve the democratic cause,” Walsh pronounced on a forum over the *New York Times* radio station WQXR, “by supporting a regime suppressing democratic freedoms just because we are frightened by a potential threat to those freedoms from outside.”⁷⁶

The American news media portrayed the Marshall Plan, America’s economic recovery program for Europe, as a “magnanimous gesture on the part of the United States” and the Soviet opposition to the proposal as “obstructionism.”⁷⁷ Walsh supported the plan, but realized that the program’s architects had ulterior motives. The U.S. demand to monitor aid, Walsh told his broadcast audience, included investigating the internal affairs of the Soviet Union; such a requirement could only result in a Soviet rejection of the plan. In the fall of 1947, Walsh debated Paul Porter, a liberal New Deal bureaucrat and, at the time, a State Department spokesman for the Marshall Plan, on his radio show. Porter argued that the aid program would prevent the disintegration of Europe and that Russia’s withdrawal from preliminary meetings reflected its paranoid fear of any western influence within its sphere of dominance. Walsh concurred that the United States should be concerned with the economic recovery of Western Europe, including Germany, and that the proposed Marshall Plan was “a generous step” forward. But Walsh disagreed that the Soviets and their satellites had withdrawn “out of pique.” The U.S. insistence on monitoring the plan constituted a deliberate ploy to exclude the Soviets and to provide aid for the west but not the east.⁷⁸

Walsh structured his broadcasts to challenge the emerging Cold War ideology of the state and corporate sectors and to point to the interconnectedness of domestic and foreign policy. That the Communist Party press argued similar points, did not invalidate the perceptiveness of his comments. No existing evidence indicates that Walsh used the CP press to fashion his news commentaries. Evidence does exist that Walsh’s commentaries drew from eclectic sources such as the newsletter *Appeal to Reason*, written and published by right-wing extremist and isolationist Lawrence Dennis, and *The Nation* columns of J. Alvarez Del Vayo, an emigré journalist and former foreign minister of the Spanish Republic.⁷⁹ Walsh believed that political repression by anti-Communist zealots was far more dangerous than the airing of leftist, even Communist, arguments. Walsh’s own political experiences and insights convinced him that an intensified red scare at home and abroad would produce the perfect environment in which U.S. businesses and conservatives could attack the welfare state, working-class rights, and civil rights.

By 1947, the domestic assault on civil liberties became a major concern of Walsh. One of his commentaries on the subject ignited a conflict with Sidney Hook. Earlier in the year, the National Council of Jewish Women dismissed a young social worker for allegedly advancing the CP line in her work. Hook, who at

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the time had been reviewing the council's "philosophy, program and functional structure," warned officials about the employee's pro-Communist leanings and the pro-Communist orientation of her union. In August, an independent arbitrator ordered that the council reinstate the dismissed worker, but not to pay her lost back wages. The arbitrator, former chairman of the Federal Communications Commission James Lawrence Fly, ruled that the worker had indeed "erred" by failing to "fully and fairly furnish facts and opinions on both sides" of an issue. But he also concluded that the council had failed to provide proper oversight for the young worker and that its inept handling of the case had "permanently blighted a career."⁸⁰

Walsh described the decision as a victory for the worker and her union. Fly ruled that council officials and Sidney Hook had manipulated the "red issue" to the detriment of a fair and just resolution of the problem. Referring to Hook as "a philosopher of deserved reputation" and "a brilliant man," Walsh then used Fly's words to describe Hook as suffering from an "allergy against the reds." Seeing "red even where it doesn't exist," Hook alarmed the council leaders, "saying they were victims of Communists" and "that the Union was controlled by Communists. The Council Director and other officers seem to have become frightened almost out of their wits." The result was an atmosphere where rumors and innuendo abounded. The "big mistake," continued Walsh, "was the Council's forgetting the principles of democracy, in the hysteria engendered by Mr. Hook. They began to see shadows and boogey men. They acted as frightened, hysterical people usually act: unjustly." Council officials harmed their own organization by sowing the seeds of suspicion and excessive caution and "committed injustice to a valuable employee." Walsh concluded that this incident served as a warning against a "criminally dangerous hysteria" fomented in the private sector and "let loose on a large scale" in the public arena by the executive branch's loyalty oaths and the legislature's passage of the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act. Finding some hope in Fly's decision, Walsh urged that the ruling receive widespread attention.⁸¹

