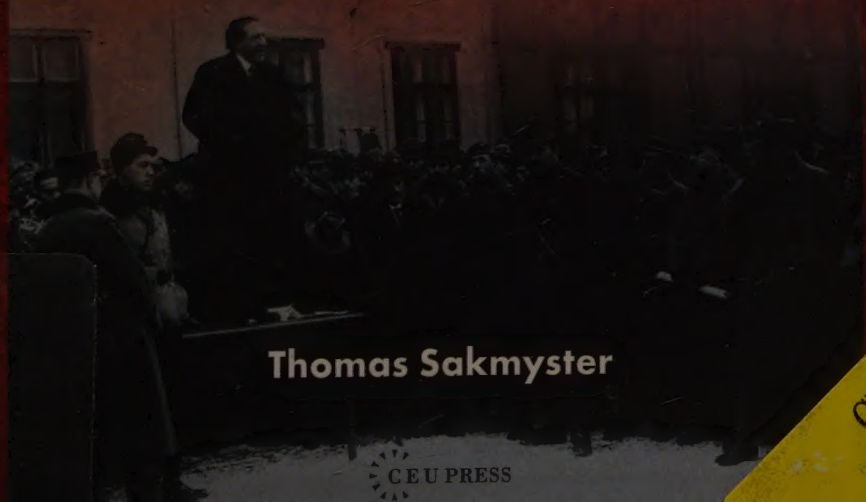
A COMMUNIST ODYSSEY

The Life of József Pogány / John Pepper



Thomas Sakmyster

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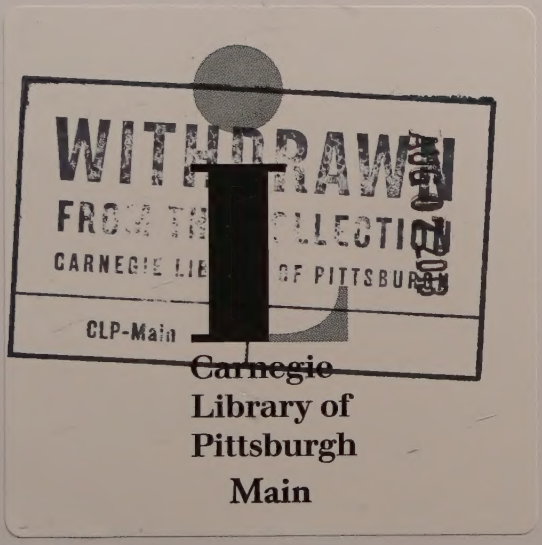

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BY

THOMAS SAKMYSTER

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Preface

The Hungarian Communist whose political odyssey is chronicled in this book was a man of many names. For the first seventeen years of his life he was called József Schwarz. In 1903 he became József Pogány, the name he would be known by while active in Hungary as a journalist and leading figure in radical left-wing parties before and after World War I. In 1922, while carrying out a mission for the Communist International (Comintern) in the United States, he chose the pseudonym John Pepper, a name he would use from that point until his death in 1938. During his career as a Communist activist he was engaged in clandestine work in many countries and briefly used at least a dozen other pseudonyms and pen names.[1]

Pogány's career as an itinerant Communist and professional revolutionary was truly remarkable. Before World War I he made his mark in the Hungarian Socialist movement as a journalist. The articles he wrote from the front during the Great War were vivid and evocative, on a par with the finest war reportage in Europe at the time. During the short-lived Hungarian Communist regime of 1919 he served in various capacities, including commissar for war, commissar of education, and army commander. As a member of what was known as the international cadre of the Comintern, he undertook assignments on three continents and played a key role in the "March Action" in Germany in 1921, and in the development of the fledgling American Communist Party.

Pogány was one of the most talented and one of the most reviled Communists in the interwar period. There were few Communists in any country who could match his educational credentials: a PhD, summa cum laude, from the University of Budapest. He was an effective orator and also one of the most prolific Communist writers of his era, the author of more than a dozen books and pamphlets and articles that by the end of his life may have numbered more than a thousand. In the prime of his career he wrote and spoke with fluency in Hungarian, German, and English, and even dabbled in fiction. His play, *Napóleon*, was performed in Budapest in 1919. In addition, he was a superb organizer with a knack for developing

1 The subject will be referred to in the narrative by the name he was primarily using at the time. However, when referring to his career or life as a whole, the name József Pogány will be used.

effective propaganda themes and for applying Marxist ideas in creative, though often fantastical, ways. Yet for all of his intellectual ability and managerial skills Pogány was a controversial and polarizing figure. His arrogance, shameless opportunism, and duplicitous behavior eventually aroused deep resentment and hostility among his comrades, whether in Budapest, Vienna, Berlin, Moscow, or New York. Wherever he went in his long odyssey he seemed to generate extreme factionalism. In fact, with the possible exception of Leon Trotsky, József Pogány was perhaps the most vilified Communist of the interwar period. Ironically, Trotsky himself loathed Pogány and lamented the poisonous influence in the Communist world of what he and others called "pepperism" or "pepperization."

Pogány played a major role in the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, in the development of the American Communist Party of the 1920s, and as an important functionary in the Comintern apparatus. Yet Tibor Hajdu, the Hungarian historian who has written most extensively about Pogány, has termed him the "forgotten Communist."[2] Hajdu was suggesting that Pogány's career has been overlooked or neglected because so much attention has been paid to other Hungarian Communists, especially Béla Kun. But Pogány/Pepper has been "forgotten" in another sense. Because the career of this itinerant Hungarian Communist was divided into distinct phases in Hungary, the United States, and Russia, the relevant primary sources have not always been easily accessible to scholars. Thus, Hungarian historians have done considerable research on the career of Pogány, but have found it difficult to reconstruct his career after he left Hungary in 1919. American historians have written about Pepper's remarkable exploits in the United States, but, unable to employ Hungarian language materials, have remained largely ignorant of his previous activities in Hungary. And until recently, the years that Pepper spent as a functionary of the Comintern in Moscow have been almost entirely unexplored because of the lack of relevant sources.

It has only been in the last decade that important primary sources have become available that make it possible to write a comprehensive biography of Pogány. In conducting the research for this study I have been able to consult such important sources as the unpublished oral memoir of Pogány's wife, Irén Czóbel; the voluminous archive of the Communist International (Comintern), including early correspondence of József Pogány and John Pepper's personnel file; the archives of the Communist

2 Hajdu, "Linder Béla és Pogány József," 35.

Party of the United States (CPUSA), which was previously thought to have been destroyed; and the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) file on Pepper. A study of the career of this "forgotten Communist" adds considerably to our understanding of the Communist movement as it developed in such disparate countries as Hungary, the United States, and Russia. It offers insights into the nature of that group of Communist agents known as the international cadre, of which Pogány was a prominent member. Finally, the life and career of this Hungarian Communist are interesting in their own right. How did Pogány make the transition from socialism to communism? To what extent were his critics justified in ridiculing him for acting like a Napoleon, the subject of his notorious play? What, if any, impact did Pogány's Jewish origins have on his career as a Communist? In what way did his personal shortcomings, which included philandering, hedonism, and superciliousness, affect his career and his family life? How was he able to make his way in the often baffling and contradictory world of interwar Communism, with its endless debates, personal feuds, power struggles, constantly changing Comintern directives, and ambiguous propaganda slogans? For many years Pogány was a survivor in this treacherous political atmosphere, in part because he had the knack for choosing the winning side in the ongoing Soviet power struggles. He was, for example, one of the first to turn against Trotsky and to throw his support to Joseph Stalin. Yet, in the end, his opportunism and skill at political maneuvering failed him, for he, like thousands of his comrades, was eventually arrested and executed in the Stalinist terror of the late 1930s.

I owe a great debt to the many scholars, archivists, and librarians who have assisted me in my research. In particular, I want to thank my colleague Willard Sunderland, who provided indispensable help in locating and procuring relevant material in Russian archives. Sally Moffitt and Mikaila Corday, librarians at the University of Cincinnati, were instrumental in acquiring important microfilm collections and often obscure pamphlets, books, and articles. Erika Gottfried graciously guided me along in my work at the Tamiment Library at New York University. Much of the research for this book was supported by grants and fellowships from the Charles Phelps Taft Research Center at the University of Cincinnati.

List of Abbreviations

AFL	American Federation of Labor
ANLC	American Negro Labor Congress
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CCC	Central Control Commission
CP	Communist Party
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPUSA	Communist Party of the United States of America
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FKJ	Forradalmi Kormányzótanács Jegyzőkönyvei
FLP	Farmer-Labor Party
FFLP	Federated Farmer-Labor Party
GCP	German Communist Party
GRACNP	General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace
HCP	Hungarian Communist Party
ICC	International Control Commission
Inprecorr	International Press Correspondence
KCP	Korean Communist Party
MFLP	Minnesota Farm-Labor Party
MMTVD	A magyar munkásmozgalom történetének válogatott dokumentumai (Selected Documents on the History of the Hungarian Workers' Movement)
MOVE	(Magyar Országos Véderő Egylet) [Hungarian National Defense Association]
NEP	New Economic Policy

PJVI	Pogány József válogatott írásai (Selected Writings of József Pogány)
PolCom	Political Committee
RCPUSA	Records of the Communist Party of the United States of America
RGASPI	Russian State Archive of Social and Political History
HSP	Hungarian Social Democratic Party (Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt)
SCP	Swedish Communist Party
SDP	Social Democratic Party
WP	Workers' Party

CHAPTER 1
The Making of József Pogány

My husband was not a pleasant individual. Indeed, he was aggressive and supercilious, and as a person of great learning he disdained those who were less educated. / IRÉN CZÓBEL POGÁNY, 1965

The Hungarian, who as József Pogány would play an important role in the short-lived Communist regime of 1919, was born in Budapest on November 8, 1886, as József Schwarz. The only available account of Pogány's early life is found in the memoirs of the woman he married in 1909, Irén Czóbel. She stated that her husband came from a "poor, provincial family" that always lived in "straitened circumstances."[1] This perhaps presents too bleak a picture. Pogány himself later made a confession in a Comintern questionnaire that most Communists of the time would have tried to avoid, namely that he came from a "petit bourgeois," that is, lower middle-class, family.[2] His father, Vilmos Schwarz, had, early in life, been a tradesman, but later obtained a minor civil service position. His mother, Hermina Weinberger, was a hairdresser. There were three children in the family, József being the oldest.[3] The parents were practicing Jews in one of Budapest's Neolog (Reformed) synagogues. Vilmos was an active member of the Chevra Kadisa in Pest and later in life was employed as the leader of prayers at the head of funeral processions. It is likely that his father enrolled József in the Chevra Kadisa as a young boy. Whether he had his bar mitzvah is unknown, since neither Pogány nor his wife ever mentioned anything about his Jewish upbringing.

What seems quite clear is the keen interest that Vilmos and Hermina expressed in the education of their children, particularly József, who early on showed an aptitude for learning. They realized, as did countless other

1 "Pogány Józsefné Czóbel Irén visszaemlékezése" [The memoirs of Mrs. József Pogány, Irén Czóbel], Politikatudományi Intézet (Budapest), 867, fn. 2. p. 1. This memoir is a compilation of oral interviews Czóbel gave in 1965, at the Institute of Political Science of the Hungarian Communist Party. Hereafter cited as "Czóbel Memoir."

2 Comintern questionnaire (Anketa) filled out by Pogány in November 1924, Records of the Communist International, Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, 495/199/1586/54–55. Hereafter cited as RGASPI, followed by the number of the collection/inventory/file/ and page.

3 Varga, "Pogány József," 49.

Jewish parents in Hungary in this era, that the surest means for escaping social isolation, advancing in society, and preparing for a possible anti-Semitic outbreak in the future, was through education. Hungarian Jews, who represented 5% of the population of the Kingdom of Hungary, were at the time enjoying a degree of civil equality, tolerance, and access to education that was nearly unprecedented in Europe. By the turn of the century, Jews were graduating from Hungarian high schools (the *gimnázium*) and universities in numbers that greatly exceeded their percentage in the population as a whole.[4] True, they were largely barred from professions that were deemed the private preserve of the Christian elite, including the government and the officer corps. But they were encouraged to enter those professions whose members were playing a key role in the modernization of the country. In Hungary on the eve of World War I, 85% of leading bankers, 42% of journalists, 49% of medical doctors, and 49% of lawyers were of Jewish origin.[5]

It was no doubt that their son would take advantage of these opportunities and rise high up from his humble family origins that prompted Vilmos and Hermina in 1896, to enroll József in one of Budapest's most prestigious schools, the Barcsay Gimnázium. Given the meager financial resources of the family, it is probable that József received at least a partial scholarship. The Barcsay was a secular institution that boasted an excellent faculty and that attracted a broad range of students from middle- and upper-class families. Some of József's classmates were to go on to distinguished careers as politicians, scholars, and artists. József was a good but not outstanding student. He excelled in Hungarian and history, but performed less well in mathematics and Latin. He graduated in 1903 with an overall grade of "good" (*jó*).[6]

As a student at the Barcsay, József showed little interest in extracurricular activities. He won no special prizes and joined few clubs. In his final year, however, he did serve on the jury of the debate team along with Kálmán Darányi, a future prime minister of Hungary. József apparently spent much of his time in independent reading in areas that interested him, including history, philosophy, and sociology. He shared these interests with a group of fellow students, particularly one who became his closest friend, Ernő Czóbel. The students in this group were becoming aware of, and attracted to, the Marxist approach to political and social problems.

4 Patai, *Jews of Hungary*, 436–37.

5 Perlman, *Bridging Three Worlds*, 44; Pataki, Jews of Hungary, 437–38.

6 Varga, "Pogány József," 50.

Among them were a few female students, including Ernő's sister, Irén, who graduated from the Barcsay in 1903, the same year as József.[7]

The name on József's graduation diploma was not, however, Schwarz, but Pogány. At some point in 1903, at the age of seventeen, József legally changed his surname.[8] At the time this was not an uncommon phenomenon among Jews who wished to emphasize their assimilation into Hungarian society.[9] Had he retained the name "Schwarz," it would always have called attention to his Jewish origins. However, "Pogány" was a curious choice for a new name. Certainly it had a good "Magyar" sound to it, but the word means pagan or heathen in Hungarian and there were any number of other Magyar names with more pleasant connotations that he could have chosen. Perhaps this was József's way of declaring that he was making a complete break not just from the Judaism of his family, but from all religious beliefs. The left-wing radicalism that he was beginning to embrace was hostile to organized religion, regarding it as the "opium of the masses" and was one of the chief obstacles to political and social reform. From this point on Pogány never again referred to his Jewish upbringing and his wife omitted all mention of it in her memoirs. Nor did Pogány, who would write prolifically on all of the negative aspects of bourgeois society, ever take any special interest in the problem of anti-Semitism.

In 1904, Pogány enrolled at the University of Budapest, where he chose to concentrate on Hungarian and German studies. His university years were a time of momentous changes in Hungarian political and artistic life. Classical liberalism was in a serious decline and many students and intellectuals looked to the Social Democratic Party (SDP) as the vehicle for significant reforms. They were inspired by the exhilarating poetry of Endre Ady's *Új versek* (New poems, 1906) and his call for the transformation of Hungary, with its economic backwardness and semifeudal institutions, into a modern, progressive country. Pogány and his friend Czóbel, became ardent readers of the *Népszava* (People's voice), the newspaper of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which became a daily in 1905. In that same year Pogány and Czóbel joined the SDP, though they had to do this secretly since university students were not permitted to be formal members of a political party.[10]

7 Ibid., 49–50.

8 Ibid., 49, fn. 7.

9 In the period 1900–1904, nearly two thousand Hungarian Jews legally changed their names. Karády, "Asszimiláció," 56.

10 Czóbel Memoir, 1; Comintern questionnaire of November 1924, RGASPI, 495/199/1586/54–55.

In 1907, Pogány successfully completed his preliminary exams and embarked on a period of study abroad, six months in Berlin and six months in Paris. He attended some university classes, but mostly used the time to improve his language skills, to acquaint himself with the workers' movements and socialist literature in Germany and France, and to continue work on his dissertation. Financially these were difficult times for Pogány. His only steady income was a small monthly stipend he received from the Hungarian journal, *Munka Szemle* (Labor review), with whose editor he had made an arrangement to send periodic articles on Hungarian art and culture written from the perspective of historical materialism. From time to time Pogány also received small amounts of money from his parents and his friend Czóbel may have helped out as well. When he was particularly short of funds in Berlin, he would resort to one of the beer halls that for the price of a beer allowed patrons to eat as much bread as they liked.[11]

Upon his return to Hungary in 1908, Pogány quickly completed and submitted his dissertation on the political views of János Arany, one of Hungary's most important poets of the nineteenth century. Pogány's enemies would later scoff at the idea that he had done worthwhile academic work and that he deserved the title of "Doctor," but, in fact, his professors found much merit in the dissertation and he received his doctorate degree summa cum laude.[12] Having completed his education, in 1909 Pogány married Irén Czóbel, his best friend's sister, his classmate in the gimnázium, and a woman who fully shared his ideological orientation. Their marriage would last until Pogány's death in 1938, although his prickly personality and frequent philandering would at times strain their relationship.

Many university graduates in Pogány's circumstances chose to become teachers, but he aspired instead to become a journalist and to employ his excellent writing skills to promote the socialist program. Beginning journalists often struggled financially, but Irén brought to their marriage some money of her own, having come from a well-to-do middle class Jewish family. Pogány was soon producing articles and reviews at a rapid clip. At first his work appeared primarily in *Munka Szemle* and in *Szocializmus*, (Socialism) sometimes coauthored with Czóbel, but he soon came to the attention of the editors of other publications. He began writing for the newspaper *Friss Újság* (Fresh news) and contributed literary and theatrical

11 Varga, "Pogány József," 52; Czóbel Memoir, 1.

12 Varga, "Pogány József," 53. Writing with a strong anti-Communist and anti-Semitic orientation, Tharaud later observed how astonishing it was to learn that Pogány had attended a university and received a doctorate degree, given his "butcher-like appearance and his brutal face." Tharaud, *When Israel Was King*, 153.

reviews to several progressive periodicals, including one of the most influential at the time, *Huszadik Század* (Twentieth century). He wrote numerous articles on topics in Hungarian history and contemporary social problems. In one article he asserted that capitalism, which was staggering toward its final collapse, "in the countryside keeps the laborer in barbaric condition" and "in the city ruins the health of the factory worker."[13] His views were clearly shaped by his understanding of the Marxist theory of historical materialism and, as a historian has aptly put it, his was "a typical left-wing dogmatic Social Democratic approach."[14]

Pogány's stature in the socialist camp was greatly boosted by an article he wrote in 1909 for the journal *Szocializmus* on Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and the Hungarian Revolution of 1848.[15] Here Pogány argued that the revolution was directed not just at imperial absolutism but also at the feudal magnates, and that the lower gentry were increasingly identifying with the common people.[16] This article caught the attention of prominent figures in the socialist movement. He now began to meet other writers and activists at the Meteor coffeehouse and in 1911 was invited, along with Czóbel, to join the freemason lodge Demokrácia, which was known for its radical orientation. Among its members were Oszkár Jászi and Endre Ady, as well as several leaders of the SDP, one of whom, Zsigmond Kunfi, was to become a friend and mentor of the younger Pogány.[17]

A survey of the topics about which Pogány wrote between 1909 and 1912 shows his diverse and eclectic interests. He published historical essays on famous Hungarians (Petőfi, Martinovics) and non-Hungarians (Napoleon, Diderot, and Darwin). Among the literary figures whom he dealt with were Boccaccio, Swift, Stendhal, Ibsen, and G. B. Shaw.[18] He also served as editor of a series of translations, into Hungarian, of important European writers. Pogány himself dabbled briefly in fiction. He wrote two theatrical plays, one of them about Napoleon Bonaparte, in which the French leader was depicted as reluctant to become emperor, preferring to retire to a quiet life in the countryside.[19] Apparently no theatrical agent

13 "Lakásprobléma és lakáspolitika," in Varga, *Pogány József válogatott írásai,* 46–55. Cited hereafter as PJVI.

14 Hajdu, "Az elhallgatott Pogány József," 4.

15 "Marx, Engels, és a 48-as magyar forradalom," in PJVI, 55–57.

16 Erényi, *Félévszázad*, 207.

17 Tömöry, *Új vizeken járok*, 47, 196.

18 Some of Pogány's literary and historical essays were later compiled and published as a book: *Emberek és korok.*

19 *Napóleon. Dráma három felvonásban.* The price of the book was stated as 9 korona on the cover, but no publisher or date of publication is given, which suggests that the book might have been self-published.

was interested in this somewhat unorthodox interpretation of Napoleon, although several years later, in a favorable political environment, the play was in fact performed in Budapest.