Sidney Hook denounced Walsh's commentary as "an outrage upon truth and moral decency" and demanded equal time on WMCA to respond.⁸² The station and Walsh agreed. In a letter to Hook, Walsh regretted that Hook believed "that I maliciously damaged your reputation. That was certainly not my intention, and I do not believe I did."⁸³ Hook's response, aired over Walsh's program in mid-October, contended that Walsh presented "an unfair" and politically skewed account of the issues, that he tainted the National Council "with illiberalism and red-baiting," and that his analysis of the arbitrator's opinion "was seriously inaccurate and misleading." After recounting the details of the case and emphasizing the arbitrator's conclusion that the social worker had presented biased findings, Hook lashed out at Fly for making the wrong decision and at Walsh for defending it. "This decision," contended Hook, "was widely criticized in the press and hailed enthusiastically only by the Communist *Daily Worker* and by Mr. Raymond Walsh." Hook decried Walsh's "tiresome charge of red-baiting hysteria whenever Communists are under fire." The very cry of "red hysteria" was, according to Hook, "a new smear technique" that in and of itself could "corrode the fabric of democratic life;" a life already under "savage attack" by "totalitarian forces throughout the world under the leadership of

the Kremlin.” While seeking to differentiate his anti-Communism from that of “irresponsible” and “foolish reactionaries,” Hook again linked Walsh with the Communists and asserted that Communists in the local union were circulating Walsh’s broadcast “to all sections of the Council in order to disrupt the organization.” Walsh’s distorted version of the arbitrator’s decision, concluded Hook, “abused a public trust” and “flagrantly failed” as “a fair and reliable report.”⁸⁴

This controversy and similar incidents reflected a “deep encroachment upon the freedom of dissent in the United States.” By 1949, Walsh complained of daily encounters with “some new torture of elementary civil rights,” including in “the labor movement, unhappily.” That liberal and progressive individuals and organizations could contribute to “this baleful trend” left Walsh astonished.⁸⁵ Walsh had presumed that he and Hook “were both scholars enough to differ on public matters and [to] discuss them with civility.” It saddened Walsh that the domestic Cold War had reached such a phase that sophisticated debate had become impossible.⁸⁶

Rational discussion of public policy issues, Walsh felt, was essential for a democracy. The value of his WMCA programs, he later recalled, resided in offering his audience a “vigorous airing of differences of opinion in an informed and civilized context.”⁸⁷ The limited evidence of audience reaction to these broadcasts suggests that listeners—from across the political spectrum—appreciated the insights and alternative perspectives offered by Walsh. Wrote one such listener in late 1947, “I have just recently discovered your daily news analysis on WMCA and I want to let you know how much I like it. At present I cannot say to what extent I agree with your point of view, but I am pleased to find such free expression of liberal opinion on a commercial radio station.”⁸⁸ WMCA managers also remained impressed with Walsh’s commentary. In 1947 they nominated his show for one of the awards given annually by the Institute for Education by Radio. Although the judges did not bestow the award on Walsh, they commended his intellect, training, and experience, noting his willingness “to lean over backwards to avoid his personal bias,” and praising his “intellectual honesty and forthrightness.”⁸⁹

1948 Presidential Campaign

For contemporary politicians, journalists, and intellectuals, nothing better clarified the harshness of the domestic Cold War and the phenomenon of fellow traveling than Henry Wallace’s challenge to Harry Truman in the 1948 presidential election. Early in the campaign, mainstream newspapers referred to Wallace and his Progressive Party supporters as naive dupes of the Soviet Union and the CP. By mid-year, a vitriolic press charged that Moscow orchestrated the Progressive Party’s every move. Newspapers in at least six states published the names, addresses, and places of employment of thousands of local people who signed Wallace nominating petitions. The papers then “suggested that the FBI might want to check them out.” Red-baiting the Progressive Party became a standard practice throughout the U.S. mass media during 1948.⁹⁰

Few historians dispute the important role that the CP played in the 1948 Progressive campaign. But the party’s involvement in Wallace’s presidential run does

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not fully explain the participation of hundreds of thousands of union, peace, and civil rights activists. African-Americans' attraction to the Progressive Party, for example, derived not from Communist manipulation but rather from the party's firm commitment to end segregation and secure full citizenship rights for the black community.⁹¹ The interaction of Walsh with the third-party movement in 1947-1948 reveals much about the complexity and ambiguity of the politics of fellow traveling and how changed historical conditions can alter the position of organic intellectuals. Walsh agreed with the domestic and foreign policy positions embraced by Wallace, yet he ultimately broke from the 1948 campaign.