In this period every young socialist journalist hoped to join the staff of *Népszava,* Béla Kun never fulfilled this dream, but Pogány did. In 1912, with the help of his friend Kunfi, editor of *Szocializmus*, Pogány was given a position as a *munkatárs* (fellow worker) on *Népszava.*[20] This was the lowest rung of the editorial ladder, but Pogány within two years managed to become one of the newspaper's most important editorial writers and essayists. He accomplished this despite the fact that he soon gained the enmity and ridicule of several members of the editorial board, including the editor, Ernő Garami. As Irén later admitted, Pogány often irritated those with whom he worked: "My husband was not a pleasant individual. Indeed, he was aggressive and supercilious, and as a person of great learning he disdained those who were less educated."[21] Some of Pogány's colleagues on the editorial board soon concluded that he was the worst kind of climber (*stréber*), "a loathsome, ambitious, and dishonest person who pursued his own interest in an unprincipled way, riding roughshod over everyone in his way."[22] Perhaps they also believed that he was too independent-minded and not always willing to hew closely to the guidelines established by the editorial board. On the other hand, there was no denying that he could write with fluidity, cogency, and at times eloquence. As a result, Pogány soon became one of the editors responsible for lead editorials on contemporary political issues, especially on foreign affairs, although these articles were sometimes unsigned.[23]

In his articles in the period 1912–14, not all of which appeared in *Népszava*, Pogány certainly was not shy about voicing harsh criticism of the government and of leading politicians. He was passionate in his attacks on the Nemzeti Munkapárt (National Party of Work), and on its leader, István Tisza.[24] In his commentaries on the Balkan Wars of 1912 and on their aftermath, Pogány expressed despair about the future of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Emphasizing the critical nature of the struggle between Russia and the Habsburg Empire, and the threat posed by the

20 Czóbel Memoir, 21; Hajdu, "Linder Béla és Pogány József," 34.

21 Czóbel Memoir, 56.

22 Göndör, *Vallomások*, 39.

23 Hajdu has described Pogány's work at *Népszava* as "most distinguished, on a par with that of Kunfi." Hajdu, "Linder Béla és Pogány József," 34.

24 Some of his articles from this period were included in a published compilation in 1917: *A Munkapárt bűnei.*

stirring of nationalism in the Balkans, he described Franz Joseph's realm as the "new Turkey" and as the new "sick man of Europe."[25] Hungary, he suggested, might do well to remain part of the Habsburg Empire if it adopted a policy of democracy and freedom, but instead it had chosen "corruption, military despotism, and antidemocratic reaction."[26] When Pogány published his thoughts on "Austro-Hungarian imperialism" in a pamphlet,[27] he was brought to trial by the government on charges that the publication was injurious to the interests of the monarchy. He received a six-month jail sentence. Shortly thereafter he was convicted of lèse-majesté because of remarks made about King/Emperor Franz Joseph in a speech in Arad. In neither case did Pogány actually serve any prison time, since the legal proceedings were overtaken by the momentous events in the summer of 1914.[28]

In the years leading up to 1914, Pogány did not become a major figure in the leadership of the SDP. He attended party meetings and congresses, but never was given, or perhaps never aspired to, a prominent role. Certainly he was well-known in party circles for his journalistic successes, but he also had the reputation for retaining a certain distance from the party and for an independence of thought. Perhaps he was consciously emulating the German socialist Franz Mehring, about whom he wrote: "He [Mehring] is not a politician, agitator, leader, speaker, or organizer. But also not simply a thinker. He is a new type in the history of the social-democratic movement: a journalist, a publicist."[29]

Pogány's skills as a journalist and as a publicist were put to the test in the aftermath of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Habsburg throne, in the summer of 1914. From late June until the outbreak of war in early August, Pogány wrote some ten lead editorials (not all of them signed) in *Népszava* on the developing crisis. He blamed the crisis entirely on the "provocative and oppressive policies of Austro-Hungarian imperialism" which drove people "to commit murderous acts and assassinations..." Moreover, these oppressive policies were aimed not just at the Bosnian Slavs but toward all the national groups of the Habsburg Empire. The only answer that "Austro-Hungarian absolutism"

25 "Küzdelem a balkáni hegemóniáért," PJVI, 96–111.

26 Erényi, *Die Sozialdemokratische Partei Ungarns*, 417.

27 *A Balkán-háború és az osztrák-magyar imperializmus* (1912). This pamphlet also appeared in a Serbo-Croatian edition.

28 "Czóbel Memoir," 4.

29 Varga, "Pogány József," 63.

gave to demands for freedom, social reform, and democracy was military oppression, martial law, and gunfire.[30] By late July, when war seemed to be imminent, Pogány lamented the fact that all of the Hungarian newspapers, except for *Népszava*, were joining in the warmongering and failing to recognize that a "criminal war" was being launched. The ultimatum to Serbia was a "dangerous provocation" and the Slavic nations, both outside and within the Habsburg monarchy, regarded Austro-Hungarian absolutism as the main enemy. Writing with much prescience, Pogány predicted that the conflict could have unforeseen and catastrophic consequences, including war with Russia, a worldwide conflagration, and a shattering of the social order.[31]

Despite Pogány's vehement critique of Austro-Hungarian policy, when war did break out early in August and quickly escalated into a European-wide conflict, the SDP in Hungary reacted as did socialist parties all across the continent. They gave grudging support to the government's war effort, called on workers to join in the defense of the fatherland, and agreed to a kind of "political truce" for the duration of the conflict. This included a promise to refrain from calling strikes and from launching direct attacks on the government. Those SDP leaders who were most in favor of this strategy, such as Ernő Garami, rationalized it in part by arguing that Austria-Hungary, with all of its faults as a capitalist and imperialist state, was nonetheless not as bad as Tsarist Russia, where anti-Semitism was rampant and often state-sponsored.[32] Pogány may not have fully agreed with the policy adopted by the more moderate SDP leaders, but he realized that under the circumstances, he could not pursue an independent course and he quickly acclimatized himself to the new situation.

Of most immediate concern to him now was the probability that he would soon be drafted and perhaps sent into combat. Twenty-eight years old at the time, he no doubt hoped that he could escape this fate and leave the actual fighting to younger men. One possibility for avoiding military service was to gain an exemption granted to those doing civilian work essential to national interests. Each major newspaper in Hungary was permitted to designate a small number of its writers as war correspondents who would be exempt from the draft. But Pogány, who was not in the good graces of the editor of *Népszava*, failed to receive such a designation. Thus,

30 Lead editorials in *Népszava* on June 30 and July 3, in PJVI, 153–59.

31 "Nem akarunk háborút!" *Népszava*, July 25, 1914, in PJVI, 160; Varga, "Pogány József," 66; Erényi, *Die Sozialdemokratische Partei Ungarns*, 425.

32 Hajdu, "Az elhallgatott Pogány József," 5.

he was drafted and after a short period of training was sent, along with his friend Czóbel, to Galicia where Austro-Hungarian and German forces were engaged in fierce combat to stop the invading Russian army. In retrospect, Pogány was perhaps lucky that early in the fighting he suffered a serious chest wound and was sent to a German military hospital for treatment.[33] Had he not been wounded and removed to a noncombat zone, his chances for survival would doubtless have been slim, for the death toll among combatants on the Carpathian front was enormous.[34]

At some point in the winter of 1915, Pogány was transferred to a hospital in Budapest to complete his recuperation. When he was finally released, he was under an obligation to return to active duty, but in the meantime he apparently was successful in gaining a military exemption as a war correspondent for *Az Est* (The evening), a Budapest newspaper with a large readership that represented the interests of the Jewish bourgeoisie. He may initially have been granted this exemption in the category of combat photographer, but in fact he never learned to operate a camera. Before long he had resumed his normal activity as a journalist.[35] For the duration of the war he was to write a large number of reports, many of them insightful, describing conditions on the Russian and Italian fronts. These appeared not only in *Az Est* but occasionally also in *Népszava*, *Volkstimme* (People's voice) (the SDP's German language publication), and in several German and Swiss newspapers that employed Pogány as a "stringer." Several collections of these articles were also published during the war as pamphlets.

As a journalist who before the war had been known for expressing radical socialist ideas, Pogány, as a war correspondent, had to tread carefully in composing his reports. He knew that the diligent wartime military censors would not allow any article to be published that even indirectly maligned the Austro-Hungarian armed forces or raised doubts about ultimate victory. The frequent blank sections in issues of *Népszava* were a constant reminder that articles that violated the censors' guidelines would be banned. Furthermore, war correspondents were encouraged to contribute to the prevailing jingoistic atmosphere and reverence for military officers. Pogány did his best to comply with these guidelines without compromising the socialist program to which he was so ardently committed.

33 Czóbel Memoir, 5; Varga, "Pogány József," 66.

34 See Tunstall, *Blood on the Snow*.

35 Czóbel Memoir, 6.

Nonetheless, in the eyes of his critics in the SDP, Pogány crossed over the line in his efforts to placate the censors.[36] No doubt he feared that a blatant challenge to the guidelines governing war correspondents would endanger his exemption from the draft. He also might have felt some pressure to conform to the editorial line of *Az Est*, which had the reputation of being a "quarrelsome and chauvinistic" tabloid.[37] Finally, Pogány's opportunism may have led him to maintain good relations with the military leadership should the war end in a great victory for Austria-Hungary.

Whatever his precise motivations, in his reports from the eastern front in 1915, Pogány portrayed the Austro-Hungarian war effort as generally effective and justified. He depicted Tsarist Russia as a brutal enemy that had suppressed the socialist movement at home and since overrunning Galicia, had ruled that province with an iron fist. Polish nationalism was crushed and Russian officers instigated pogroms against Jews. The legacy of Russian rule in Poland was nothing more than "misery and ignorance."[38] Pogány was careful, however, to emphasize that bitterness and hatred should be directed only at the tsarist government, and not at the Russian people.[39] In this context he felt justified in celebrating Austro-Hungarian victories against Russia. When Lemberg was recaptured in June 1915, he apparently gave an impromptu speech at a gathering of military officers and "reveled in the victory." In fact, in this period Pogány seems to have made an effort to socialize and to ingratiate himself with military officials. Rumors were soon circulating among socialists in Budapest that their comrade had gone so far as to offer a toast to General Böhm-Ermoli, who was generally disliked by the Hungarian public. Furthermore, during a banquet at military headquarters at which several military censors were present, Pogány was even said to have expressed admiration for the censors who were doing their work "in a most liberal and understanding way." These reports had a demoralizing effect on those socialist journalists who were trying to inject antiwar themes into their articles. One of them, Ferenc Göndör, found himself being reproached by

36 A later Communist critic of Pogány asserted that during World War I he "served as paid war correspondent of Emperor Franz Joseph" and was "a jingo of the darkest dye." Unsigned article, "Good-by (sic!) Pepper: The Passing of an Adventurer," *Militant*, October 1, 1929, 8.

37 Deák, book review in *Central European History* 1, no. 2 (June 1968): 188.

38 Pogány, "A meghódított Oroszlengyelországon keresztül," 12.

39 Varga, "Pogány József," 67.

the military censors, who suggested that if a socialist like Pogány could openly support the war effort, why couldn't he do the same?[40]

In Pogány's reports from the Italian front in the latter half of 1915, one finds a similar deference to the censors, although his vivid descriptions of the devastation caused in the ongoing battles near the Isonzo River might well have encouraged pacifist sentiments in some readers. In detailing the horrors of this campaign, which he called a "hell on earth," Pogány sometimes drew on literary sources, such as Petőfi, Arany, and Maupassant. His language was neither crude nor chauvinistic, but it was sufficiently patriotic to please the censors. He declared that the war on the Italian front was being fought to defend one of the most important interests of Austria-Hungary: access to the Adriatic Sea. Trieste, he conceded, was ethnically Italian, but it was best left to Austria-Hungary since only in that way could "its destiny as a major seaport be properly fulfilled."[41] Moreover, Italy was conducting the war with "unnecessary and sad brutality." He deplored the indiscriminate attacks on towns and cities by Italian airplanes and found the bombardment of Trieste to be particularly "wild and senseless."[42] Austro-Hungarian pilots, he naively assured his readers, dropped their bombs only on military targets. It was also clear to him from interviews with Italian soldiers that they lacked the will to fight and recognized that everyday life for common workers was better in Austria-Hungary than in their homeland. For all these reasons Pogány welcomed the victory of Austria-Hungary in the climactic third battle of Isonzo, which he declared to be "one of the greatest events of the war."[43]

One way that Pogány found to remain true to his socialist convictions while conforming to the guidelines of the military censor was to focus his attention on the ordinary foot soldiers who were carrying out their duties with dignity and great courage. He insisted that the common soldiers of the enemy, whether Russian or Italian, were not to be vilified, for they

40 Göndör recalled these incidents with bitterness in his memoir, *Vallomások*, 8–9; see also an unsigned editorial in the Social Democratic *Az Ember*, July 18, 1920, reprinted in Mályusz, *Fugitive Bolsheviks*, 368. Göndör probably went too far in terming Pogány's war reports "war-mongering," but Geréb's assertion that they were largely free of "incitement and chauvinism" also seems to miss the mark. Geréb, *Kultúra, Álkultúra*, 320.

41 Pogány, *A földreszállt pokol*, 122–23.

42 Ibid., 117. Pogány offered an eloquent description (117–24) of the impact of the war on the inhabitants of Trieste, which he described as the only European city so perilously close to the front lines.

43 Ibid., 36.

were merely tools of their oppressive governments. Moreover, as he discovered from many interviews in the prisoner of war camps, ordinary Italian soldiers were despondent and believed that "only the powerful and the rich have not gotten tired of the war." Although he could not say this openly, Pogány may have been implying that Austro-Hungarian soldiers were also becoming weary of the conflict. In any case, he pointed out that the war had demonstrated not only the bravery of ordinary Hungarian workers and peasants, but also their capacity for good judgment, organizing skill, and "an innate readiness for leadership." Pogány seemed to take advantage of every opportunity to mix with, talk to, and interview ordinary Hungarian soldiers, perhaps as a way of affirming his identity as a Magyar patriot. The nameless peasants who were digging trenches, "just as they dug the soil back home," were to him, the true heroes of the Italian campaign. He delighted in listening to the banter of Hungarian soldiers from different parts of the country, their accents comprising a kind of "Magyar symphony."[44]

After his stint on the Italian front, Pogány received an unexpected assignment: he was to travel to Denmark and report back on conditions in that neutral country.[45] During his brief sojourn there, Pogány spent much of his time in the countryside studying the social and political milieu of the Danish village. He was very impressed, indeed astonished, by the democratic spirit and by the material abundance he discovered. He reported that Danish peasants were almost all literate and had a voice in village and national affairs. They had access to good medical care and received government support if they were unemployed or "merely unlucky." Furthermore, they had a rich and diverse diet that would be unimaginable to Hungarian peasants.[46] Although he did caution his readers about concluding that the Danish village was a "bucolic paradise," he certainly created that impression. Furthermore, when his articles about Denmark were later published in a pamphlet, he chose the title "Denmark. A Peasant Eldorado."

Pogány's experiences in Denmark seem to have reinforced his previous beliefs about the need for major, indeed, revolutionary changes to improve

44 Ibid., 18, 111.

45 It is unclear under whose auspices Pogány traveled to Denmark. Some of his dispatches were printed in the journal *Szocializmus*, but it may have been the editor of *Az Est* who gave him the original assignment. His reports were subsequently published as a pamphlet in 1918, *Dánia, a paraszteldorádó*.

46 "Utazás egy semleges országban. Dániában, a Baungard-tanyán, a világháború harmadik évében," in PJVI, 192–99.

the life of Hungary's peasants and workers. For the remaining years of the war he thus remained in Budapest and returned his focus to social and political issues. Beginning in 1916, writing now mainly for *Népszava*, he condemned the poor medical facilities and inadequate housing for the urban workers. In several articles he returned to one of his favorite prewar topics, the repressive policies of Prime Minister Tisza and his Party of Work. His tone was increasingly radical, so much so, that several articles were banned because they argued too openly that only through socialism could Hungary solve its political and social problems.[47] In this period Pogány also turned his attention to the recent work of Austrian and German socialists, including Friedrich Adler, Otto Bauer, and Hans Mehring, whose books he translated and introduced to Hungarian readers.[48]

In 1917, Pogány's attention was naturally drawn to the remarkable developments in Russia. He was soon in the forefront of Hungarian socialists endeavoring to understand and to explain the significance of the revolutionary events that began in March. "How will these events affect our future?" he asked. "What significance do they have in the quest for peace?"[49] Although he initially showed much enthusiasm for Alexander Kerensky and for the relatively moderate program of change that he represented, Pogány soon became fascinated by the previously little known revolutionary who called himself Lenin. When the Bolsheviks seized power in November, Pogány could barely restrain his excitement: "In St. Petersburg the revolution of workers' and soldiers' councils has triumphed!" In a perceptive analysis he drew comparisons between the events in Russia and the French Revolution of 1789–91 and the Paris Commune of 1871. He boldly predicted that the Bolshevik regime would survive if a peace settlement was secured and if the peasants were won over.[50] Before long, Pogány was hailing Lenin as "the most distinguished figure in the world's socialist movement." No doubt Pogány hoped that the revolutionary events in Russia would improve the chances for significant changes in Austria-Hungary. Such thoughts, however, could not be openly expressed.

47 Varga, "Pogány József," 68. In 1917, Pogány's articles on Tisza were compiled in a pamphlet: *A Munkapárt bűnei.*

48 Varga, "Pogány József," 68; Bauer, *Az orosz forradalom és az európai proletárság* (The Russian Revolution and the European Proletariat) was published by Népszavakönyvkereskedés in Budapest.

49 "A forradalom halad!" in PJVI, 202.

50 "Az orosz forradalom," in PJVI, 204–6.

Whenever Pogány crossed that line, the unacceptable sections of his articles were deleted by the censors.[51]

A few of the more radical Hungarian socialists were eager to follow the example of the Bolsheviks and to provoke a crisis that would topple the Habsburg monarchy and open the way for radical reforms. Indeed, social discontent and hatred of the war were so widespread that a mass strike in January 1918 inspired workers to join large demonstrations in the streets of Budapest. Although members of the left wing of the SDP urged the workers to seek revolutionary change, the more moderate segment of the party, which dominated the leadership, tactfully urged restraint on the workers. Pogány stepped forward to champion this position, but unlike such SDP leaders as Garami and Kunfi, he saw no reason to be diplomatic. He acknowledged that the SDP was a revolutionary party and that workers had legitimate grievances, but warned in a lead article in *Népszava* that some of those agitating the workers during the strike were inexperienced and lacked discipline. He ridiculed them as "pretend Bolsheviks." Mature and experienced socialists, he declared, understood that at present the "objective prerequisites" for revolutionary action were not present in Hungary. What was needed was support from the peasants, the non-Magyar nationalities, and at least parts of the armed forces. Furthermore, an attempt to topple the monarchy would require a coordination of efforts between the Austrian and Hungarian socialist parties.[52]

The radical socialists did not take kindly to Pogány's lecture, and even those generally sympathetic to him, like Kunfi, privately chastened him for his too abrasive and condescending attitude toward the strike leaders. A year later this incident would have important repercussions for Pogány's political career. At the time it caused him a good deal of anguish and a nervous breakdown, which required a month's cure at a sanitarium.[53] Upon his return, the SDP leadership felt it best to occupy their cantankerous colleague with a task that was less sensitive politically. In February, Pogány was entrusted with the editorship of a new journal, *A Tudás* (Knowledge), which was designed to propagate the SDP's views on education and learning. He took on the task with his usual gusto and in the course of 1918, six issues appeared. In the first he sketched out a plan for reforming Hungary's educational system and for inculcating workers with Marxist

51 Varga, "Pogány József," 70–71.

52 Pogány, "A tömegsztrájk és tanulságai," in PJVI, 215–28.

53 Czóbel Memoir, 5.

views.[54] This project occupied most of Pogány's time as the internal crisis in Austria-Hungary deepened in the spring and summer.

By October, it was becoming clear that the Central Powers had lost the war and that the Habsburg Empire was on the verge of collapse. Soldiers in large numbers were deserting and making their way back home, usually passing through Budapest. Strikes and street demonstrations proliferated. On October 24 a countergovernment emerged in Hungary in the form of a National Council, which consisted of the three parties that had for some time been calling for an end to the war, radical social reforms, and the establishment of a democratic government based on universal suffrage. These were the party of Count Mihály Károlyi, a maverick nobleman; the Radical Party; and the SDP. Neither of the latter two parties had representatives in the existing parliament. Although Charles, the king of Hungary and emperor of Austria, was reluctant to deal with the National Council, the political crisis forced his hand. When it was clear that the Hungarian government no longer had complete control of the army and police, Charles relented and on October 31, Károlyi was appointed prime minister. A key role in these events was played by another newly created organization, the Soldiers' Council, which appeared in Budapest on October 25. Dissident officers in the Soldiers' Council claimed that it represented the interests of the many thousands of demoralized and discontented soldiers who had survived the war. By the end of October the Soldiers' Council had begun to assert its authority in Budapest. Key government buildings were seized and authority was asserted over the police force. Most important, the Soldiers' Council intervened to offer protection to the National Council and thereby ensured the success of the revolution.[55]

Pogány was exhilarated by the unfolding revolution and, as later events would demonstrate, aspired to play an important role in the remaking of Hungary. His political ambitions were apparently strongly supported by his wife, who believed he had the makings of an outstanding revolutionary. After being criticized for his tactless condemnation of the strike leaders in January, Pogány had avoided any controversial actions or outspoken publications. But in October he resolved to adopt a more forceful approach,

54 "Szocialista nevelés," *A Tudás,* March 1918, in PJVI, 230–31. See also Varga, "Pogány József," 73.

55 One historian has suggested that the revolution was "virtually a private venture of the Soldiers' Council's rebellious young officers." Pastor, *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin*, 37.

thinking, perhaps, that in a revolutionary situation "he who first dares to take action will be victorious."[56] At the October SDP congress, Pogány surpassed even Kunfi in his radicalism and went so far as to oppose the SDP's joining the National Council. Perhaps he did so because he knew that he could hardly hope to be named to a high-level position in the coalition government that Károlyi was forming. In fact, the SDP was allotted only two cabinet positions, and these went to the two most prominent party leaders, Garami and Kunfi. Still, Pogány must have reasoned to himself that he had expertise that no other Hungarian socialist possessed. As a war correspondent he had frequently met with both military officers and foot soldiers. Through his conversations with, and interviews of, ordinary soldiers he had gained important insights into their habits and thought processes. Probably he could never be appointed minister of war, but perhaps he could acquire similar authority by making good use of the Soldiers' Council.

56 Hajdu, "Az elhallgatott Pogány József," 5.

CHAPTER 2
The Revolutionary, 1918–1919

Pogány is a remarkable character, a Jew, writer, thinker and idealist... His enemies look on him as being next-door to a Bolshevik... I believe he is sincere in his attempts to reform the condition of the troops. This does not prevent him from being personally ambitious and shifty and unscrupulous in his methods. / ARCHIBALD COOLIDGE, AMERICAN DIPLOMAT, 1919

When in January 1918, Pogány had disparaged the leaders of the mass strike in Budapest as "pretend Bolsheviks," he had argued that radical action was premature because, among other things, those seeking revolutionary change could not count on any support from the armed forces. In the political and social turbulence of late October in Hungary, Pogány's political instincts told him that he could best use his talents in the cause of the revolution by attempting to win over the soldiers. Hungarian socialists at the time had ambivalent feelings toward the military. For many, the nearly five years of devastating war had strengthened their pacifism. They thus found themselves agreeing with the famous words of Colonel Béla Linder, shortly after Károlyi had appointed him minister of defense: "We want no more wars! Nor do we have further need for any army! I don't want to see soldiers again!"[1] Although Hungarian socialists paid lip service to such sentiments, some, including Pogány, took a less idealistic view. Yes, the old capitalist army must be abolished. But to replace it there must be created a new army dedicated to socialist principles and prepared to defend the revolution against its enemies.

As the revolution was unfolding, Pogány undertook, apparently on his own initiative, a personal mission to organize the restless and angry soldiers, many of them still armed, who were arriving daily in Budapest. Beginning in mid-October he and a few like-minded associates made daily visits to the train stations and army barracks. In fiery speeches, sometimes seven or eight a day, he urged the soldiers to repudiate the hated Austro-Hungarian army, which he denounced as a tool of the capitalists and imperialists. Instead, the soldiers should now become part of the proletarian

1 Hajdu, "Linder Béla és Pogány József," 33.

army that would be organized along democratic lines and that would give full support to the revolution. Pogány provided each soldier with a red ribbon to wear on his uniform to show solidarity with the workers and with those fighting to create the new, socialist Hungary.[2] In this way he quickly became a familiar and popular figure among ordinary soldiers and among those officers with left-wing proclivities.

Mihály Károlyi and his colleagues on the National Council viewed the disorganized process of demobilization and the proliferation of soldiers' councils throughout the capital city and the countryside with some trepidation. They feared that desperate and armed soldiers would resort to looting or commit outrageous acts that would endanger public order. These fears seemed justified when on October 31 a small group of soldiers forced their way into the residence of Count Tisza, the former prime minister and symbol of the old regime. The intruders accosted Tisza and accused him of being responsible for the hated war that had brought such misery to the country. In the altercation that followed shots were fired at Tisza and he was killed. Only an hour or two after Tisza's assassination news of this momentous event was brought to the headquarters of the National Council by Pogány and by a naval sergeant, István Dobó. It appears that some who were on the scene immediately concluded that Pogány, Dobó, and others from the soldiers' councils were in fact responsible for the assassination.[3] For many months rumors and reports about Pogány's alleged role in the assassination would continue to circulate among government officials. Pogány then and later in life adamantly denied this allegation, claiming that at the time the assassination occurred he was attending a government meeting and proclaiming the need for restoring law and order.[4] However, at a judicial tribunal in 1921 several of those who had been present at the assassination, including a Tisza family member and two of the defendants, testified that Pogány, in military uniform, had supervised the operation, blamed Tisza for the horrors of World War I, and fired the first shot. This, however, was not the end of the story, for some years later the defendants retracted their statements implicating Pogány, claiming they had been pressured to testify falsely. Thus, the evidence in the case was and remains sharply contradictory, and historians have been unable to come to a definitive conclusion about Pogány's possible guilt.[5]

2 Dietz, *Októbertól augusztusig*, 61.

3 Bencsik, *Gróf Tisza*, 218–19.

4 Czóbel Memoir, 11.

5 The most in-depth treatment of the topic is Pölöskei, *A rejtélyes Tisza-gyilkosság*.

In the aftermath of Tisza's assassination it seemed imperative that the new revolutionary government take decisive action to control the unruly mass of demobilized soldiers. Károlyi and his colleagues realized that the Budapest Soldiers' Council had played a critical role in elevating the National Council to power, but they now also sensed that it posed a possible political challenge to the new government. Károlyi thus decided to name a government representative, or commissioner, who would be responsible for bringing order to the situation and ensuring that the Budapest Soldiers' Council would be politically loyal to the National Council. When he asked his cabinet for recommendations, Pogány's name was proposed by Kunfi, who, sensing there would likely be opposition to the idea, had not consulted with other SPD leaders.[6] Apparently without asking others for their opinion of Pogány, Károlyi proceeded quickly on November 2, to appoint him as commissioner to the Soldiers' Council. It is unclear whether Károlyi had heard the rumors about Pogány's role in the Tisza assassination. However, he had learned from an incident on October 31 that Pogány was a brash advocate for achieving rapid and radical revolutionary change. On that fateful day Károlyi had announced to the public that he had been appointed prime minister by the king. When Károlyi left the balcony from which he had given the speech, Pogány pushed his way forward and gave a passionate, impromptu address in which he declared that since power in Hungary was now in the hands of the people, Hungary should become a republic and have nothing more to do with the king.[7]

Károlyi would later greatly regret that he had acted so precipitously in appointing Pogány to so critical an office. Political observers of both right-wing and left-wing orientation would concur in the belief that Pogány was a very poor choice. The conservative historian Gusztáv Gratz would later describe him as "one of the insolent and totally amoral opportunists that the revolution threw to the surface."[8] Pogány's critics in the SDP were to berate him as "an ambitious opportunist with delusions of grandeur" and "the most disastrous figure" in Hungary's era of revolutions.[9] However, in the first days of his tenure as commissioner to the Soldiers' Council there were no indications that Pogány would become such a controversial figure. His first speech to the Soldiers' Council on November 3, in an august

6 Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 90. Böhm believed that Pogány was too inexperienced and disorganized to succeed in such an assignment.

7 Eyewitness account of Aladár Gürtler, in Bencsik, *Gróf Tisza*, 219.

8 Gratz, *A forradalmak kora*, 69.

9 Ibid., 71; Göndör, *Vallomások*, 39.

chamber of the Hungarian Parliament, was fully consistent with the objectives that Károlyi and the National Council had stipulated. He warned the assembled soldiers that they must surrender their weapons and refrain from any rowdiness or indiscipline. For the time being they were to be confined to their barracks and educated in the new revolutionary spirit. Their interests would be looked after by the Budapest Soldiers' Council, which would be run according to the principles of democracy and would ensure that the voice of the ordinary soldier would be heard.[10] Pogány's message was apparently well received by the assembled soldiers, who numbered over a thousand, for they proceeded by a unanimous vote to elect him president of the Soldiers' Council.[11]

Before long, however, Károlyi began to worry that Pogány had misunderstood the nature of his appointment. The Soldiers' Council, like the similarly organized Workers' Council, had no executive or legislative powers. Its role was solely advisory and it was to operate under the close supervision of the minister of defense.[12] In his public posture Pogány gave the impression that he completely agreed with this interpretation. In interviews he insisted that the Soldiers' Council was interested only in the education and well-being of the soldiers. It would teach them to be loyal to the democratic revolution and offer them recreation to help them forget the misery of their wartime experiences. Reading rooms, concerts, and theatrical performances would enrich their lives and expose them to "the spirit of enlightenment."[13] Privately, however, Pogány was making it clear that, taking his cue from the Bolshevik experience, he was intent on placing the Soldiers' Council on an equal status with the National Council. Increasingly confident that the soldiers trusted him more than they did government leaders, Pogány was soon acting in ways that raised suspicions

10 In fact, representation in the Soldiers' Council was heavily tilted in favor of the common soldiers. According to a decree Pogány had issued on November 2, in each battalion the officers were entitled to one representative, the common soldiers to four representatives. *Pester Lloyd*, November 3, 1918, 4.

11 Pogány's speech is found in Magyar Dolgozók Pártja. *A magyar munkásmozgalom történetének válogatott dokumentumai*, vol. 5, 315–16. Cited hereafter as MMTVD. See also Juhász-Nagy, *A magyar októberi forradalom*, 289–90.

12 Pastor, *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin*, 39.

13 This is the interpretation of the purpose of the Soldiers' Council that Pogány gave to representatives of the Western powers. See, for example, report of Thomas Cunningham, February 14, 1919, "General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, 1918-1931," National Archives Microcopy 820, reel 207, Washington: National Archives, 1972. Hereafter cited as GRACNP.

that he wished to play the role of "watchdog" over the revolutionary government. In this role he imagined himself to be an independent agent, not directly beholden to, or supervised by, the government or even by the SDP.[14]

Pogány had in fact organized the Soldiers' Council in such a way as to enhance his own authority. The "democratic" procedure he had established for the election of members of the council meant that most of the delegates were men with little education and no experience with, or real understanding of, the political process. This meant that they were more easily swayed by Pogány's persuasive, and at times demagogic, oratory. He was adept at giving the impression that he fully endorsed the more reckless and radical demands of the soldiers, such as the idea that officers should be elected by the soldiers.[15] He also cleverly played on the fears of the soldiers that enemies of the revolution, the "counterrevolutionaries," were ubiquitous and increasingly powerful. Only those officers who professed full solidarity with the revolution were permitted to participate in the Soldiers' Council. Those who chose to join rival officer groups or detachments were denounced as counterrevolutionaries.[16] If such groups had their way, Pogány declared, the new workers' army would be eliminated and ordinary soldiers and workers would once again suffer from capitalist oppression.

To be sure, Pogány's warnings about the rise of counterrevolutionary forces were well founded. Most conservatives in the Hungarian political establishment viewed the government of Károlyi with disdain and revulsion, and were prepared to support the various antirevolutionary military and political groups that were now appearing in various regions of Hungary. Ironically, Pogány's radical oratory about the dangers of the counterrevolution served merely to incite the enemies of Károlyi's government and to sharpen the threat of counterrevolution. In November 1918, Pogány was emerging as the bête noire of the counterrevolutionaries and anti-Semites, especially of the radical right-wing military officers gathered together by Captain Gyula Gömbös in an organization known as MOVE (Hungarian National Defense Association). They insisted that Pogány was the true symbol of the revolution. He was the Jew with no loyalty to the

14 Vermes, "October Revolution," 39–40; Zsuppán, "Early Activities," 92; Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 83.

15 Vermes, "October Revolution," 40; Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 91–92.

16 Juhász-Nagy, *A magyar októberi forradalom*, 290.

Magyar nation, the Socialist who was the enemy of the family and religion, and the "demon of demoralization of our former army."[17]

The greatest challenge to Pogány's authority as president of the Soldiers' Council came, however, not from the ranks of the counterrevolutionaries, but from within the cabinet of the Károlyi government. After the sudden resignation of Linder on November 8, Colonel Albert Bartha was appointed minister of defense. Bartha was an experienced military officer with traditional views about how an army was to be organized and employed. Unlike Linder, he believed there was a need for a disciplined, well-organized Hungarian army that could be used to defend the country against invasion. By mid-November the need for such an army had become clear. Oszkár Jászi, Károlyi's minister of nationalities, had hoped to maintain Hungary's territorial integrity by transforming the country into a democratic "Eastern Switzerland." The leaders of Hungary's ethnic minorities and the newly emerging successor states (Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia) had no interest in such a fanciful concept. They intended to use military force to seize and annex large chunks of Hungarian territory. Already in early November Czech army units began to make military incursions into the Hungarian province of Slovakia. By mid-November foreign troops had invaded the northern, eastern, and southern parts of the country. Sobered by this ominous development and by the lack of sympathy shown by the Allies, particularly the French, toward the new pacifist, democratic regime in Hungary, Károlyi declared on November 11 that the Hungarian army had stopped disarming and was preparing to defend Hungarian territory.[18]

It was apparent to Bartha, and perhaps now also to Prime Minister Károlyi, that an effective national defense could not be organized in a situation where the armed forces were divided into two parallel, and often opposing, entities. Something had to be done to neutralize the soldiers' councils, which many in the government now viewed as hotbeds of "reckless insubordination." Accordingly, a few days after his appointment as minister of defense Bartha declared: "I will not tolerate any sort of soldiers' council." In an official proclamation detailing the organization of the new Hungarian army, no mention was made of any role that the Budapest

17 Tormay, *Outlaw's Diary*, vol. 1, 222. Leaders of the MOVE considered Pogány to be the most dangerous of the revolutionaries and may even have planned to assassinate him. Hajdu, *Az 1918-as magyarországi polgári demokratikus forradalom*, 251–52. Hereafter cited as Hajdu, *Forradalom*.

18 Pastor, *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin*, 69; Romsics, *Hungary*, 93.

Soldiers' Council might play.[19] Pogány had no intention of backing away from this direct challenge. He began an immediate campaign to vilify Bartha as a secret enemy of the revolution. Each measure Bartha introduced to reestablish traditional military discipline was declared by Pogány to be a counterrevolutionary ploy. Pogány soon had the delegates in the Soldiers' Council convinced of the need to stop Bartha from carrying out his nefarious policies.

Significantly, Pogány's view of Bartha was shared to a certain extent by his colleagues in the SDP. Their suspicions of the minister of war were sharpened when in early December he tried to circumvent a new policy approved by both the Soldiers' Council and the SPD. This was the transfer of disciplinary power from officers to tribunals elected by common soldiers. Fearing that this innovation would only hasten the breakdown of discipline, Bartha attempted to introduce his own new disciplinary procedure based on "flying squads" that he would appoint. To the socialist leadership this truly smacked of counterrevolution. The two SDP members of the coalition government now approached Károlyi and persuaded him that the current state of military affairs was untenable and that the best solution to the problem was to replace Bartha with someone less controversial and more committed to the revolution. Unwilling to lose the support of the SDP, Károlyi agreed and Bartha tendered his resignation late on December 11. But Pogány was not satisfied with this result, or at least with the way in which it had been achieved. He quickly devised a plan to take advantage of the development in a way that would boost his authority as the "watchdog" of the revolution.

Early on December 12, Pogány summoned the soldiers of the Budapest garrison to a mass meeting at which he declared that the situation was critical and that the time for forceful action had come. He deliberately failed to inform the assembled soldiers that Bartha had already been forced to resign. Instead, he urged the soldiers to take the matter into their own hands by marching on the Buda castle and demanding the ouster of the counterrevolutionary Bartha. Within hours several thousand armed soldiers were massed outside the offices of the prime minister. A few cannons were even set up. When informed of the demonstration, Bartha summoned Pogány and demanded an explanation. Pogány at first tried to prevaricate, claiming to have no knowledge of what was occurring. He soon admitted, however, that he had organized the demonstration because, though Bartha

19 "Die Neuorganisation des ungarischen Heeres," *Pester Lloyd*, November 12, 1919, 2–3; Juhász-Nagy, *A magyar októberi forradalom*, 294; Hajdu, *Forradalom*, 138.

had in fact submitted his resignation, the soldiers had the justified fear that the actual date of the resignation would be pushed into the future and that in the meantime he, Bartha, would continue to pursue policies that favored the counterrevolution.[20]

Pogány thereupon joined the demonstrators and in a fiery speech presented the demands of the soldiers, as represented by the Soldiers' Council. This list, which Pogány himself had drawn up, included not only the dismissal of Bartha but also further measures to eliminate counterrevolutionary elements in the officers' corps, including a proposal that the appointment of all officers had to be approved by the Soldiers' Council. "Today's demonstration," Pogány concluded, "has made clear who holds the power in this country." Károlyi appeared and spoke some brief, appeasing words, and the soldiers, sensing that they would get their way, erupted with the chant: "Out with Bartha, three cheers for Pogány!"[21]

When later in the day newspapers reported that Bartha had in fact resigned, the soldiers and the general public concluded that the mass demonstration had achieved its goal. The Károlyi government decided not to issue a clarification and explain what had truly happened, fearing that this would only prolong the crisis. Newspapers in the next few days thus continued to report that it had been the unprecedented intervention by the Soldiers' Council under Pogány that had forced Károlyi to dismiss his minister of war.[22] Although Pogány's maneuver had succeeded, he soon discovered that most of the members of Károlyi's cabinet and even many prominent Social Democrats were appalled by what he had done. On his own initiative and without informing even his colleagues in the SDP, Pogány had manipulated the soldiers and created the public impression that the revolutionary government had caved in to pressure from the streets. The lesson seemed to be that violent demonstrations, however irrational, were an effective way to influence the course of events.[23] Furthermore, it struck observers as absurd that at a time when the country was being invaded by several of its neighbors, the Budapest Soldiers'

20 Bartha recalled this event during his testimony at the Tisza assassination tribunal in 1921. See Bencsik, *Gróf Tisza*, 303–4. When Bartha complained to Károlyi about the vicious campaign against him, the latter was unsympathetic, even claiming that Bartha had ties with right-wing officers who were planning to assassinate him.

21 Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 119–20; Vermes, October Revolution," 45; Gratz, *A forradalmak kora*, 71; Cunningham, "Between the War," 417.

22 See, for example, "Die Truppen der Garnison Budapests gegen den Kriegsminister," the lead article in *Pester Lloyd*, December 13, 1919, 1.

23 This was the conclusion of Weltner, *Forradalom*, 89.

Council was devoting its efforts to the undermining of the minister of war. Summoned by Károlyi to explain how Pogány, a leading member of the SDP, could act in such an arbitrary and devious way, Garami, Kunfi, and Vilmos Böhm could only report that their colleague had not informed them ahead of time about his plan. He was, as Garami later wrote, "a dangerous opportunist with delusions of grandeur." Garami and Böhm offered to resign, but this idea was rejected as it would contribute to the public impression that the government was in a state of crisis.[24]

Pogány was thereupon summoned by the SPD leaders and severely rebuked for his conduct. At first he tried to deny responsibility, but under intense questioning finally admitted that he had in fact organized the soldiers' demonstration. He promised that he would not act unilaterally in the future.[25] Garami or Böhm perhaps had hoped they could find a way of moving their irresponsible colleague to some other government post where he could do less mischief, but they found that Pogány's position as president of the Soldiers' Council was unshakable. In fact, he had considerable support from left-wing members of the SDP, who believed that he had won a great victory against the forces of the counterrevolution. This explains why Pogány was permitted to write an unsigned article in *Népszava* in which he in effect vindicated his role in the "Bartha affair" and declared that the "soldiers of Budapest can be proud of their action... because they had demonstrated their devotion to social democracy." Even in the face of such brazen challenges, SPD moderates chose to refrain from any open condemnation of Pogány, fearing that such intramural squabbling could only help the counterrevolution.[26]

The swift flow of events left little time for Pogány to savor his victory. It was not long before he found himself locked in a renewed battle with Bartha's successor, Count Sándor Festetics, who, if anything, was more adamant than Bartha about combating left-wing influences in the armed forces. When early in January, Festetics addressed a national meeting of military officers, the event threatened to turn into a full-scale antirevolutionary demonstration. Groups of officers chanted, "We don't need a new army" and "We are Magyars, not social democrats."[27] In response, Pogány decided to repeat the methods that he had used to undermine Bartha. He

24 Garami, *Forrongó Magyarország*, 70. Böhm would also deplore Pogány's "senseless and purposeless act of mass terror." Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 106.

25 Garami, *Forrongó Magyarország*, 71.

26 Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 112; Göndör, *Vallomások*, 40–41.