Walsh was a central figure in the formation and development of the precursors to the Progressive Party. As noted earlier, he chaired the New York State Citizens Political Action Committee and served as vice-chair of the NCPAC.⁹² In September 1946, the CIO-PAC and NCPAC, together with several other liberal organizations, called for the Conference of Progressives at which Walsh wrote the foreign policy platform. Three months later, the NCPAC, the Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions, and some smaller political bodies combined to form the Progressive Citizens of America (PCA). The PCA embraced the foreign and domestic policy platform constructed at the September meeting of progressives. Walsh became a national PCA vice-chairman and chair of the New York State branch. Through his radio commentary, speeches at conferences, and testimony at congressional hearings, Walsh addressed the issues of housing, education, wages and prices, and international peace that the PCA deemed essential.⁹³

Through much of 1947, Walsh supported Henry Wallace's effort to educate the American public about the PCA's stand on domestic and foreign policy issues. Convinced that Wallace should challenge Truman for the presidency in 1948, Walsh participated in a tour that brought Wallace to speaking engagements around the country. Walsh often introduced Wallace at these mass rallies and helped to raise funds for the PCA. The PCA's national board of directors, including Walsh, met in Chicago in late June and declared that American voters should have "the opportunity if necessary, to have a clear choice between progressive and reactionary candidates for President."⁹⁴

As the summer turned to fall, however, Walsh developed reservations about a third party campaign. While admiring the former vice president's "intellect and character" and agreeing with all of Wallace's political positions, Walsh "became acutely aware that the charges of communism and communist influences were making serious inroads into the strength of the party." As Wallace "refused to either deny or repudiate" these allegations, Walsh grew increasingly pessimistic about the election. Trade union support for the PCA declined, individual candidates for local and state offices broke with the national organization, and fund raising became more difficult as the red scare intensified.⁹⁵ At a lengthy meeting in mid-December 1947, which Walsh did not attend, the PCA executive committee voted to urge Wallace to head a third party ticket. Walsh firmly opposed the move. During his nightly commentary over WMCA, Walsh explained that if Wallace launched a campaign, conservatives and labor leaders would attack the PCA's third party effort as a "Communist operation" and this would be the "kiss of death." The PCA knew that Wallace could not be elected in 1948, but it wished to prepare for the next elec-

tion cycle. Unlike the party, which estimated five million votes for Wallace, Walsh foresaw a protest vote of only 500,000. Such a poor showing “would kill the chance of progressive politics in America for a long time, possibly for the rest of your life.”⁹⁶ The day after Wallace announced his candidacy, Walsh’s commentary characterized the decision as “ill-advised” and predicted “that it would foster rather than deter the rush of reaction.” Walsh could neither “accept his [Wallace’s] decision of last night, nor his candidacy.” He subsequently resigned his PCA post.⁹⁷ Years later, Walsh maintained that his course of action “was the best and most important political stand he had ever taken.”⁹⁸

Henry Wallace’s candidacy in 1948 marked the end of cultural/popular front politics, the reshaping of the Democratic Party into its Cold War liberal form, and the acceleration of the anti-Communist campaign.⁹⁹ But, despite his public defection from the Wallace campaign, Walsh did not abandon his leftist politics. He did not join Arthur Schlesinger and other anti-Communist liberals, including many labor leaders, in the Americans for Democratic Action. Walsh continued to broadcast leftist critiques of foreign and domestic policies and to work for an alliance of leftist and liberal forces. And, most important, he continued to hope that rational debate over national issues might survive. That was not to be the case.

Radio news commentary increasingly served the interests of state and business Cold Warriors. Communist witch-hunters in government (e.g., the Federal Bureau of Investigation and HUAC) and in the private sector (e.g., the networks, sponsors, advertising agencies, and private-enterprise vigilantes like the ABC, Inc.) pressured recalcitrant news commentators to accept Cold War and corporate values. In an environment demanding ideological and political conformity during the late 1940s, formal and informal, institutional and individual, public and private sector mechanisms arose to suppress liberal and leftist radio commentators. This contributed to the strangling of an open debate about the efficacy or even necessity of Cold War political and economic policies.

Anti-Communists pressured station WMCA, its owner, and Walsh’s sponsor, to eliminate the fellow traveler from the air. *Counterattack*, other right-wing publications, and the mainstream press increasingly identified Walsh as a Communist or fellow traveler. In early 1948, the *Bergen Evening Record* reported that the local New Jersey chapter of the Catholic War Veterans had charged Walsh as a Communist. The paper made no effort to seek Walsh’s response.¹⁰⁰ Walsh was shocked when close friends, such as fellow news commentator H. V. Kaltenborn—a firm cold warrior—publicly and privately snubbed him. “It puzzled and pained Walsh that his former friend...never said one word to him about his stands, never sought to argue with him, [or] confront him” about the Cold War.¹⁰¹

It was unusual for someone with Walsh’s politics to last on the air as long as he did. Corporate sponsors and advertising firms had little patience for commentators who challenged America’s Cold War policies. William Shirer’s controversial departure from the Columbia Broadcasting System in 1947 came, in part, because an advertising agency became dissatisfied with the prominent news analyst’s insufficient support for U.S. foreign policy.¹⁰² With the backing of the independent station WMCA, the open-minded Straus, and a sympathetic sponsor, Sachs Quality Stores, Walsh remained on the air. By the fall of 1949, however, Walsh recognized that the