27 (Mrs.) Rudolf Dósa, *A MOVE* (The MOVE), 42.

began once again to fulminate about the renewed "counterrevolutionary machinations" in the Ministry of Defense. He accused Festetics specifically of trying to pit different sections of the Budapest garrison against each other and of organizing officers' groups that were inimical to the revolution. Because he could continue as president of the Soldiers' Council only if reelected in a new vote scheduled for January 12, Pogány felt he had to pander even more to the radical elements among the common soldiers. Although he successfully opposed a proposal for the complete elimination of the officers' corps, he now argued that in the new democratic army all of the officers should be elected by the troops, decrees of the Ministry of Defense would have to be approved beforehand by the Soldiers' Council, and provisions were to be implemented to ease the way for common soldiers to become officers. Reelected in a nearly unanimous vote, Pogány was emboldened to increase his attacks on Festetics and demand that the prime minister dismiss him because he had never gained the confidence of the soldiers.[28] The hapless Károlyi, confronted by a host of serious problems that had gravely weakened the government, once again gave in. He dismissed Festetics on January 20 and replaced him with Vilmos Böhm, in the hope that a Socialist might be able to tame the Soldiers' Council under Pogány.[29]

Pogány's success in toppling two successive ministers of defense using violent rhetoric and the threat of military force was seen by many political observers as a very ominous development. It seemed to suggest that the government, which was dedicated to democratic procedures and the rule of law, was virtually helpless in the face of a group or party that was adept in using violence and intimidation in the streets. In particular, some felt that Pogány's methods were merely paving the way to power of the Communist Party, which had only recently appeared on the Hungarian scene. In November 1918, a small group of former prisoners of war in Russia, newly converted to Communism, had arrived in Hungary under the leadership of Béla Kun. Lenin had given this group the mission of fomenting a Communist revolution in Hungary. Though the CP's membership remained quite small, it managed to play a highly disruptive role in late 1918 and early 1919. Through speeches at factories and during

28 Varga, "Pogány József," 75; Juhász-Nagy, *A magyar októberi forradalom*, 345–46. Pogány received 653 of the 657 votes cast.

29 Festetics complained privately to an American diplomat that Pogány, who was supposedly a commissioner of the government, seemed to have complete liberty of action and was intent on "bulldozing" all constructive efforts of the Ministry of Defense. Report of E. M. Storey, January 31, 1919, GRACNP, reel 204 (Washington: National Archives, 1972).

street demonstrations and in sensationalist articles in their newspaper, the *Vörös Újság* (Red news), Kun and his comrades ridiculed the Károlyi regime as weak and ineffective and offered a proletariat utopia based on the Bolshevik model, in which all workers would flourish and national conflicts would be eliminated. This program resonated powerfully not only with the poorest and most downtrodden in Hungarian society but also with those on the Left who were becoming increasingly disillusioned with parliamentary democracy in general and the Károlyi government in particular.[30]

The rise of the Hungarian CP had the effect of exacerbating differences among the factions of the SDP. The majority of the party's leaders had no desire to cooperate with or appease the Communists, for they realized that Bolshevism rejected one of the key principles on which their party had been based, namely democracy. After all, they called themselves "social democrats," and one of the main planks in their program had always been the demand for universal suffrage and free elections in Hungary. Moderate party leaders like Garami argued that the SDP must continue full support for, and cooperation with, the Károlyi government, especially since plans were in place for the first democratic elections in Hungary to be held in April 1919. Strong opposition to the CP also allowed the SDP, and the revolutionary government, to take what appeared to be a moderate, middle-of-the-road stance. They would be equally hostile to extremist parties that sought to overthrow the Károlyi regime, the counterrevolutionaries on the Right, and the Communists on the Left. This would also serve to placate those Western diplomats who were warning the SDP leaders that unless the Hungarian government stamped out the CP, the Entente would allow "the Czechs, Serbs, and Romanians to enter Hungary and occupy it entirely."[31]

Yet a growing minority of Social Democrats were becoming disillusioned with the slow pace of reforms enacted by the Károlyi government and by the relatively minimal influence that the SDP seemed to have in the coalition. Fascinated by the conviction of the Communists that the logic of history was on their side, they now began to doubt that true socialism would ever be achieved on the basis of parliamentary democracy, which was too cumbersome and permitted too great a voice to those promoting counterrevolution. In any case, they had to face the real possibility that Socialists would not fare well in a free election. The SDP, for the most part, had the vote of the factory workers, but they were a relatively small

30 Romsics, *Hungary*, 98.

31 Report of Thomas Montgomery-Cuningham, February 14, 1919, GRACNP, reel 207.

part of Hungarian society and in any case, the CP was making inroads among them. Much greater in number were the peasants, but they showed little enthusiasm for the SDP, whose leaders remained adamantly opposed to land reform that would break up the great estates and distribute land to the farmworkers. Most middle- and upper-class Hungarians, of course, would vote for conservative, antirevolutionary parties. In other words, the results of a democratic election might serve to reduce rather than enhance the power and influence of the SDP. In these circumstances the Communist arguments for a violent overthrow of the regime and establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat seemed increasingly persuasive.

Early in 1919, following the example of several prominent independent left-wing radicals like György Lukács, and a few prominent Social Democrats, including the journalist Gyula Alpári, announced that they had switched their allegiance to the CP.[32] Most SDP leaders, however, still believed that the socialist program was best promoted by the party's continued participation in the government coalition. Like many of his colleagues, Pogány had ambivalent feelings about how to resolve the political crisis. He had been one of the first Hungarian Socialists to welcome the victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia and he was naturally curious about the program of the fledgling CP in Hungary. Late in 1918 he thus agreed to join several radical left-wing SDP members in a secret meeting with Kun.[33] But apparently nothing Pogány heard in this discussion led him to abandon his conviction that the SDP was still the only political group that could push through a socialist revolution in Hungary, especially when backed by the revolutionary army he was helping to build. In this strategy he seemed to take the Independent Social Democratic Party in Germany as a model. His response to the challenge posed by the CP was thus to argue even more strongly for the SDP to pursue its program boldly, to the point even of attempting to create a new coalition government in which the SDP would be the dominant party and would not have to make compromises with the bourgeois parties.[34]

Pogány's distaste for the Communists increased when it became clear during December that they were beginning to gain influence among the soldiers and enlisting some of them in the newly formed Red Guards. At the end of the month Kun, already widely known for his effective oratory, even had the audacity to encroach on Pogány's territory by showing up

32 Tőkés, *Béla Kun*, 109–10.
33 Borsányi, *Life*, 82.
34 Varga, "Pogány József," 75.

unannounced at one of the Budapest barracks to harangue the soldiers and proclaim the need for an armed uprising against the bourgeois government. When gunfire suddenly erupted, Pogány was summoned to the scene. He managed to restore order and persuade Kun to leave, but the Communist leader made it clear that he intended to continue his speech at another nearby barracks. The police were notified and Kun was arrested when he tried to enter the barracks. However, Pogány, apparently seeking to defuse the situation, intervened and had Kun released. They apparently left the scene together, arm in arm, a sign that though Pogány rejected the CP program, he saw some value in maintaining a reasonably amicable relationship with Kun.[35]

At the critical SDP congress held in January 1919, Pogány gave lip service to the program of Garami and to the more moderate faction, but it was clear from his contributions to the debates that, like others on the far left-wing of the SDP, he was no longer confident that Károlyi's coalition government was capable of carrying out a revolutionary program and holding off the attacks of the counterrevolution. He also stated his belief that the government's orientation toward the victorious Entente powers was bankrupt. Citing the Spartacist uprising then raging in Germany, Pogány argued that the best solution to Hungary's problems was an alliance with the workers of Germany and Russia.[36] Viewing things from his new position as minister of defense, Böhm could only conclude that Pogány's vacillations and contradictory statements were a reflection of his well-known political opportunism. To satisfy his personal ambitions to be a leader of the revolution, he had so positioned himself that he could move in whichever direction the political winds would lead him. Böhm, who realized that the failure to create an effective and disciplined army was one of the main reasons for the frustrating impasse in which the government found itself, placed most of the blame on Pogány. The Soldiers' Council he had fashioned was "the avant-garde of pseudo-radicalism," an organization that thwarted the efforts of the SDP to achieve its goals.[37]

35 Borsányi, *Life*, 95–98; Zsuppán, "Early Activities," 323.

36 Varga, "Pogány József," 75; Hajdu, *Forradalom*, 261. At this time Pogány told a British diplomat that if pushed into a "policy of despair," Hungary would choose a radical course and "set fire to a blazing trail of Communism that would reach to France and even to Great Britain." Cunningham, *Dusty Measure*, 317.

37 Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 200. The historian, Tibor Hajdu, came up with a similar assessment in describing Pogány's views as shaped by "the situation of the workers' movement at a given point in time and the mood in the streets." Hajdu, *Forradalom*, 89.

Pogány probably felt freer to express his views before the Soldiers' Council than at a SDP gathering. In a major speech on February 7 to the Soldiers' Council, he spoke in the strongest possible terms of the imminent danger of counterrevolution.[38] Hungarian soldiers and workers, he insisted, faced a stark choice: "whether we put an end to the counterrevolution, or we quietly allow the counterrevolution to put an end to us." Pogány portrayed the agents of counterrevolution as sinister manipulators and oppressors. The landowners, churches, and bourgeois parties like the Christian Socialists were "capable of anything" and were "utterly brutal, heartless, and merciless." They used terms like *family*, *religion*, and *property* to confuse and deceive the masses, while railing against "the Jewish government in Budapest" in an attempt to foment anti-Semitism. He concluded that Hungarian soldiers would no longer use their bayonets to defend the clergy and the bourgeoisie, but rather their "own proletariat interests." The audience responded to these words with "minutes-long applause and chants of 'Long live Pogány!'"[39]

Despite the apocalyptic nature of most of his speech, Pogány made one significant concession to the realities of the situation in Hungary. He pointed out to the soldiers, many of whom had origins in the countryside, that the urban proletariat was a minority in Hungary and that by themselves could not ensure the success of the revolution. The idea that the victory of socialism depended on winning over the peasantry was to become one of the few political principles that Pogány would continue to cling to over his entire career as a revolutionary. At this point, however, he still favored the formula for land reform that the SPD had championed. The great estates should be broken up, but the land must be formed into state collectives and not distributed in small plots to the farmworkers. The latter solution would only create thousands of smallholders who would become anti-Socialist and hostile to the revolution. Pogány chastised the Károlyi government for acting "with insufficient determination" on this issue as well as on many others. The government, he declared, "must recognize that the masses demand rapid and serious action." To thunderous applause he concluded that the challenge from the counterrevolution must be met by the new army: "So far the soldiers have been patient, but if necessary, they will make use of their weapons to defend the revolution."

Completely absent from Pogány's speech on February 7 was any reference to the national elections to be conducted in April. By this point he

38 Pogány's speech is in PJVI, 241–50.

39 *Pester Lloyd*, Abendblatt, February 7, 1919, 3.

had apparently abandoned all hope that free elections would somehow open the way to a resolution of the crisis and to the triumph of socialism. In private discussions he argued that what the country needed was not an election but a "real revolution."[40] Yet he continued to insist that the program of the Communists impeded the efforts of the SPD to achieve that "real revolution." Like other prominent Hungarian Socialists he reacted with consternation to a Communist-inspired demonstration on February 20 at the offices of *Népszava* that degenerated into a full-scale riot in which six police officers were killed. Realizing that some drastic step was necessary, the government had Kun and forty leaders of the CP arrested and imprisoned. The next day, in response to a call from the SDP, two hundred thousand workers marched in the streets of Budapest in a massive demonstration against the Communists. Pogány joined other SDP leaders in bitter condemnations of the Hungarian CP. In a lead article in *Népszava* he asked if "there is any dirty trick these pseudo-Communists won't try that is designed to let loose the hatred and lower instincts of the masses."[41] The Communists responded in kind by mocking Pogány as an "illustrious social chauvinist."[42]

By early March Hungary seemed to be on the verge of political chaos. Even with most of their leaders imprisoned, the Communists managed to continue to organize street demonstrations. Military incursions into the country by Czech and Romanian troops had gone virtually unchecked. Counterrevolutionary groups were organizing in almost every city and town and were emboldened by the apparent inability of the government to maintain law and order. The representatives of the Entente in Hungary, especially the French, showed little sympathy for, or understanding of, the country's plight and made decisions, sometimes quite arbitrary, that made the task of the Károlyi government even more hopeless. By mid-March some government leaders, perhaps even Károlyi himself, were contemplating a radical change in foreign policy. Since an orientation toward the Western powers, especially Britain and the United States, had apparently failed, Hungary should turn eastward and seek a military alliance with Soviet Russia.[43]

40 Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, 88–89.

41 Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 162; Borsányi, *Life*, 117.

42 "Csepel," March 13, 1919, *Vörös Újság*, in MMTVD, vol. 5, 602. On January 4, Pogány had been attacked in *Vörös Újság* as a war correspondent "who wrote war-mongering reports and as a result was named by the government as commissioner to the Soldiers' Council." Ibid., 400.

43 Pastor, *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin*, 130–31.

Pogány, who for some weeks had been calling for just such a reorientation, was well poised to play a leading role in the process. What the proposed realignment implied, as one historian has aptly put it, was a readiness on the part of Hungarian Socialists to accept the Hungarian CP as "a congenial ally rather than a mortal foe."[44] With his well-practiced opportunism, Pogány was prepared to disregard all the bitter altercations and mutual name-calling of the previous three months. As a first step toward a rapprochement, he sent an emissary to Kun in his prison cell to determine under what conditions the CP would be willing to join the SDP in a unified Hungarian workers' movement. Kun's lengthy written response apparently was sufficiently encouraging to induce several members of the left-wing of the SDP, including Pogány and Jenő Landler, to make at least one secret visit to conduct negotiations with Kun. These too went satisfactorily, and Kun, impressed by Pogány's professions of "complete solidarity," concluded that Pogány was "on our side."[45]

With Pogány, Landler, and several other radicals apparently now arguing vigorously for an alliance with the Communists, the SDP leadership finally capitulated. They could see no other option for preserving the meager gains of the revolution and for preventing the restoration of the old regime. Pogány hinted at what was in the offing when on March 15, he declared at a meeting of the Soldiers' Council that since the Entente had condemned Hungary to dismemberment, the only choice now was an alliance with Russia.[46]

The final impetus to the SPD rapprochement with the Communists came on March 20, when the Hungarian government was presented with a demand by the Entente powers for the evacuation of a large part of Transylvania. The implication of this ultimatum was clear: the victorious Great Powers had sanctioned the dismemberment of Hungary and the loss of such key provinces as Transylvania and Slovakia. This was a tremendous blow to Károlyi, who now was forced to conclude that his strategy of cooperation with the Western powers on the basis of a commitment to democracy and national self-determination had ended in complete disaster. He concluded that the only possible way out of this crisis was for the Social Democrats to form a cabinet and assume the leading role.[47] But the

44 Vermes, "October Revolution," 58.
45 Borsányi, *Life*, 126–32, 146; Hajdu, *Forradalom*, 342.
46 Hajdu, *Forradalom*, 347.
47 Pastor, *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin*, 139–40.

SPD leaders believed that the only course now open to Hungary was a military alliance with Soviet Russia, and this, in turn, necessitated a compact with Hungarian Communists.[48]

Pogány was a member of a five-man delegation sent on March 21 to inform Kun of the latest developments and to express the willingness of the SPD to unify with the CP. These talks proceeded smoothly and rapidly. The resulting agreement stipulated that the merged party, to be called the Socialist Party of Hungary, would affiliate with the Third International in Moscow, which had been established only days earlier. All ties with the "bourgeois" government would be broken. Károlyi would have no role in the new government, and the national elections planned for April would be canceled. Instead, the new Socialist Party of Hungary would seize power and proclaim the dictatorship of the proletariat.[49] Although this momentous news was not made public until the following day, Pogány decided to take immediate action on his own as president of the Soldiers' Council. He first sought and received the approval of the Soldiers' Council for the creation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this way he was able to steal the thunder of the Workers' Council, which passed a similar resolution several hours later. Later in the day he issued a variety of orders to pave the way for the political transition, including the requisition of all private and government automobiles.[50] Pogány's actions suggest that he had reason to believe that he would be appointed Commissar for War in the newly established Hungarian Soviet Republic.

48 In a speech to the Workers' Council, Garbai declared that "henceforth we must look to the east for justice, since it has been denied to us in the west." *Pester Lloyd*, March 22, 1919, 2.

49 Borsányi, *Life*, 136–37; Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 321.

50 Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, 95–96.

CHAPTER 3
The Communist

Pogány was one of the[most] insolent and totally amoral climbers that the revolution threw to the surface... His fanatical determination was simply a means to satisfy his swollen ambitions. He imagined himself to be a Napoleon. / GUSZTÁV GRATZ, HUNGARIAN DIPLOMAT AND HISTORIAN

The Hungarian Soviet Republic, which lasted only 133 days, has been called a "bizarre experiment of doctrinaire war Communism."[1] It provided the opportunity for zealous Hungarian Communists and Socialists to attempt to put into practice the abstract principles that they fervently believed would abolish the old order based on superstition and class oppression and would bring into being a workers' paradise. A messianic strain can be detected in the thinking and oratory of many of the leaders of the Hungarian Communist regime.[2] This was especially true of Pogány, who was exhilarated by the turn of fortune that had transformed him almost overnight from an apparently vehement critic of the CP into one of the leading figures of the Soviet Republic. That he was destined to play a key role in the coming days could be seen at the outset of the Communist regime, when Kun asked Pogány to join him in composing a manifesto to the Hungarian people announcing the momentous political change that had occurred. Signed by both Kun and Pogány and dated March 22, the proclamation was titled "Mindenkihez" (To everyone).[3] It informed the public that the CP and the SPD had merged in order to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat and to rescue Hungary from "anarchy and collapse." To protect the new regime, a new proletariat army was being formed and a military alliance with Soviet Russia was planned.

It was apparent from the very beginning of the Soviet Republic, that Kun had formed a very favorable opinion of Pogány as a reliable and competent comrade whose newly announced commitment to Communism was firm. Not himself particularly adept with the pen, Kun seemed to have greatly valued Pogány's writing and journalistic skills and in the coming months and years was often to rely on him for assistance in this realm. Pogány was given one of the key posts in the new government, one that he

1 Nagy-Talavera, *Green Shirts*, 24.
2 Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, 95–96.
3 The text is in MMTVD, vol. 6, 3–4.

had surely coveted: People's Commissar for War. In addition, he was a member of the five-man executive committee of the Revolutionary Governing Council.[4]

By no means an individual accustomed to act with humility and tactfulness, Pogány did not conceal his delight at having realized his political ambitions. Right from the start he annoyed both his new and former comrades with his haughtiness and histrionic manners. Those who knew that he had written a play about Napoleon Bonaparte now joked that Pogány was taking on the airs of a French emperor.[5] Pogány's demeanor was particularly disgusting to those Communists who were upset in general about the way in which Kun had chosen to divide up the spoils of victory. Key positions were not distributed fifty-fifty, but on the surface at least were decidedly in the favor of the Socialists. On the Revolutionary Governing Council only one of the twelve full commissars was a Communist. This was Kun himself, who assumed responsibility for foreign affairs. Of the twenty-one deputy commissars, seven were Communists.[6] Kun apparently felt that this concession to the Socialists was needed in order to ensure a rapid and lasting merger of the two parties. After all, the SDP was clearly stronger in size of membership, political experience, and public recognition. In any case, the Communist deputy commissars would be on hand to make sure that their superiors adhered to accepted ideological guidelines.

Many Communists were especially resentful of the appointment of Pogány as Commissar for War. Those who had been leaders of the mass strikes in January 1918, recalled with bitterness his mocking reference to them as "pretend Bolsheviks." As recently as late February he had denounced the "despicable" tactics of the "pseudo-Communists." Why, they complained, had Pogány been given a position for which either of his deputy commissars, Tibor Szamuely and Béla Szántó, would have been better qualified? It is thus not surprising that Pogány met with obstruction right from the start. He quarreled with Szamuely and Szántó over the very nature of the Red Army that was to be created. Pogány wished to continue to build on the framework established by the last minister of war in the bourgeois government, Vilmos Böhm, who had envisioned a mercenary army whose recruitment policy was focused on the trade unions. His deputy commissars advocated an entirely new model based on universal

4 The other members were two Communists (Kun himself, and Vágó) and two Social Democrats (Kunfi and Landler).

5 Hajdu, *A Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság*, 84–85. Hereafter cited as Hajdu, *Tanácsköztársaság*.

6 Tőkés, *Béla Kun*, 150.

conscription. On this issue Pogány apparently had his way when the Revolutionary Governing Council approved his plan on March 24.[7]

Confident that he was now on firm footing, Pogány proceeded to make plans for creating a Red Army that would be responsible for the "defense of the proletarian dictatorship and the defeat of all counterrevolutionary attempts."[8] One of his first acts was to issue a decree renaming key army barracks and installations. No longer would they bear such reactionary names as Franz Joseph or Joseph Radetzky, but instead would honor Marx, Lenin, or Petőfi.[9] Despite opposition from Szántó, on April 1 Pogány abolished the soldiers' councils, declaring that they had lost their raison d'être.[10] But as he began to tackle other substantive problems, he quickly discovered that he had underestimated the tenacity and ruthlessness of his opponents. His two deputy commissars opposed virtually every proposal he put forward. When he became aware of what was happening, Kun formed a three-person committee (Kun, Böhm, and Jacob Weltner) to defuse the situation. They recommended that the work of the war commissariat be divided into three parts, with Pogány having responsibility for overall organization and his two deputies concentrating on other areas.[11]

However, this solution failed because Szántó and Szamuely refused to accept defeat and continued to plot against their putative boss. They had considerable support among their colleagues, for, as one later recalled, "the entire communist party loathed him [Pogány]."[12] At a session of the Revolutionary Governing Council on April 2, it became clear that the unity of the newly organized party and government was in danger of being shattered. After Pogány gave a report on the good progress being made in organizing the Red Army and conscripting soldiers, Szamuely took the floor and contradicted almost everything that his superior had said. The organization in the war commissariat, he declared, was "close to being a disaster." The military situation in the countryside was "on the verge of anarchy." What is more, Pogány had not worked harmoniously with his deputies, but had chosen instead to collaborate with his friend, Czóbel.