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constant political pressure and economic boycotts had taken “serious financial toll” on both station and sponsor and he concluded that “he could not with a clear conscience continue to burden them for his own benefit.” Raymond Walsh voluntarily discontinued his news commentary show before the end of the year. Six months later, in June 1950, Walsh’s name appeared in the infamous blacklist of the broadcasting industry, *Red Channels*.¹⁰³

In the spring of 1950 Walsh became an economic analyst for a small Wall Street brokerage house owned by Morris Cohon. The shrewd Cohon, a successful investment banker who befriended Marxists such as Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman, had sought out Walsh and offered him a job because he admired Walsh’s intellect, integrity, and support for Israel. Walsh worked for Cohon for almost a decade and became quite wealthy. Several of his clients shared his leftist political convictions.¹⁰⁴ With no family to support, Walsh used his new wealth to support leftist organizations, including media outlets such as *The Nation* and *Monthly Review*. He became a founding member of the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee in 1951, a group that stood squarely against the red-scare threats to civil liberties and which came under FBI scrutiny.¹⁰⁵ At heart a teacher and debater, Walsh thrived when he was on the air. The red scare blacklist made that impossible. Although he wrote an occasional piece for leftist journals and gave a few public lectures, Walsh remained relatively silent throughout the 1950s.¹⁰⁶ In 1960, Walsh retired and returned to his hometown of Beloit.

Organic Intellectuals and Social Movements

Walsh was a fellow traveler of the air. His radio commentaries and his political activities revolved around a leftist critique of American society which, in turn, reflected his family background, education, and work experiences. He was an organic intellectual for the counter-hegemonic forces of the popular/cultural front. Walsh’s political commitments were not, as one critic of fellow travelers has argued, “inseparable from the long-term goal of establishing a society akin to the Soviet Union in the United States.”¹⁰⁷ Walsh never saw his labor and political activism and journalism as agents of the CP or the Soviet Union. Rather, he perceived his role as providing valuable information and oppositional perspectives on the crucial issues of the day. His journalistic activities and political life were inseparably bound up with the functions of an organic intellectual seeking to educate working- and middle-class Americans about their world in order to change it.¹⁰⁸ An organic intellectual for the subaltern classes, Walsh played a role in Gramsci’s war of position in the struggle over civil society. He was not a “gatekeeper” like many of the professionally-trained journalists of his era, but rather a “gate-opener;” more concerned with providing his listeners with “options, arguments, and perspectives” than with controlling information.¹⁰⁹

Raymond Walsh’s role as organic intellectual was inextricably linked to “the egalitarian and inclusionary social movements that emerged in the age of the CIO.”¹¹⁰ These movements shaped Walsh and motivated him to spread their core

values. Walsh hoped to use education and the mass media to raise the consciousness of his audiences to international issues, economic democracy, racial equality, and civil liberties. He was most effective when he worked through social movement institutions such as teachers' unions, the CIO-PAC, the NCPAC, and the PCA. As those institutions and their base social movements cracked under Cold War repression, Walsh lost his ability to speak. It was not so much that Walsh abandoned broadcasting in the 1950s, but that the Cold War red scare and its attendant blacklist made it difficult to use broadcast media to serve counter-hegemonic purposes. Exacerbating the position of organic intellectuals like Walsh was the labor movement's purging of leftists from its ranks during the late 1940s. The "separation of the radical intellectual from the labor movement" appalled Walsh and confirmed his belief that organized labor was in decline.¹¹¹ Viable social movements were and are the key to counter-hegemonic campaigns. Without them, intellectuals are left with little else than symbolic gestures and nostalgia. Hearing the African-American, classical, vocalist Marian Anderson sing in 1959, made Walsh almost feel "that the affecting attributes of the New Deal, of the loyalists in Spain, of Socialism are still alive." "It's a strange way," he confided to a friend, "to get reassurances against the stupidities of the Cold Warriors."¹¹²

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The author wishes to thank the following people for their invaluable assistance. Beth McKillen and Alex Grab read and critiqued earlier versions of this article. James Tracy and two anonymous readers for the *Democratic Communiqué* made constructive suggestions for the final revision.

Nathan Godfried is Professor of History at the University of Maine. His publications include, WCFL, Chicago's Voice of Labor, 1926-78 (University of Illinois Press, 1997), Bridging the Gap Between Rich and Poor: American Economic Development Policy Toward the Arab East, 1942-1949 (Greenwood Press, 1987), and several articles on labor and the mass media. He currently is working on a study of leftist radio news commentators during the period 1940-1960.