7 Liptai, *A magyar vörös hadsereg*, 54–55.

8 József Pogány, "Miért kell vörös hadsereg," in *A Vörös Katona*, March 30, 1919, in PJVI, 253–54; Gratz, *A forradalmak kora*, 94.

9 Vörös, "Árpád helyett Marx, " http://epa.oszk.hu/00600/00617/00004/tsz99 _3_4_voros_ boldizsar.htm, accessed May 20, 2011.

10 Hajdu, *Tanácsköztársaság*, 96. Szántó opposed this step, and managed to prevent the abolition of the provincial soldiers' councils.

11 Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 321.

12 Cited in Tőkés, *Béla Kun*, 150, fn. 31.

Infuriated by these invidious remarks by his subordinate, Pogány responded that Szamuely was arguing on the basis of "false data and mistaken assumptions."[13]

In the ensuing debate, some of the commissars stood up for Pogány, pointing out that those who disliked him were carrying out a campaign of persecution against him. Even so, the delegates fully agreed with Kun's analysis of the situation: there was an apparent lack of trust between the commissar for war and his deputies and as a result there had arisen a conflict over spheres of authority. Kun suggested that the only solution to the crisis was for Pogány to step down and be transferred to some other post. Pogány thereupon submitted to the will of the council and submitted his resignation. On the next day Budapest newspapers briefly reported this fact, but offered no explanation of the surprising development. One of Pogány's enemies in the CP reported erroneously in the *Vörös Újság* that not only had he been forced to resign as Commissar of War, but had also been purged entirely from the party.[14]

The article in the *Vörös Újság* was an indication that Pogány's enemies in the Communist leadership were not entirely appeased by his quiet resignation, for they wished to subject the former Social Democrat to public humiliation and thereby diminish his role in the government. Remembering how Pogány had arranged a demonstration against Albert Bartha even after he had in fact resigned, Szamuely and Szántó decided to employ a similar tactic. Faithfully following Pogány's formula, they worked stealthily, without informing Kun or other leading Communists of their plans. On the morning of April 3, they called a meeting of several hundred army soldiers who were fanatic Communists and loyal to them. Szamuely and Szántó violently attacked Pogány, whom they declared to be untrustworthy and unprincipled. They alleged that he not only still harbored ill feelings toward Communists, but also was allowing counterrevolutionary plots to be hatched in his ministry. Incited in this way, the soldiers, joined by units of the Red Guard and factory workers recruited for the demonstration, promptly marched on the War Office. There the angry crowd, now numbering several thousand, was addressed once again by Szántó, Béla Vágó, and other Communists. Each mention of Pogány's name brought from the crowd "hoots and jeers" and the chant: "A rope, a rope, for Jóska Pogány." To some observers the mood of the demonstrators was so menacing as to suggest that if Pogány were to appear, he would in fact

13 *A Forradalmi Kormányzótanács jegyzőkönyvei 1919*, 145–54. Hereafter cited as FKJ.
14 FKJ, 170; *Pester Lloyd*, Abendblatt, April 3, 1919, 1.

be hanged from a lamppost. During the demonstration Pogány remained huddled in his office, looking to his comrades as if he were about to enter "the gates of hell." Only the intervention of Böhm and several other prominent Social Democrats served to calm the situation. Kun finally arrived on the scene and managed to disperse the demonstrators.[15]

It seems that at first Pogány, who perhaps was not objective enough to see that he was being given a powerful dose of his own medicine, suspected, erroneously, that Kun had sanctioned the actions of Szamuely and Szántó.[16] At the Revolutionary Governing Council late on April 3, Pogány expressed his bitterness over what had happened: "If I do not receive satisfaction in this matter, I will resign from the party." Kun and others quickly came to Pogány's defense, calling the anti-Pogány demonstration an injustice that verged on being outright rebellion against the Soviet Republic. Several speakers deplored the "campaign of persecution" against Pogány, who, as Landler pointed out, had been very popular among the soldiers before March 21. At Kun's insistence the Revolutionary Governing Council agreed to make amends to Pogány by transferring him to the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, where he was to serve as a deputy commissar under Kun. Furthermore, neither Szamuely nor Szántó were to remain in the Commissariat for War. A temporary plan for a five-man directorate to supervise the Commissariat for War was also approved; before long the direction of that controversial government department was given to Böhm.[17]

For weeks after this humiliating affair Pogány privately raged against his enemies and avoided all contact with the Communist leaders, except for Kun. He spent most of his time seeking consolation from his SDP comrades. Although many of them also had a long-standing distrust of, and aversion for, Pogány, they nonetheless accepted him, presumably because of the feeling that all of the Social Democrats should band together to prevent the zealous Communists from subjecting them to the same treatment Pogány had received.[18] It took only a few days, however, for Pogány to regain his

15 Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 321–25; Hajdu, *Tanácsköztársaság*, 96–97; Göndör, *Vallomások*. 82; Ashmead-Bartlett, *Tragedy of Central Europe*, 102–3. Ashmead-Bartlett, a British journalist, regarded the crowd as so threatening that he feared for his own life and fled the scene.

16 In his memoirs, Rákosi confirmed that at the time of the anti-Pogány demonstration he had been with Kun, who knew nothing of what Szamuely and Szántó were undertaking. Rákosi, *Visszaemlékezések*, I, 369–70.

17 MMTVD, vol. 8A, no. 127, 115–16; FKJ, 166–72.

18 Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 327.

equilibrium and to reassert his desire to play a leading role in the Soviet government. In fact, his response to the public disgrace on April 3 seems to have been an effort to demonstrate his credentials as an authentic Communist of the most radical kind. His frequent speeches and articles during the remainder of April took on a grandiose and even messianic tone.

On April 6, speaking from an improvised lectern placed on the limousine in which he traveled about Budapest, Pogány declared that the Soviet Republic's foreign policy must be based on just one idea: "The revolution must be expanded beyond our frontiers, because a social revolution is possible only on the basis of a successful world revolution." Buoyed by the news of the recent establishment of a Soviet regime in Bavaria, Pogány suggested that "the proletariat of the entire world" would soon be following Hungary's example. "Within two months," he confidently predicted, "a powerful bloc of Soviet states will form in Central Europe. This territory will be self-sustaining in terms of foodstuffs... and will thus be able for years to hold its own against world capitalism."[19] Pogány was equally optimistic in an article published a week later in *Vörös Újság*. There he ridiculed those "false Socialists" who harbored doubts that socialism could truly gain a secure footing in Hungary. In fact, he asserted, securing the workers' dictatorship in Hungary would be easier than it had been in Russia, since the Hungarian Socialists had the benefit of the Russian example and the bourgeoisie was relatively weaker in Hungary. Furthermore, although the dictatorship of the proletariat did not embrace the outmoded, imperialist concept of the "territorial integrity" of the Kingdom of Saint Stephen, the Red Army nonetheless had the obligation to "liberate the great masses of Magyar proletariats from the hated rule of the foreign capitalists."[20]

When Pogány delivered a major address on April 19 before an assembly of delegates from workers' and soldiers' councils from throughout the country, his attitude was less sanguine since the situation was much altered. Not only had Romanian, Czechoslovak, and Serb armies, with tacit approval of the Great Powers in Paris, continued their incursions into Hungarian territory, but counterrevolutionary demonstrations had occurred in Sárospatak and in a number of other towns. Pogány still expressed confidence in the durability of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, but chose now to focus instead on how to deal with the threat of counterrevolution. He gave a stern warning to those who would dare to try to restore the capitalist system. His words would long rankle the enemies of the Soviet regime:

19 *Pester Lloyd*, April 6, 3; Gratz, *A forradalmak kora*, 96.

20 Article on April 13, 1919, in MMTVD vol. 8a, no. 209 202–4.

"You should tremble in fear of our retribution. We will root you out to the last man, to the last counter-revolutionary... The bourgeoisie should take notice that from this day forward we regard them as hostages. They should take no satisfaction in the progress made by the Entente armies, for all advances on the part of the Serbs and Romanians will entail cruel experiences for them. Should they rejoice or display white flags from their windows, we will dye them red with their own blood." Pogány's rhetoric was received enthusiastically by his audience, which responded with "thunderous approval and extended applause."[21] Nor was his threat an idle one. In the coming weeks over five hundred prominent members of the Hungarian middle and upper classes were arrested by security detachments, placed in prisons, and designated as hostages.[22]

Not surprisingly, Pogány's ominous warnings deepened the antipathy that was directed at him by enemies of the Communist regime. They watched with silent revulsion as he toured about in Budapest in his "grey, luxurious field car, like the one the King used to have." Cecile Tormay, who was emerging as one of the leading voices of the anti-Communist and anti-Semitic movement in Hungary, spotted Pogány one day in his chauffeur-driven limousine. In her diary she described him as a "fat, high-shouldered, short-necked broad Jew, whose very attitude was unpleasant." Under his Soviet cap "greasy black hair curled over his neck." The experience caused her to shudder: "It was as though a soft slimy toad suddenly appeared on the surface of a clear sylvan pool."[23]

Despite the ignominy he suffered when he was forced to resign as Commissar for War, Pogány had managed, through a series of fiery and bellicose speeches, to recover his status as one of the chief spokesmen for the regime. Yet he seemed to realize that as a deputy commissar for foreign affairs under Kun, the possibility of making a truly creative contribution to the dictatorship of the workers was limited. For one thing, Western diplomats were strongly hinting that before any negotiations could be conducted with Hungary, the "extremists" in the government like Pogány and Szamuely, had to be removed. One solution to this dilemma was for Pogány to be given some assignment that would take him away from Budapest and would limit his opportunities to give speeches. Earlier in April Pogány had proposed that, in light of Hungary's deteriorating military position, a people's commissar should be sent to each Red Army division

21 *Pester Lloyd*, April 20, 1919, 5; Gratz, *A forradalmak kora*, 134.

22 Borsányi, *Life*, 165. In late May, on the urging of Kunfi, the Revolutionary Governing Council decided to free the hostages. Hajdu, *Tanácsköztársaság*, 153–54.

23 Tormay, *Outlaw's Diary*, vol. 2, 128–29.

to help ensure discipline and to inspire the troops. Kun now acted on this suggestion, dispatching Pogány to the eastern front, where Romanian forces were making steady advances and the Red Army had been retreating in a disorderly fashion. On April 26, shortly after Pogány's appointment as political advisor to the First Division, a counterattack on Romanian forces near the town of Nyíregyháza was launched. This proved to be unexpectedly successful, and in his report the division commander praised the role Pogány had played in the operation. He had "led small units into the battle, and it was only through his personal influence that we had success against a numerically superior enemy." The comments of the mayor of Nyíregyháza suggest that Pogány's success was achieved only at the cost of a tremendous loss of life. From the factories of Nyíregyháza Pogány had been able to form "workers' battalions," either on a voluntary or coerced basis. These "untrained soldiers in civilian garb" were thrown into the battle. Many perished, in part because of the lack of army doctors and medical services. Nor did this military success prove to be durable. Soon the Romanian forces advanced again on the town, and even Pogány had to admit that the Red Army did not have sufficient manpower to defend Nyíregyháza, which was thereupon evacuated.[24]

In the meantime, Kun, having concluded that for the immediate future the Hungarian Soviet Republic could expect no military assistance from Russia, decided to test the water and determine if some sort of deal could be reached with the Great Powers in Paris. He seemed prepared to make significant territorial sacrifices if only he could obtain a guarantee of the survival of the Communist regime. After all, Lenin and his comrades had done something similar when they agreed to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918. Intent on showing his willingness to negotiate in good faith, Kun was even prepared to jettison those whom Western diplomats regarded as "extremists," Pogány and Szamuely, and to replace them with more moderate individuals. On April 29, the leadership of the Revolutionary Governing Council accepted Kun's proposal along these lines.[25] Pogány apparently offered no resistance to this demotion, which suggests that he may well have been promised that in exchange he would be appointed to a position that he had been coveting for some time: commander of one of Hungary's four army corps.[26] Pogány's fleeting success on the Romanian

24 Hajdu, *Tanácsköztársaság*, 165.

25 MMTVD, vol. 8a, no. 344; Hajdu, *Tanácsköztársaság*, 172.

26 Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 403. Soon after his downfall on April 3, Pogány began pestering Kun and Böhm to be appointed a military commander, but they at first turned down this idea, fearing that he lacked the experience and organizational skills.

front seems to have convinced him that he had a real knack for military leadership.

As it turned out, Pogány was not in fact stripped of his title of "people's commissar." By early May, Czechoslovak, Romanian, and Serb troops were making such rapid advances into Hungarian territory that foreign diplomats in Budapest were expecting an imminent collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic.[27] There thus seemed no need for the Great Powers to accede to Kun's request for diplomatic negotiations, and no need for Kun to remove the "extremists" from his government. So dire was the situation that some Social Democrats, including Kunfi and Weltner, privately described it hopeless and called for surrender. Others, like Böhm, thought continued resistance would be merely "revolutionary romanticism" and urged Kun to resign.[28] However, at the key debate of the Revolutionary Governing Council on May 2, Pogány and several others made impassioned pleas for a desperate, last ditch effort to defend the country, or at the very least Budapest, and this argument carried the day.[29] Once Kun gained assurances that the workers of Budapest would rally to support the regime, steps were taken for a rapid increase in the size of the Red Army and a reshuffling of army posts. Col. Aurél Stromfeld, a professional officer with excellent organizational skills, was given the responsibility of devising a strategy to defend the country and, if possible, to expel the invaders from Hungarian territory.

As part of the reorganization of the Red Army in mid-May Pogány was finally granted his wish of becoming a military commander. He was placed in charge of the Second Army Corps, which had jurisdiction in western Hungary (Transdanubia) and, unlike the other three Army Corps, was designated as non-combatant. Clearly, Hungary's professional military leaders did not want to have the inexperienced Pogány interfering in the military campaigns soon to be launched.[30] In the first month and a half of the Communist regime, Pogány had often warned of the rise of counterrevolutionary activity. But he is not known to have traveled outside of Budapest in March or April. Once he established himself in his headquarters at Siófok in mid-May, he soon discovered that the danger was even

27 Hajdu, *Tanácsköztársaság*, 172–73.

28 Borsányi, *Life*, 157–58.

29 Pogány was joined in this plea to fight to the end on "the barricades of Budapest" by Landler, Szántó, and Szamuely. Borsányi, *Life*, 158.

30 Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 403. When a few weeks later western Hungary was in fact designated a zone of military operations, Haubrich, one of the Commissars of War, argued against keeping Pogány on as commander of the Second Army Corps, since he was not "suitable for the job." FKJ. 446.

greater than he had imagined. In fact, as one historian has put it, by May the countryside was in the grip of a "popular counterrevolution."[31] In a series of reports Pogány declared that he had found "disorder and anarchy in the strictest sense of the word." There was opposition to the Soviet Republic not only in the officer corps, which did not surprise him, but also in the lower classes: "The peasantry is actively counterrevolutionary; the workers are entirely passive, and do not feel that they have a stake in the dictatorship of the proletariat... they are not prepared to make any sacrifices at all." One result of the "embittered anger" of the peasants and workers was the resistance to mobilization. Pogány proposed two measures to deal with the situation. One was to increase newspaper and pamphlet propaganda. The other was the designation of Transdanubia as a war zone so that strong methods could be employed.[32] The latter request was granted early in June.

By that time, though resistance to the Soviet regime in Transdanubia had not diminished, Pogány's mood became much more optimistic. Two developments help explain this change. In late May, Colonel Stromfeld's brilliant plan of attack was implemented. The Red Army, bolstered by newly mobilized forces who had responded to both ideological and patriotic appeals, was able to split the Romanian and Czechoslovak forces and to push rapidly northward. The enemy's resistance seemed to crumble and one by one important Hungarian cities like Kassa were recaptured. To Pogány this was exhilarating news, for it seemed to vindicate him and others who had argued against surrender in early May. In this period he had another, more personal, reason for satisfaction as well. On May 17 the play he had written some years earlier, *Napóleon*, debuted at the Nemzeti Színház (National Theater) in Budapest.

Napóleon was presented only nine times in its run of three weeks in Budapest, but Pogány seemed to bask in the glory of having his artistic ability recognized in this way. Almost surely, the decision to put on a play written by a current high government official was not based on the intrinsic merit of the piece. Perhaps the director of the Nemzeti Színház, Lajos Bálint, went along merely as a favor to Pogány, who had been *a* schoolmate at the Barcsay Gimnázium.[33] On the other hand, the theatrical repertoire

31 Deák, "Budapest," 129.

32 Pogány's report of May 19, 1919, MMTVD, vol. 8a, no. 460; Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 404–5. The strict measures Pogány instituted against counterrevolutionary activity led to later accusations that during this time he supervised a "terror unit" in Székesfehérvár. Gratz, *A forradalmak kora*, 152.

33 Czóbel Memoir, 3.

in Budapest during the Communist period remained quite traditional, with only an occasional play performed for ideological or propagandistic reasons. In fact, during its three-week run *Napóleon* alternated at the Nemzeti Színház with such masterpieces as Hamlet and Antigone. The production was fairly elaborate, with thirty-two performers under the direction of Sándor Hevesi. Pogány must have reveled in the opening night festivities. He delighted in associating with the performers, particularly the actresses. There was enthusiastic applause from the audience, although Pogány perhaps did not realize that this came mostly from those workers and soldiers who had been given free tickets and who had been strongly encouraged to attend.[34]

In his euphoria Pogány perhaps also found a way to downplay or ignore the reviews of *Napóleon*, which were devastatingly negative. Ferenc Herceg, the famous Hungarian writer, concluded that the play was "overly sentimental and contained little worth discussing," although he softened the blow by adding that Pogány "was not entirely lacking in talent." Other critics were less obliging, finding *Napóleon* to be "exceedingly mediocre."[35] The most severe verdict came from Miksa Fenyő, the highly respected critic, who found the play to be "dull," "tedious," and "filled with bloodless dialogue." After listing the many poetic and aesthetic infelicities in the play, Fenyő concluded that Pogány was certainly "not a poet" but rather a "boring writer with a complete lack of individuality."[36]

Pogány's ebullience over the favorable developments of late May and early June seemed to awaken in him a previously dormant hedonism. He now began to take on imperial airs and to stage elaborate banquets at his military headquarters on the shore of Lake Balaton. To these he invited friendly journalists, writers, artists, and "buxom actresses," who arrived from Budapest on Pogány's private train. To entertain his guests he organized yachting excursions on Lake Balaton and horse races using hussar regiments under his command.[37] They were offered the most luxurious and delectable food then available in Hungary. Rumors were soon being spread in Budapest about the bacchanalian parties that Pogány was allegedly staging. He had, so his critics now believed, become a "caricature of Napoleon,"

34 Gál, *A polgár a viharban*, 144. Gál observed that most of the regular patrons of the Nemzeti Színház remained entirely silent during and after the presentation.

35 Gratz, *A bolsevizmus*, 700, 723.

36 Fenyő, "Pogány József," http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/00268/07945.htm, accessed on August 8, 2010. See also Hajdu, *Tanácsköztársaság*, 402.

37 Göndör, *Vallomások*, 100; Hajdu, "Az elhallgatott, ????" 8; Tormay, *Outlaw's Diary*, vol. 2, 222; Mályusz, *Fugitive Bolsheviks*, 368.

aping his poses and gestures. Soon jokes about Pogány proliferated. He was said to be presiding over "the reddest army and the blondest women." He had become the "Red Napoleon," "the Napoleon of the ghetto," or the "Napoleon of the lumpen proletariat."[38] Others regarded the matter more seriously, believing that by living in such an ostentatious way while ordinary workers were starving and the Soviet Republic was in danger, Pogány had defiled the revolution and insulted the Hungarian proletariat. Even years later stories about Pogány's alleged "Napoleonic" excesses at Sopron were still circulating inside and outside Hungary. Some of his enemies believed that in his delusion of grandeur he had seriously contemplated the possibility of reestablishing the monarchy and placing the crown of St. Stephen on his own head.[39]

Nothing is known of the reaction of Pogány's wife to the reports of his extravagant lifestyle in Siófok. Throughout the period of the Communist regime she remained in Budapest, where she cared for their two young daughters. She also employed her literary talents by writing introductions to new entries in the series of translated works of foreign authors that Pogány had initiated. At her husband's insistence, however, these appeared under his and not her name.[40] If indeed Pogány had succumbed to a debauched lifestyle in Sopron, it did not last beyond mid-June. On June 12, Colonel Stromfeld issued an order for a new offensive against Czechoslovak forces on Hungary's northwestern frontier. A new division, the fifth, was being created specifically for this campaign, which was to be launched from the Kisalföld in Transdanubia. Since Pogány, as commander of the army group in Transdanubia, presumably had come to know the area well, Stromfeld placed him in charge of the planned offensive.[41] Pogány was thus finally given the opportunity to lead soldiers into battle. No doubt he hoped that his division would have the same kind of success that other units of the Red Army had earlier in Slovakia. Unfortunately, before the offensive began, a new crisis had arisen and the Soviet Republic was at a critical crossroad.

On June 15 what came to be known as the Clemenceau Note, was received in Budapest. In it, the Western powers demanded that Hungary

38 Göndör, *Vallomások*, 101; Hajdu, "Az elhallgatott," 8.

39 Pogány supposedly spoke of his imperial ambitions while an émigré in Vienna: "I had the power to do it ... who knows what course victory would have taken if I had not hesitated in the decisive moment." Deri, "Downfall," 6.

40 Czóbel Memoir, 9.

41 Hajdu, *Tanácsköztársaság*, 270.

withdraw from territory recently reconquered by the Red Army, including all of Slovakia. If this demand was rejected, the Great Powers would launch a coordinated military operation against Hungary. On the other hand, if Hungary cooperated with the Great Powers, Romania would be induced to withdraw its forces to the east of the Tisza River.[42] The question of how to respond to the Clemenceau Note was vigorously debated by the Hungarian Communist leadership. Kun, who had recently received discouraging news about the military prospects of the Red Army in Russia, argued for compliance with the demands of the Great Powers and for the initiation of negotiations to achieve a Hungarian version of the Brest-Litovsk treaty.[43] But many of Kun's comrades, led by Pogány, were strongly opposed to this policy, which they regarded as defeatist.

In a forceful, eloquent, and long speech to the Revolutionary Governing Council on June 19, Pogány explained why he regarded the Clemenceau Note as a "deceitful ploy" that must be rejected.[44] He reminded his colleagues that he had always stood firmly with Kun on policy issues, but in this case he felt compelled to dissent. What Kun proposed was a "disastrous policy" for it would force Hungary into a position "in which we must make concessions." From a psychological point of view, he asserted that it would be a grave mistake for the Red Army to abandon territory in northern Hungary that had recently been regained. To withdraw to the borders stipulated by the Entente would be a deathblow to the Soviet Republic. No government, whether capitalist, feudal, or Socialist, could survive in such borders, for it would bring great misery and suffering to the Hungarian people. Sounding very much like the conservative Hungarians whom he normally excoriated, Pogány insisted that the frontiers being drawn by the victorious powers were not justified from an economic, demographic, or geographic point of view, since "purely Magyar territory" was assigned to Hungary's new neighbors.

What course should Hungary follow if the Clemenceau Note were to be rejected? Pogány answered this question with the suggestion, which was greeted with "stormy applause," that the Red Army should return to the attack and test the "power, fortitude, and morale" of the Western powers and their East European lackeys. The Clemenceau Note, he continued, was merely a bluff that was aimed at gaining time for the Czechoslovak government to mobilize more troops and for an Entente blockade of

42 Borsányi, *Life*, 185.

43 Tőkés, *Béla Kun*, 190.

44 Pogány's speech on June 19, 1919, PJVI, 259–69. See also Hajdu, *Tanácsköztársaság*, 289.

Hungary to be imposed. If the Red Army moved quickly, he suggested, "Czech imperialism" would crumble in ten days and this in turn would lead to the collapse of the Romanian army. Resistance by the Hungarian Red Army to Entente imperialism would inspire and electrify the workers of the world. On the other hand, if Hungary accepted the terms of the Clemenceau Note, the Great Powers would eventually demand that the Red Army be disarmed. They might then send French or Senegalese soldiers to occupy Hungary, or more likely, would unleash the Hungarian "white guards" being organized in Szeged, to destroy the dictatorship of the proletariat. Some would argue, Pogány added, that what he proposed was an "unrealistic policy," since a small country like Hungary cannot hope to hold its own against the military might of the Western powers. But the dilemma of the Hungarian Soviet Republic was that no matter what choice it made, in the end it would have to face a life or death struggle with capitalist imperialism. Thus, "if we want peace, we must resolve on continuing the war," for only in that way would it be possible to "capture the hearts of our Italian, French, and English comrades" and ensure the "military victory of the Hungarian proletariat."

Pogány's speech, one of the most effective of his entire career, was greeted with "long and spirited approval and applause." He had shrewdly appealed to the idealism and messianic aspirations of his comrades. Probably the majority of those present agreed emotionally with the policy that he proposed. Most of the commanders of the Red Army, as well as Minister of War Böhm, also sided with Pogány, for they were loathe to abandon voluntarily the fruits of the victorious campaign in Slovakia.[45] But the grim realities of the situation were such that, after due deliberation, the Revolutionary Governing Council sided with what seemed to be the more realistic policy that Kun proposed. The Red Army thus began its withdrawal from the recaptured territory and negotiations were initiated with Western diplomats.

As the military and diplomatic crisis unfolded, Pogány found himself spending considerable time in Budapest, focusing on internal policies. Since it now seemed that the planned offensive in the northwest would be put off indefinitely, Kun decided, perhaps as a kind of consolation prize, to arrange Pogány's appointment as Commissar for Education. This occurred on June 24. Perhaps Pogány undertook this additional responsibility because he felt that certain practical steps had to be taken to overcome the resistance

45 Gosztonyi, "Collapse," 69–70.

to the regime that he discovered in Transdanubia. Thus, he immediately put an end to certain educational reforms that had been bitterly opposed by a majority of the country. One was the experiment of teaching sex education in the schools, even in the lower grades. Another was the system of "student directories" that had been established to enable students to inform the government of any developments in their schools that they considered hostile to the dictatorship of the workers. In this way students had been encouraged to make accusations against teachers whom they suspected of being insufficiently loyal to the revolution and to identify courses or textbooks that contained traces of counterrevolutionary thinking.[46]

Pogány must have known that such marginal changes could not bring about a massive change in popular sentiment toward the regime. Every day, it seemed, there was fresh news from the countryside that showed how fiercely the peasants opposed the regime. For a week in late June there had been a full-scale peasant uprising in the Kalocsa district.[47] Pogány apparently now concluded that the only possible way of winning over the peasantry would be if there was a major change in the government's policy on land reform. He had earlier hinted that he believed the decision to create state-run collectives rather than to distribute land to the peasants had been misguided. In July, when the growing counterrevolution in the countryside led to severe problems in procuring the harvest and provisioning the urban centers, Pogány boldly declared at a session of the Revolutionary Governing Council that Hungary must follow Lenin's example and create dwarf-holdings to be distributed to the poorer farmers. Only in this way could the regime hope to win over at least a part of the peasantry. However, only one other commissar, Landler, supported Pogány's proposal. The others, including Kun and Böhm, believed that it would be "very dangerous" not only because it would undermine the state collectives, but because those peasants who received land would be even more inclined to support the counterrevolution.[48]

In early July, the Red Army began its withdrawal from Slovakia as stipulated in the Clemenceau Note. It did not take long for the Hungarian leadership to recognize that Kun's vision of some sort of negotiated deal with the Great Powers that would allow for the maintenance of the Communist regime would not be fulfilled. There were numerous signs that a

46 Jászi, *Revolution*, 147; Eckelt, "Internal Policies," 69.

47 Romsics, *Hungary*, 107.

48 Pogány's speech is found in MMTVD, vol. 8b, no. 779, 409. See also Szabó, *Landler Jenő*, 169–70.

collapse of the Soviet Republic was imminent. Morale in the army had deteriorated and defections were on the increase. The peasants continued their obstruction, and there were growing signs that even factory workers had lost faith in the regime.[49] Internal squabbling intensified in the government and Kun had to contend with brewing revolts in both the left-wing and right-wing of the CP. Finally, and most ominously, there were no signs that Romania intended to withdraw its forces or that the Western powers were planning to force them to do so. Pogány had no opportunity to gloat over the fact that he had predicted just such an outcome in his speech of June 19, for events were moving too quickly.

Early in July, Pogány was informed by Böhm that a group of Social Democrats had formed a plan to topple the Communist regime by a military coup d'état. When asked if he would participate, Pogány replied that he shared his fellow Social Democrats' antipathy for the Communists, who had led the revolution to ruin. But he was not prepared to join in the planned move because he thought it had no chance of success. On the other hand, he would not hinder the effort or inform the Communists what was afoot.[50] There was also no chance that Pogány would cooperate with the left-wing Communists, like his archenemy Szamuely, who had thoughts of challenging Kun and setting up a purely Communist regime. In the final days of the Soviet regime he thus returned to his traditional strategy of sitting on the fence and waiting to see how events would unfold. In this strategy he was joined by Landler, who in this period had become his confidante and closest collaborator. The two of them were on hand on July 31 for a meeting of the supreme command of the Red Army in Cegléd. The situation was desperate. The Romanian army units had several days earlier crossed the Tisza River and launched a major attack in the direction of Budapest. Resistance seemed futile, since the Red Army clearly was disintegrating. Kun nonetheless proposed that Hungarian forces continue to fight on, and both Pogány and Landler supported him. Accordingly, as a last, desperate measure, all available soldiers and weapons were concentrated in the first army corps, which was placed under the command of Pogány and Vágó. There were some fleeting successes, for example, in the town of Szolnok, but it was clear to all that the fate of the Soviet Republic had been sealed.[51]

49 Borsányi, *Life*, 191–92.

50 Böhm, *Két forradalom*, 494; Hajdu, *Tanácsköztársaság*, 320.

51 Borsányi, *Life*, 201; Gosztonyi, "Collapse," 73; and Hajdu, *Tanácsköztársaság*, 350–51.

On August 1, after days of intensive behind-the-scenes negotiations, the Revolutionary Governing Council resigned and yielded power to a government of moderate Social Democrats who had not played any role in the Soviet Republic. Even before word of this development spread, the previously silent opponents of the Communist regime in Budapest began to reassert themselves. The red banners of revolution were quickly replaced by the traditional tricolor Hungarian flag. The small remnants of the Red Army dissolved and counterrevolutionary military units seemed to appear everywhere. Some Communists might have taken solace in the thought that a Socialist regime, even one led by the right-wing of the SDP, would surely not allow reprisals against the leaders of the Soviet government. But Kun, with much justification feared that the Socialist government would be swept away and a "white terror" would arise that would not spare any well-known Communists. For this reason he had taken the precaution of arranging, through diplomatic channels an agreement with the Austrian government to grant political asylum to a group of the most endangered leaders of the Soviet regime and their families. On the basis of this agreement, two special trains left Budapest late in the evening of August 1. Kun had no hesitation about including Pogány on the list of those who would gain asylum in Austria, for he sensed that Pogány was among the most reviled and hated of all those who had participated in the two revolutions that Hungary had experienced since the end of the war.

Upon crossing the border early the following day, Pogány met his wife and daughters, who had fled to Austria on an earlier train.[52] Pogány no doubt hoped that he would someday return to his native land and help once again to build a Socialist regime. That was not to be, although his wife would spend the last years of her life in the Hungarian People's Republic after World War II. In August 1919, Pogány seemed to feel no particular sorrow about parting with those members of his family who remained in Hungary. He had apparently been for some time estranged from his father, Vilmos, who as a committed Jew, disapproved of the atheism and political radicalism his son had embraced. During the Communist era when his colleagues congratulated him for having such a famous son, Vilmos, who was his synagogue's leader of prayers at the head of funeral processions, was reported to have responded bitterly: "If only I could accompany my son's coffin to the grave." Nothing is known of Pogány's reaction when in October 1919, his father committed suicide by hanging.

52 Czóbel Memoir, 13.

He had become despondent because his synagogue, like many others at the time in Hungary, had denounced him for his close association with someone who had played a major role in the Communist government. Having also been fired from his job with the Chevra Kadisa for similar reasons, he was consigned to penury and chose to end his life. His grief-stricken wife declared that he had been driven to this action by his wayward son, who had left them destitute. It was not true, she insisted, that they had obtained any special benefit from their son during the Communist regime.[53]

53 "A népbiztos atyja. Pogány József atyja öngyilkos lett," *Az Újság*, October 28, 1919, 3.

CHAPTER 4
Vienna, Moscow, and Berlin

All Communist parties must take the initiative and launch actions and win the confidence of the proletariat who are not yet Communists. Smaller actions are necessary even though they will not bring the final victory immediately. In fact, defeated small actions are the necessary preliminaries to the final victory. / SPEECH OF JÓZSEF POGÁNY, JENA, APRIL 1921

Although the band of Hungarian Communists who arrived in Austria early in August 1919 was granted asylum, they were at first not given the freedom to move about the country. Instead, they were placed under protective custody at Karlstein Castle, a dilapidated relic in northern Austria. The Austrian authorities not only feared that the émigré Communists might create political disorder if allowed complete political freedom, but also that anti-Communist organizations might target them for retribution and even for execution. The Hungarians were soon complaining to the Austrian government about the primitive conditions at Karlstein, including the remote location, lack of heating, poor hygiene, deplorable food, and inadequate educational facilities for the children. In time conditions improved a bit, and events justified the precautions the Austrian authorities had taken. For in fact, radical right-wing organizations in Hungary were making plans to abduct and kill the prominent Communists secluded away in northern Austria. The most elaborate of these plans was set forth by Col. Pál Prónay, leader of the most notorious of the paramilitary detachments that appeared in Hungary after the fall of the Communist regime: "We will dope three or perhaps four of the commissars, the biggest scoundrels (Kun, Hamburger, Landler, Pogány), stuff them into cars, and bring them back to Hungary. The others will be hanged on the spot, on lampposts and trees in the courtyard of the castle, which would be the most appropriate punishment for them."[1] The Austrian police, alerted ahead of time, were able to foil the plot and arrest some of the perpetrators just outside the castle.[2]

1 Prónay, *A határban*, 143–44.

2 Borsányi, *Life*, 220. A few months later, several members of Prónay's detachment managed to send the Hungarian Communist émigrés a food package that had been poisoned. Prompt medical attention saved the lives of those who tasted the food. Ibid., 221. 58–59.

Having a good deal of time on their hands, the Hungarian internees naturally reflected at length on the 133-day Communist regime. Why had it failed? Was Kun at fault? Might the dictatorship of the proletariat have survived if different policies or strategies had been pursued? How could the Hungarian Communist Party (HCP) serve the interests of Hungarian workers now suffering from counterrevolutionary repression? Pogány had tentative answers to all of these questions, but he was wary of sharing them with his fellow internees, most of whom, in any case, regarded him with disdain if not outright antagonism. In fact, Pogány was on good terms with only two of the Communists living at Karlstein Castle, Landler and Kun. He apparently still bore some resentment against Kun stemming from the April 3 incident, but he thought it best for the time being to retain his goodwill. Kun sensed that there were some in the party and perhaps even in Moscow who would like to make him the scapegoat for the failure of the Soviet Republic. If he came under attack, it would be a good thing to have Pogány, who wrote and spoke persuasively, as an ally.[3] But it was only with Landler that Pogány felt free to speak openly of his hopes and plans. In the last months of 1919 they were seen taking daily walks around the castle and conversing with great animation. Kun did not in the least suspect that these two comrades were in fact hatching a plot to create a new revolutionary party from which he would be excluded.

Early in 1920 the Hungarian Communists were transferred to Vienna, where they were housed in an annex of the Steinhof lunatic asylum. There conditions were more satisfactory and some of the internees, including Pogány, were permitted to move freely about the city. Vienna at the time was teeming with Hungarian refugees representing all varieties of left-wing ideology, from moderate Socialists to hard-line Communists. As one observer put it, "for every coffee house there is a [Hungarian] party."[4] These Hungarians were an extraordinarily contentious and factional group that engaged in constant recriminations, accusations, and personal attacks against each other in newspapers and periodicals. Thus, any attempt to rally a majority of them in support of a new political party was a Herculean task, especially for Pogány, who was probably the most detested individual in the Hungarian émigré community.

Pogány had created many enemies during the revolutionary period in Hungary, and in the freewheeling political atmosphere of postwar Vienna

3 Kun's biographer states that by this time, Pogány and Kun had become "good friends" and that Kun saw Pogány as "a journalist who could write well, an excellent speaker and organizer." Ibid., 221–22.

4 Henri Simonyi, in *Károlyi Mihály írásai*, 604.

they felt no compunction about using the most malicious and violent language in denouncing him. Among the Social Democrats the leading critic of Pogány was Göndör, who wrote for the Viennese-based *Az Ember* (The Man). In a number of articles published in the second half of 1920, Göndör, who had heard reports of Pogány's plan to start a new party, heaped invective on his former comrade. Pogány, he wrote, "was the greatest disgrace and most ridiculous clown of both revolutions." During the world war he had toasted the military censors and made patriotic speeches in favor of the war. As a military commander in the Soviet period that "grotesque imitator of Napoleon" organized horse races, went on yachting excursions, and was a "frequenter of pleasure houses." In short, he was a "notoriously mercenary pseudo-revolutionist" and a "disfiguring blemish on the countenance of the labor movement."[5] Pogány's enemies in the CP were equally outspoken. László Rudas, who in fact shared many of Pogány's extremist views in this period, nonetheless detested him. In a pamphlet he later described Pogány as "the most ambitious and unscrupulous demagogue ever to emerge from the ranks of the Social Democrats; his Marxism always amounted to an attempt to dress up into theory the lowest instincts of the current leaders of the party."[6]

By this time Pogány had become accustomed to the abuse routinely hurled at him. He was capable, of course, of responding in kind, but in the spring of 1920 he proceeded more cautiously, for he and Landler were developing a plan that they hoped would attract support from the Hungarian left-wing émigrés, perhaps even from some of his enemies. Pogány and Landler began quietly to talk of the formation of a new Communist party in which Kun would play no part. Kun, they argued, was a "scoundrel" who was responsible for the failure of the Soviet regime in Hungary. They proposed the creation of a new Communist Party that would be based on the Third International and would, as one of its primary objectives, seek to win over the peasants by a promise to divide up the land. Most of the Hungarian left-wing émigrés in Vienna were very skeptical of the success of this plan, for, as one of them put it, Pogány and Landler have nothing to work with and "no one to offer them support."[7]

In fact, Pogány and Landler hoped to win support from the one individual they imagined might still be able to unite Hungarians on the full spectrum of the Left, namely Károlyi. The latter had recently found sanctuary

5 Göndör's articles of July 18, July 25, and December 4, 1920, reproduced in Mályusz, *Fugitive Bolsheviks*, 368–72.

6 Rudas, *Abendteuer*, 29.

7 Letter of Henri Simonyi, May 12, 1920, in *Károlyi Mihály írásai*, 605.

in Prague, from which he had issued statements excoriating the newly installed counterrevolutionary regime of Admiral Miklós Horthy in Hungary and expressing his solidarity with the objectives of the Third International in Moscow. Assuming that for all practical purposes Károlyi had declared himself to be a Communist, Pogány and Landler sent him a letter in April 1920. They addressed him as "comrade" and declared their great satisfaction and joy over his recent statements expressing support for the Communist movement. What was now needed, they suggested, was a new Hungarian Communist party that was led by "true revolutionaries," not those, like Kun and Böhm, who had proved to be failures in 1918–19. This new party would be led by a triumvirate of Károlyi, Pogány, and Landler, and would affiliate with the Third International. It would emphasize a "Leninist program of land distribution" and "rule of the workers and peasants."[8]

Károlyi's reply was polite but noncommittal.[9] He expressed agreement "with almost all the points in your memorandum," but did not refer at all to the proposal for a new party. Károlyi's intentions became clearer just a few weeks later when he turned instead to Kun and offered his services in a joint endeavor to promote the dictatorship of the workers and peasants. Kun, however, was not particularly eager to join forces with Károlyi, whom he considered to be by no means a Communist.[10] When Pogány learned of this development, he realized that the scheme he had developed with Landler had no chance for success. He concluded that the only feasible course for him now was complete cooperation with Kun, which turned out to be easily achieved since Kun had apparently not learned of Pogány's approach to Károlyi or the derogatory way in which Pogány and Landler had spoken of him to other Hungarian émigrés.[11]

Kun and Pogány were soon collaborating closely on a new periodical sponsored by the HCP. Launched in Vienna in June 1920, *Proletár* (Proletariat) had a board of editors consisting of Kun, Pogány, Landler, and Lukács. Pogány was now back in his element as a polemical journalist. In the second half of 1920 he and Kun wrote many of the major articles in *Proletár* that addressed the problems confronting not only the Hungarian

8 Litván, "Richtungen," 720–21.

9 Ibid., 721.

10 Borsányi, *Life*, 222–23.

11 When in 1920, Kun learned for the first time that in the last days of the Soviet Republic Pogány had agreed with Böhm in his conclusion that Kun and his Communist comrades were responsible for the failure of the revolution, Kun decided not to upbraid Pogány because he needed his help in his defense against his critics in Moscow. Rákosi, *Visszaemlékezések*, 726.

but other European Communist parties as well. In this period Kun and Pogány were of one mind in believing that the prospects for a Communist revolution throughout Europe were increasing daily. They were buoyed by news reports detailing the advance of the Red Army into Poland and the strong possibility that by the end of the summer Warsaw would fall and a Soviet regime would be established in Poland. Such an event would send revolutionary shock waves all across Europe. In an article on June 30 in *Proletár*, Pogány imagined how enthusiastic Marx would have been if he could have seen this "coming European revolution" and the way in which the idea of revolution "has become crystallized into action."[12]

Through his frequent contributions to *Proletár*, Pogány tried to reestablish himself as one of the leading authorities of the Hungarian Communist movement. In July he offered an assessment of the failed Hungarian Soviet regime and pointed out the brutal impact of the triumph of counterrevolution, which deprived the Hungarian worker of "power, freedom, housing, human dignity [and] indeed all that is necessary to lead a worthy life."[13] At the same time he offered strong support for an economic boycott of Hungary that had been launched by the International Trade Unions Alliance in Amsterdam in June. But Pogány's most important and influential publication in this period was not an article in *Proletár* but a short book entitled *A fehér terror Magyarországon* (The white terror in Hungary).

Pogány's work appeared in June 1920 in Hungarian and German editions. A Russian version followed one year later. For European Communists and for other interested readers, the book became an essential primer on the often referred to, but as yet inadequately analyzed, phenomenon known as the "white terror." The phrase had come into use in the aftermath of World War I to refer to what many regarded as the repressive acts of counterrevolutionary "white armies" in Russia and Finland. But it was only in Hungary that a full-scale version of white terror could be observed, for it was only in that country that a Soviet republic of some duration had been followed by a counterrevolutionary regime determined to eradicate all traces of communism. The white terror in Hungary was largely the work of paramilitary officer detachments that were at first tolerated, and even encouraged, by the country's new leader, Admiral Horthy. After the collapse of the Communist regime in August 1919, these units roamed the country in a campaign to identify and punish those who had lent support to the Soviet Republic. They were responsible

12 Mályusz, *Fugitive Bolsheviks*, 262.

13 Pogány, "Mit vesztett a diktatúra bukásával a magyar munkásság," *Proletár*, July 8, 1920, in PJVI, 277.

for a series of gruesome atrocities and the execution of over a thousand Hungarians. Many thousands more were arrested and held in makeshift concentration camps. The white terror had a pronounced anti-Semitic character, for most, though not all, of the victims in Hungary were Jews.[14]

The term *white terror* and the situation in Hungary were given international prominence in the spring of 1920 when a British Labor Party delegation, invited by the Hungarian government to conduct an on-the-scene investigation, issued their "Report on the white terror in Hungary." They concluded that a campaign of terror had indeed been raging in Hungary. Because they were interested primarily in protecting the interests of the working class, they downplayed the clear anti-Semitic character of the white terror and concentrated on the way in which workers were being oppressed. In addition, they determined that although the government had not been able to control the white terror, its leaders, including Horthy, were not directly complicit in it.[15] Motivated in part to rebut the conclusions of the report of the British Labor delegation, Pogány quickly assembled his short book of 192 pages, which was based for the most part on newspaper articles (especially from the leading Jewish newspaper, *Egyenlőség*, Equality), eyewitness accounts, and Pogány's fertile imagination.[16]

Pogány related and interpreted the events associated with the white terror in Hungary through the perspective of a Communist who believed that Europe was on the verge of a vast revolutionary outbreak. He thus greatly exaggerated the severity of the white terror and the number of people who had been executed. He likewise offered a misleading analysis of the motives of the Hungarian government, which in fact at this time was searching for ways to curb the activities of the paramilitary units responsible for the white terror. Hungary, Pogány declared, had been transformed into a "horrible mass grave," a "gigantic morgue," a "forest of garrets," and an "enormous torture chamber" (p. 3). Taking issue with the conclusions of the British Labor delegation, he insisted that the counterrevolutionary government of Admiral Horthy gave its full support to the officer detachments that were primarily responsible for the campaign of violence, since the government's objective was "nothing other than the complete elimination of the Hungarian working class" (p. 169). In fact, Pogány argued, the military officers responsible for the worst of the atrocities were de facto members of the government: Colonel Prónay was in effect the minister

14 Sakmyster, *Hungary's Admiral*, 30–32, 36–38; Bodo, "Tószegi Affair," 116–17.

15 Sakmyster, *Hungary's Admiral*, 41.

16 The page citations in the text are to the German edition, *Der Weisse Terror in Ungarn*, which circulated widely in Central and Western Europe as well as in North America.

of the interior, and Major Ostenburg was the true mayor of Budapest (p. 119).

In insisting that the "mass murder" underway in Hungary was aimed primarily at the urban proletariat, Pogány was faced with the problem that the great bulk of the evidence available to him suggested that most of the victims of the white terror were in fact Jews, among whom only a small portion were workers. In fact, contrary to the conclusion of the British Labor delegation, the white terror in Hungary was fueled equally by a vehement anti-Semitism and anti-Communism. Although many innocent Jews were victimized, most singled out for retaliation were believed either to have participated in, or supported, the Soviet Republic. Another target of the white terror were peasants who had taken advantage of the revolutionary era to challenge the authority of the noble landowners. Ordinary workers, unless they had actively supported the Communists, were usually not victims of violent retaliation. Pogány was forced to offer convoluted arguments to overcome these realities. He conceded that the white terror in Hungary was motivated in part by a "religious fanaticism" and by the "spirit of the Inquisition"(p. 147). Thus, it was not surprising that Jews, whom the counterrevolutionary government regarded as the "foreign race" that dominated the Communist regime, should be prominent in the available lists of those who had been executed. This, however, should not obscure the fact that workers were the primary target.

Throughout his book Pogány sought to alert all European workers to the dangers posed by the white terror. He pointed out that this was a phenomenon by no means confined to Hungary. Horthy was indeed the "supreme commander of the white terror," but there were similar perpetrators of terror in Russia (Alexander Koltchak and Anton Denikin), Germany (Erich Ludendorff), and Finland (Carl Mannerheim). These agents of the white terror found many in society who facilitated their work, including right-wing Social Democrats (pp. 12–13). Moreover, the Western powers, who acted as a kind of "lying mafia," had every reason to support and facilitate white terror, for they fervently desired the "enslavement of the Hungarian working class" and the proletariat in all of the countries of Europe (pp. 23–25).

Pogány's book was widely read and praised by fellow Communists and by others on the Left throughout Europe.[17] His views on the white terror and the nature of the counterrevolutionary government were to have a strong influence on several generations of Hungarian Communists. The

17 A particularly favorable review appeared in the journal *Kommunizmus* 1, no. 27 (July 21, 1920): 947–54.

immediate impact of the book in 1920 was that Pogány became known in Moscow, Berlin, and elsewhere as one of the most prominent and perceptive Hungarian Communists. This was to be important for Pogány's future career in the CP, for the opportunity soon arose to make his escape from Vienna, where so many of his comrades viewed him with disdain and even hatred. In July a diplomatic agreement between Austria and Soviet Russia was concluded for an exchange of prisoners of war. As part of the deal, Kun was to be included in the group that would travel by train to Moscow.[18] How he managed to arrange it is not known, but Pogány gained permission to join this group. Leaving their wives and children behind, Pogány and Kun left Vienna on July 15. After a convoluted journey, during which they were separated, they finally arrived in St. Petersburg in mid-August and then made their way to Moscow.

Upon their arrival Kun and Pogány learned that they would henceforth be under the jurisdiction of the Communist International, or Comintern, which had its headquarters in Moscow. Although they would likely return from time to time to Austria and travel on Comintern missions to other countries, they were not to make any immediate plans to live in a capitalist country.[19] Pogány and Kun found lodging in a house rented by other Hungarian émigrés, and in time they were joined by their families. Perhaps through the intercession of Kun, Pogány soon came to know the leading figures of the Comintern, including Grigory Zinoviev, chair of its Executive Committee (known as the ECCI). At first he worked as an assistant to the German Communist, Karl Radek, but in October he received a Comintern assignment that took him briefly to Vienna to participate in a Comintern-sponsored conference on the Balkan countries. At that gathering, to which representatives from all of the Balkan Communist parties had been summoned, Pogány gave a long speech on the "Romanian Problem" and offered an analysis of contemporary affairs not only in Romania, but in the entire Balkans and Central Europe as well. On his return to Russia he stopped in Prague to offer assistance to the fledgling Czechoslovak CP.[20]

Pogány used his brief visit to Vienna to brush up on the latest developments among the sizable group of Hungarian Communists who had remained in Austria. Once back in Moscow he learned that he and Kun

18 Borsányi, *Life*, 226–27.

19 Ibid., 229.

20 Pogány's speech of October 7, 1921, is in RGASPI, 5/3/30/10–23. On his Comintern assignment in Prague, see RGASPI, 495/199/1586/23.

were being sent on a special assignment to the Crimea. There they were to provide assistance to the Revolutionary Military Council for the Southern Front, where Gen. Mikhail Frunze was directing operations against the last remaining White Army, which was under the leadership of General Peter Wrangel. Because he was fluent in Russian and had greater standing in Soviet circles, Kun was entrusted with several important tasks related to the military operations in the Crimea. Pogány's assignment was of a lesser order. Perhaps because he had had some experience along these lines on the Romanian front in April 1919, he was attached to Frunze's army as a political advisor with the assignment of bolstering discipline and instilling Communist values among the soldiers. This created an awkward situation, since Pogány knew no Russian and could communicate only through a translator. On the other hand, he was able to speak in German to soldiers from German-speaking provinces, although this too proved to be difficult since the Russian Germans were on the whole hostile to the Soviet regime.[21] A related problem was the presence of virulent anti-Semitism among the common soldiers drafted to serve in the Red Army. In order to combat this, Pogány wrote a pamphlet condemning anti-Semitism in Wrangel's army. His hope was that Red Army soldiers would also read it and see the error of their ways.[22]

By early 1921 Wrangel's army had been defeated and Kun and Pogány returned to Moscow. There they soon found themselves being drawn into a debate among Soviet leaders on future strategy. One group, for which Trotsky was the spokesperson, believed that after the great exertions of the past four years and the failure of the Red Army to topple the Polish bourgeois government, European Communists needed "breathing space" in which for a time no new revolutionary projects would be launched. Opposing this view were Zinoviev, Nikolai Bukharin, and other Comintern and Soviet leaders, who argued that it would be a grave error to adopt a more cautious policy, especially since they had detected definite signs of imminent political and social upheaval in Germany. Lenin straddled the middle in this debate, although his actions later in 1921 suggest that he basically agreed with Trotsky that the pace of revolution should for a time be more moderate.[23]

21 Czóbel Memoir, 22, 59; Geréb, PJ, 327;

22 No copy of this pamphlet is known to have survived. Pogány referred to it in a speech delivered in December 1928, Records of the Communist Party of the United States of America (RCPUSA), 515/1/1275/242, reel 96. See also Geréb, *Pogány József*, 327.

23 For an analysis of this strategy debate, see Koch-Baumgarten, *Aufstand*, 116–18; and McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 28–31.

One of the reasons why Kun and Pogány found ready acceptance in the higher echelons of the Comintern was that the ideological position they had been advancing for some time, dovetailed conveniently with the militant program being espoused by Zinoviev and his colleagues in the ongoing debate. In several articles in *Proletár* and in the German-language *Kommunizmus* (Communism) in 1920 and in early 1921, Kun and Pogány had asserted that Central Europe, particularly Germany, was ripe for a revolution, which could be triggered by a series of small isolated actions and provocations that would escalate and spark a massive upheaval. Both believed that, despite the fact that the CP in Germany had far fewer adherents than the Social Democrats, the Communists would inevitably direct and control any revolutionary outbreak. Moreover, a successful Communist revolution in Germany would prove to be a boon to the Communist cause throughout Europe. Similar upheavals would be sparked in Austria, Hungary, and elsewhere, and Germany, one of the world's most highly industrialized states, would then be able to help subsidize the more backward economies of Russia and other East European countries in which Communism triumphed. Pogány put forward these ideas in perhaps their most strident form in an article on February 17, 1921. On the following day Kun boldly followed up with the assertion that "in Germany the dance of revolution has begun."[24]

It was precisely at this time in mid-February that Zinoviev and his like-minded comrades in the EECI sought to gain Lenin's approval for the idea of dispatching a team of Comintern agents to Germany to spur the German CP leadership to more militant action. Lenin apparently was willing to sanction the idea as a kind of experiment and agreed to meet with Kun, whom Zinoviev had proposed to head the Comintern delegation. Nothing definite is known about the precise instructions the Soviet leader gave to Kun, but in light of his later actions, it is certain that Lenin did not imagine that he was giving him the green light to foment a revolution. However, he apparently spoke in sufficiently vague terms that Kun, eager to create a confrontation with the bourgeois German government, felt that he had more or less of a free hand.[25] Zinoviev, who saw Germany as the site for "his revolution," no doubt assured Kun that Lenin's instructions amounted to a mandate for seeking a "revolutionary breakthrough." In consultation with, Zinoviev then proceeded to name the other members of

24 Pogány's article, "Let Us Be Prepared for War," *Proletár* 2, no. 7 (February 17, 1921); 22–27; Székely, "Kun Béla," 489–50.

25 Tőkés, "Béla Kun, the Man," 185. Pogány may also have been present at this meeting.

the Comintern team: Pogány, because of his fluency in German and well known militancy; and Samuel Guralski, a Pole, who was reputed to be an expert on clandestine paramilitary activity.[26]

For this mission Pogány assumed a new alias, "Berger." He and his colleagues traveled in the greatest secrecy and arrived in Berlin early in March. They soon became aware of new developments that helped shape the nature of their mission. In the past few weeks the more radical faction of the GCP had gained ascendancy, so those German Communists who had been criticized for their hesitant and vacillating policy, were no longer in control of the party. Meanwhile in Russia a serious challenge to Soviet authority had erupted in the form of the Kronstadt rebellion, which led to bloody encounters between the insurgents and Red Army units. For Kun and Pogány the events in Kronstadt provided a further incentive to provoke a revolution in Germany, for, they now argued, it would serve to divert the world's attention from the insurrection underway in the Soviet Union.[27]

In the first two weeks of March, Kun and Pogány worked assiduously to build support among German Communists for what as yet was only a loosely defined "offensive action." Kun concentrated on persuading the GCP leadership and Pogány agitated among workers and youth groups.[28] The planning process was accelerated in mid-March by a letter from Radek in Moscow who, on behalf of the Comintern leadership, warned the German Communists not to "let slip a decisive moment." The time had come for "setting the masses in motion" and, if the world crisis deepened, for "taking up arms."[29] Despite the pressure from Moscow on the GCP leadership, Kun and Pogány encountered stiff resistance to their plans from the more moderate faction of the GCP leadership, especially from Klara Zetkin and Paul Levi. They regarded the Comintern agents as obnoxious and unscrupulous outsiders who knew little about conditions in Germany and were proposing a highly unrealistic and potentially disastrous policy.[30]

Apparently what tipped the balance in favor of the Comintern's call for militant action was the decision of German government officials who, fearing that some sort of revolutionary action was imminent, began to take preventative measures, including the seizure of weapons illegally procured

26 Broué, Histoire, 212; Hornstein, *Arthur Ewert*, 27–28; Székely, "Kun Béla," 489.
27 Koch-Baumgarten, *Aufstand*, 124; Borsányi, *Life*, 251–52.
28 Gross, *Willi Münzenberg*, 103.
29 Broué, *German Revolution*, 492; Koch-Baumgarten, *Aufstand*, 113.
30 Hornstein, *Arthur Ewert*, 30; Broué, *German Revolution*, 494–95.

by the workers. Kun, Pogány, and the German radicals were now able to argue that there must be a vigorous response to this "provocation" by the bourgeois government.[31] By March 18 a plan had been worked out by the GCP leaders in cooperation with Kun. There was to be a call for a general strike and the initiation of armed clashes and violent acts that would create a revolutionary situation in central Germany and in selected cities. This, according to Kun, would spark similar militant actions elsewhere in the country and even formerly passive workers would rise up in solidarity with those who were being persecuted by the police. To coordinate what was now being called the "March Action," Guralski was sent to Central Germany and Pogány to Hamburg, while Kun remained in Berlin.[32]

The scheme promoted by Kun and Pogány had almost no chance for success, since, as one historian has aptly put it, it was based on "haphazard planning, wishful thinking, and a blind urge to bring the simmering conflict to an immediate crisis regardless of the cost."[33] Unions and factory councils were reluctant to take action and the workers were generally passive. Such was the situation in Hamburg when Pogány arrived on March 19. Arguing that the counterrevolution was on the offensive in Central Germany, he immediately began to agitate for the initiation of actions that would escalate the crisis to "the highest level" and that would topple the hated bourgeois government. His arguments proved to be effective, for, despite a stormy debate among local Communist leaders, agreement was reached on the program he proposed. On March 23 the CP would provoke a major strike among dockworkers, the occupation of factories by thousands of the unemployed, and a mass demonstration on the Heiligengeistfeld.[34]

As March 23 approached, some in the German Communist leadership in Berlin were beginning to realize that there was little support for radical action among the workers. Both non-Communist workers' organizations and the SDP leadership refused to endorse the action. Finally conceding that the conditions were in fact not favorable for the kind of militant operation that had been contemplated, late on March 22 the central committee of the GCP decided to call off the planned action in Hamburg and in Central Germany. But the message either did not reach Pogány or he chose to ignore it, for the action proceeded in Hamburg as planned. About

31 Borsányi, *Life*, 253–55.

32 Broué, *German Revolution*, 497–99.

33 Tőkés, "Béla Kun, the Man," 187.

34 Koch-Baumgarten, *Aufstand*, 198. Pogány's initial success was due in part to the support he received from Ernst Thälmann, one of the most influential German Communists.

10,000 workers responded to the call to go on strike, and some 15,000 to 20,000 joined in the mass demonstration. But few unemployed workers volunteered to storm the factories, and the Social Democrats and union leaders refused to offer any support. Nonetheless, there were numerous bloody clashes with the police, especially on the waterfront where thirty workers were killed. By the end of the day, however, it was clear that the plan to spark a major revolution had failed. When a final attempt by Pogány to intensify the action on March 24 found no support, he made his way back to Berlin.[35]

It was no easy task to explain away the disastrous March Action, which resulted in thousands of casualties and a mass exodus from the GCP.[36] Yet neither Kun nor Pogány, nor for that matter Zinoviev and his colleagues in the ECCI, admitted that they had miscalculated or that their planning had been faulty or had caused unnecessary bloodshed. Kun soon returned to Moscow, but Pogány remained behind to attend a Communist-sponsored Youth Congress as a semiofficial representative of the Comintern. In a long speech to the delegates on April 8, a completely unrepentant Pogány repeated the call for militant action in Germany and elsewhere in Central and Western Europe.[37] The economic crisis, he insisted, was "sharpening to an unheard of extent" and the proletariat faced a truly "revolutionary situation." The European working class had committed a "gigantic historical mistake" by failing to seize the favorable opportunity presented by the advance of the Red Army into Poland in 1920. Now the workers had to atone for this by heeding the advice of Marx, who had insisted that "taking the offensive is an international duty." Communists had to seize the initiative and to launch actions that would win the confidence of the proletariat. Communist parties must adopt illegal and military methods in order to provoke civil war. Small-scale actions were important, even though they might not bring the final victory immediately. In what seems to be a reference to the March Action, Pogány added that defeated small actions were "the necessary preliminaries to final victories."

Pogány's speech at the Youth Congress had a decidedly arrogant and hectoring tone. He insisted that any Communist who, in the current conditions, preferred to rely only on propaganda and to bide time, was a rank

35 The role of "Berger" in these events is described in a report by a Hamburg Communist that was obtained by the German police, "Bericht aus dem Ortsverein Hamburg," Lageberichte (1920–1929), microfiche 286, 52/80, 177. See also Hornstein, *Arthur Ewert*, 30; Koch-Baumgarten, *Aufstand*, 202–16, 300.

36 McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 30.

37 Speech of April 8, 1921, RGASPI, 533/4/5/1-12.

opportunist who was satisfied to maintain a "constant, hopeless defensive position." Furthermore, any Communist party that acted independently and questioned the concentration of power in the Comintern was also guilty of opportunism. This was a direct rebuke of the organizers of the Youth Congress, especially Willi Münzenberg, who had decided to hold the Congress in Germany, despite pressure from the Comintern to postpone it so that it could be organized later in Moscow.[38]

Pogány returned to Moscow later in April in a cocksure, satisfied mood, apparently unaware of the fact that disgruntled German Communists had been sending messages to Lenin and to other Soviet leaders complaining about the inept Comintern representatives who had promoted an ill-timed, poorly organized, and ineffective revolutionary action. Lenin and Trotsky found themselves in agreement on this issue: Kun and Pogány were to be reprimanded for their dangerous adventurism and warned to avoid future mischief-making of that kind, but this was to be done privately so as to avoid any public mention of the Soviet Union's role in the March Action.[39] Accordingly, Lenin summoned the two Hungarians to a meeting at which he subjected them to a fierce tongue-lashing. They had, he insisted, committed serious "left-wing mistakes," and had tried to be too "left of the left." In short, the March Action in Germany had been premature and poorly organized and executed. As the Hungarians were about to leave, however, Lenin added in a friendlier tone: "Comrade Pogány, we'll surely be joining together in many future struggles."[40]

Kun and Pogány no doubt smarted under the criticism they had received from the Soviet leader, but it did not completely deter them from continuing to advance their theory of the need for a "revolutionary offensive." And although in the coming months Lenin made it clear at Comintern forums on several occasions that he deplored the mistakes of the March Action and regarded the "leftist" theories of Kun and Pogány as "basically false" and even "political garbage," he balanced these criticisms with praise of the Hungarian exiles as individuals. They were, he pointed out, "faithful Communists ready for any sacrifice" and were "respected by the whole International."[41]

38 Gross, *Willi Münzenberg*, 105.

39 Service, *Trotsky*, 286–87. Trotsky became furious when Kun began to circulate rumors that Lenin did not share Trotsky's views on the March Action.

40 Czóbel Memoir, 36; Borsányi, *Life*, 259–61; Tőkés, "Béla Kun, the Man," 188.

41 Zinoviev also offered public support for Kun and Pogány when he asserted that "the Hungarian comrades have done a great deal on behalf of the Communist International in 1920–21." Borsányi, *Life*, 260–65.

The suggestion that Kun and Pogány were respected by all of their comrades in the Comintern was clearly a well-intentioned exaggeration. Trotsky, for one, regarded Kun with contempt and soon came to despise Pogány as well. This was demonstrated at sessions of the Third World Congress of the Comintern, which took place in the summer of 1921 in Moscow. Trotsky was the chief spokesperson for those Communists advocating a temporary slowdown in the pace of the revolution. Arguing that the struggle to achieve Communist objectives elsewhere in Europe had proved to be more difficult and lengthy than had been anticipated, he suggested that the revolutionary success was "perhaps a question of years." Despite the fact that there were many signs that Lenin agreed with this viewpoint, Kun and Pogány offered strong rebuttals to Trotsky's thesis. In a long speech Pogány argued that Trotsky's arguments were contradictory and inadequate. He insisted that Communists could not afford to slow down the revolution since workers everywhere were being crushed by the economic crisis and were showing signs of a willingness to offer a militant response. As evidence for this he cited recent strikes in Great Britain and the fact that in recent days the GCP had become "truly revolutionary."[42]

Trotsky's response was brief and somewhat condescending, for he probably did not regard this relatively unknown Hungarian as a worthy opponent in debate. He merely suggested that Pogány had offered a faulty and misleading analysis of his thesis and that his remarks were "somewhat automatic" and even "metaphysical." He even made the humorous suggestion that perhaps the misunderstanding between them was due to the fact that his voice was "not musical enough," or that Pogány's ear "was insufficiently musical," or simply because the acoustics in the hall were poor.[43] On later occasions, when Trotsky was to be under siege, his responses to criticisms from Pogány would be much more acerbic. In 1921, however, Trotsky was clearly on the winning side in the ideological debate. The World Congress endorsed Lenin's criticism of exaggerated leftism and his call for a more patient, long-term struggle on the basis of a worker-peasant alliance. At the same time, Lenin was successfully launching his New Economic Policy (NEP), which involved the introduction of certain free market or capitalist practices into the Soviet economy. Finally, later in 1921, the ECCI announced a new "line" that called for a united front

42 Communist International, *Protokoll des III. Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 106–12, 129–32; Koch-Baumgarten, *Aufstand*, 374.

43 Communist International, *Protokoll des III. Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 132; Trotsky, *The First Five Years*, 230–32.

strategy in which Communists would temporarily de-emphasize their revolutionary goals and cooperate with other workers' parties and groups.[44] If in these circumstances Kun and Pogány had continued to espouse their program of militant action, they would likely have been condemned as "sectarians" who were challenging the authority of the Comintern. Thus, they now turned most of their attention to another pressing problem, the intensification of factional problems in the HCP.

Since the departure of Kun and Pogány from Vienna in 1920, a major rift had developed between those Hungarian Communists who remained in Austria and those who comprised the Hungarian colony in Moscow. Not surprisingly, this was caused in part by personal differences and animosities among the émigrés. But they also differed on fundamental party strategy. The group in Vienna, where the party's Central Committee was located, believed that the counterrevolutionary government of Admiral Horthy was firmly in control of Hungary and that for the foreseeable future the HCP should refrain from any attempt to topple it through revolutionary action.[45] The Hungarians in Russia, the "Muscovites," led by Kun and Pogány, increasingly disregarded the opinions of their colleagues in Vienna and by mid-1921 regarded themselves as the "party building faction." They embraced the idea that Hungarian Communist émigrés had the duty to return as soon as possible to their native land and to foment revolution. Kun and Pogány advocated that the HCP adopt this militant policy even after the Soviet and Comintern leaders had rejected it and after Lenin had criticized them for the fiasco they had made of the March Action in Germany. Perhaps Kun and Pogány concluded that they had to give up their campaign for revolutionary actions in Germany and elsewhere, but were justified in continuing to propose such a strategy in Hungary, for, after all, who knew what would work best there than those who had created and led the Hungarian Soviet Republic? The Hungarian Communists in Vienna were appalled by this attitude, for they believed that any comrades infiltrated into Hungary would be on a suicide mission. They would most probably be quickly arrested and swallowed up in the horrors of the white terror. Kun dismissed his opponents as cowards and heretics: Communists had the duty to return to Hungary and to undermine the Horthy regime, even if there was a 90 percent chance they would be arrested.[46]

Like a moth to the flame, Pogány seemed unable to resist immersing

44 Kovrig, *Communism in Hungary*, 86–87; McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 30–31.
45 Kovrig, *Communism in Hungary*, 85.
46 Borsányi, *Life*, 268–69.

himself in the factional struggle. Now that his fortunes as a Communist émigré and Comintern cadre were tied closely to Kun, who seemed to have the confidence of Soviet leaders, he felt no compunction about turning viciously against those few comrades who had formerly been his allies, including Landler, the leader of the Vienna group.[47] When, in July 1921, the ECCI, which deplored factionalism in any of the national parties, conducted a hearing to resolve the factional dispute among the Hungarians, Pogány engaged in a war of words with Lukács, one of the few "Muscovites" who sided with the Vienna group. In response to Lukács's branding of Pogány's arguments as "complete nonsense," the latter replied that Lukács was using "false quotations" and data.[48] Seeking to bring harmony to the Hungarian émigrés, the ECCI presented a compromise. Its decision on what political strategy should be pursued favored the Landler group, but on the reconstituted Central Committee the Kun faction was given a small majority of delegates.[49] However, the terms of this compromise were soon violated by both factions, since the Landler faction was not about to admit defeat and the Kun/Pogány group refused to yield on ideological issues.

In the late summer and early fall of 1921, Pogány made several trips to Vienna and Berlin to try to resolve the differences between the two groups over party strategy and the management of *Proletár*. He had been asked by Radek, on behalf of the ECCI, to serve as the representative of the Muscovites and to mend bridges with the Landler faction. However, his arrogant manner and tactlessness merely aggravated the situation. In his reports back to Kun, Pogány (using the alias "Pichler") painted a bleak and no doubt exaggerated picture of the activities of their Vienna colleagues. He had discovered that they had no intention of working harmoniously with the Moscow group. They were destroying the journal, *Proletár*, which he and Kun had established. Some of them declared it impossible to have any dealings with him (Pogány); others found Kun so detestable and dangerous that they wanted to see him shot dead.[50] Pogány further inflamed matters when he made invidious accusations against the

47 In this period Pogány wrote to Kun: "You well know that I like Landler, but what he is doing ... harms the Party. I have often tried to speak with him confidentially, and often come to an agreement with him. But most of the time he does not keep to the agreement, or if he does, it is only superficially." Pilcher (Pogány) to Kun, October 7, 1921, RGASPI, 495/142/31/25–33.

48 Communist International, *Protokoll des III. Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 592.

49 Borsányi, *Life*, 273.

50 Pilcher to Kun, August 29, 1921. RGASPI, 495/142/31/8-10.

Landler faction in an article in *Proletár*.[51] By December he confided to Kun that he saw no hope in working with the Vienna faction, since "neither compromises nor clever actions" were working. Because the opposition had resorted to denunciation and ridicule, the only solution now would be victory after a bloody struggle.[52]

By the end of 1921 it was also clear to the Comintern leadership that their compromise settlement had not worked and that some other solution was needed to bring peace to the warring Hungarian comrades. Pogány did his best to convince Radek that he had gone to great lengths to achieve cooperation with the Landler faction. In a letter of December 2, 1921, he asserted that the Vienna Hungarians had shown no interest in abiding by the Comintern decision and in fact had begun to constitute themselves as a nonparty organization.[53] In committee assignments and in matters relating to *Proletár*, he and Kun had striven to be even handed and above "petty factionalism." Meanwhile, the Landler group did everything it could to destroy party discipline, sabotage the work of the CP in Hungary, and flout the will of the Comintern. The only correct and durable solution was to discipline the members of the Landler faction and to allow the Kun-Pogány faction to assume control of the HCP.

Radek was the Comintern official with whom Pogány had worked most closely since his arrival in Soviet Russia in 1920, but by late 1921 the German Communist had become impatient with the irascible Hungarian. He and other Comintern leaders had come to the conclusion that no true harmony could be achieved among the Hungarian Communists if Pogány remained on the scene. Early in 1922 a Comintern committee, given the task of ending the factional struggle in the HCP, tentatively agreed on the outline of a solution, a key provision of which would be that for an undetermined period of time both Kun and Pogány would be given assignments that would take them far from Moscow.

Pogány was no doubt shocked when he heard rumors of what was being planned by those Comintern leaders, including Zinoviev and Radek, whom he thought of as his supporters. Kun, he soon learned, was to be sent to the Urals to do work for the RCP. But Pogány did not speak Russian and could hardly carry out such an assignment. Nor, given his activities

51 Borsányi, *Life*, 275–76. Pogány bitterly complained about the way in which the Landler faction had reacted to his article, "Három hamis jelszó" (Three False Slogans). See RGASPI, 495/142/31/34–38.

52 Pilcher to Kun, December 5, 1921, RGASPI, 495/142/31/100.

53 Pogány's letter to Radek, December 2, 1921, RGASPI, 5/495/142/31.

over the past year, was it likely that the Comintern would send him to Germany or Austria. Where else could he go? At some point in March he seems to have settled in the United States as the future base for his organizing talents. Perhaps he recalled the suggestion of his friend Kunfi, who visited the United States in 1914, and returned to Hungary convinced that there was fertile ground for Socialist activity among Hungarian-American workers.[54] Pogány spoke not a word of English and had never before evinced an interest in the United States, but no doubt, he felt quite capable of organizing Hungarian immigrants in America. He thereupon sounded out several American Communists in Moscow, and though no one gave him positive encouragement, he apparently resolved to procure some sort of Comintern assignment to the United States.[55] Zinoviev, Radek, and other Comintern leaders were probably delighted with Pogány's proposal, for it would take him very far from the USSR. Furthermore, since the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) was small and insignificant, even if Pogány proved to be meddlesome, he could not do much harm.[56] Finally, by coincidence a request had recently come from leaders of the Hungarian-American Federation in the CPUSA for a Comintern agent, preferably one with experience as a journalist, to be sent to the United States to help in editing their newspaper.[57]

The Comintern decision on the Hungarian factional struggle was announced on March 17, 1922, at a session of the presidium of the ECCI.[58] Zinoviev, who presided over the session, declared that both factions had sabotaged the compromise that the ECCI had put forward eight months earlier. Therefore the slate would be wiped clean. The HCP organization and newspaper in Vienna would be abolished. A new Central Committee would be created with three members from each faction, but Kun, Landler, and Pogány would be excluded. The two comrades who had engaged in the

54 Köves, *Amíg az ember él*, 66.

55 Ludwig Katterfeld, who was at that time the representative of the CPUSA to the ECCI, was aware of the turmoil in the HCP in Moscow. When approached by Pogány he politely declined to offer encouragement or assistance, since he privately felt that "we had plenty of that sort of thing [factionalism] without him." Interview of Katterfeld, September 8, 1956, http://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/1956/o9/0908-dra[er-katterfeldint.pdf, accessed on 9/21/2010.

56 American Communists in Moscow sometimes had the impression that Comintern officials regarded the CPUSA as "more a nuisance than a bonafide business operation." RCPUSA, 515/1/39/22, reel 2.

57 On this request see RCPUSA, 515/1/115/8, reel 7.

58 RGASPI, 495/142/53/11; 495/142/124/10–14.

greatest factionalism, "P" (Pogány) and "R" (Rudas), were in the future to work under the aegis of the ECCI. Furthermore, "Comrade Pogány was free to travel to America."

What was to be Pogány's assignment in the United States? He no doubt wanted the letter of introduction he would carry with him to the CPUSA leadership, to be as open-ended as possible concerning the nature of the work he was authorized to do. In fact, there remains some uncertainty about what the Comintern leaders envisioned as Pogány's mission in the United States. In Pogány's Comintern personnel file one finds a letter of introduction by Otto Kuusinen on behalf of the ECCI bearing a handwritten date of "03.1922" in the margin.[59] The document, which Pogány may have helped compose, appears to be a draft, since several words are crossed out and Kuusinen's name is typed in but not signed. Although no final, signed version of the letter has surfaced, it is likely that the letter of introduction Pogány carried with him to America contained similar wording. In this document, written in German, Pogány is described as "one of our most experienced comrades with long years of revolutionary activity who has proven his great value in such responsible positions as... People's Commissar for War during the [Hungarian] Soviet Republic." Because of language problems his work was to be primarily with those comrades who spoke German or Hungarian, but he also would be able to offer his services to the CPUSA leadership. Furthermore, the Comintern was authorizing him to act as their permanent correspondent (*ständiger Berichterstatter*) in the United States and to send to the ECCI "periodic reports on the general situation in America and in the Party." If indeed the final version of the letter of introduction was similar to this draft, the wording was elastic enough for an ambitious Communist activist like Pogány to use to his advantage in carving out a major role for himself in the CPUSA.

In making his preparations for the journey to the United States, Pogány encountered an unexpected problem. Upon learning of his new assignment, Pogány's wife, Irén, insisted that she should accompany her husband. Pogány attempted to explain to her that the wives of Comintern agents were not normally permitted to join their husbands on missions abroad, except in those cases where the wife herself was a Comintern cadre. But Irén was adamant, even though their young daughters would have to be left behind in the care of friends. Perhaps she felt that her own

59 RGASPI, 495/199/1586/24. A more polished version of this letter, identical in wording but also undated and unsigned, can be found at RCPUSA, 515/1/418/112, reel 27.

linguistic abilities in both German and English could be put to good use in aiding her husband's work in the United States. She might also have felt a certain resentment over her husband's constant absences over the past several years and the rumors that must have reached her about his philandering. Whatever her motivations, her persistence finally paid off when the Comintern agreed that she could join Pogány on the journey to America.

In May, József and Irén traveled to Berlin, where the skilled experts in the Comintern's passport apparatus provided them with fraudulent travel documents under the name of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Lang. At this time Pogány also met and had preliminary discussions with Henryk Walecki, a veteran Polish Communist whom the Comintern was sending as its official representative to the United States to resolve certain critical questions about the nature and future of the Communist movement in the United States.[60]

60 Czóbel Memoir, 66.

CHAPTER 5
The "Hungarian Christopher Columbus"

I wish I could have gone to America.
Napoleon Bonaparte, in Act 3
of / JÓZSEF POGÁNY'S *NAPÓLEON*

The American Communist movement that Pogány, using the name Joseph Lang, encountered upon his arrival in New York in mid-July 1922, was in considerable disarray, racked by a bitter factional struggle, a proliferation of rival organizations, and economic woes. Since its inception in 1919, the CPUSA had to contend with state and federal authorities that sought to suppress the movement. As a result, in its first two years the party had been forced to operate underground. By 1921, however, government repression had eased and at the insistence of the Comintern a legal Communist Party, called the Workers' Party (WP), was established. The membership in the two arms of the party, the underground and the legal, largely overlapped, but there ensued a fierce struggle over which organization should have precedence in directing the overall Communist movement. In 1922, the CPUSA had a relatively small following among workers. There were at most twelve thousand dues-paying members, the majority of whom were foreign born. Their connection to the national Communist movement was largely through the CP's language federations, which published ethnic newspapers, established clubs and insurance societies, and clung stubbornly to their autonomy. The Hungarian Federation, which eagerly awaited the arrival of Pogány, was typical. Many of its two hundred dues-paying members, concentrated mainly in New York and Cleveland, were aliens with a limited ability to communicate in English. To serve their needs and promote Communist objectives, the Hungarian Federation published a daily newspaper written exclusively in Hungarian, the *Új Előre* (New forward).[1]

1 Party membership data can be found in RCPUSA, 515/1/148 and 515/1/206. Draper has suggested that the true figure for 1922 was about 6,000. Draper, *American Communism*, 353, 391. For the state of the CPUSA in 1922, see Klehr, *American Communist Movement*, 37–38; Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 358–62; and Zumoff, "Communist Party," 82–83. For the Hungarian Federation and the *Új Előre*, see Sakmyster, "Communist Newspaper," 41–70.

Soon after his arrival in New York Pogány appeared at the headquarters of the WP, introduced himself, and arranged to have his CP membership transferred to the CPUSA, an indication that he intended his stay in the United States to be an extended one.[2] He also met with the editorial board of the *Új Előre*, to sketch out an ambitious program of changes he was planning. But Pogány's own inclinations and local circumstances led him, in the first few months of his sojourn in the United States, to focus much more on the resolution of problems in the CPUSA as a whole. Only in the autumn was he able to apply himself to what supposedly was the main thrust of his mission, work with the Hungarian American Communists.

Pogány appears to have made a very good initial impression on the leaders and members of the WP in the New York area, who were dazzled by his credentials as a prominent international Communist with significant experience in revolutionary activity and apparently close ties to the Bolshevik leadership in Moscow. No one seemed to be aware of his reputation for divisiveness and the fact that he had been deeply involved in two of the greatest defeats the Communist movement had suffered (Hungary in 1919 and Germany in March 1921)."[3] They were prepared to accept Irén's suggestion that her husband was truly the "Hungarian Lenin."[4] Most American Communists had never encountered such an exotic political creature as Pogány: "[He] looked like a Hungarian version of the proverbial traveling salesman. Short and stocky, with a large head and a disproportionately larger nose that proudly bore a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles perched importantly on its bridge, he dressed like a dude, combed his hair sleek and neat, was always clean-shaven, smoked gold-tipped cigarettes, listened attentively to everything that was being said in his presence, and said absolutely nothing. But this man was a genuine Bolshevik, albeit a Hungarian one."[5]

Whether Pogány showed anyone his Comintern letter of introduction is unclear. Given the later questioning of his status by some CPUSA leaders, it is quite possible that at this time he merely offered an oral summary of his assignment, mentioning that he was to assist both the Hungarian Federation and the national party and that he had been authorized to report back regularly to Moscow. At a meeting of the Central Executive

2 RGASPI, 495/199/1586/27.

3 One historian has suggested that Pogány "had nothing but disaster to his credit." Draper, *American Communism*, 59.

4 Gitlow, *Whole of their Lives*, 426.

5 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 136.

Committee of the WP in late July, Pogány was introduced, spoke briefly in German, and left the impression that he was authorized by the Comintern to play a major role in guiding the Communist movement in America. One participant in the meeting later recalled that Pogány was received "with awe" and that some, at least, believed him to be a personal emissary of Lenin.[6]

Early on Pogány forged close ties with the three most prominent WP leaders in New York: Charles Ruthenberg, the national secretary; Max Bedacht; and Jay Lovestone. Since all three spoke German, Pogány could communicate easily with them and they in turn could serve as interpreters when he spoke to individuals or groups. These WP leaders were very impressed by Pogány's oratorical and organizing skills, intellectual capacity, and ability to interpret and apply Comintern policy. They also found him to be a particularly congenial comrade because he seemed to share their vision of the future of the Communist movement in the United States, namely that the legal party, the WP, should in time supersede the underground organization as the dominant arm of the CPUSA. Pogány in fact had made a shrewd analysis of the situation. He calculated that Comintern officials would be adamant in their insistence that American Communists end all factionalism and rally around the legal party organization. Pogány also sensed, far better than most American Communists at the time, the significance of the new "line" that the Comintern had announced toward the end of 1921. This called for Communists worldwide to work with other progressive, left-wing parties to create united fronts.[7] In the United States only a legal Communist Party, the Workers' Party, could hope to carry out such a policy. From the start Pogány thus quietly threw his support to the proponents of a strong WP, known as the "liquidators," who were engaged in the factional struggle with the "goose" faction, which insisted that the underground party must continue to direct the affairs of the Communist movement.

When Henryk Walecki arrived in New York in late July, he added to Pogány's stature by drawing him into his negotiations with the contending CPUSA factions. Pogány was invited to join what Walecki dubbed the "Adjustment" committee, which was to prepare the agenda for an upcoming national convention at which the factional struggle was to be ended and a new course set for American Communism. Although he had not been authorized by the Comintern to serve as an intermediary in the sorting out

6 Malkin, *Return to My Father's House*, 82–83; Gitlow, *Whole of Their Lives*, 68.

7 McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 31–32, 229–30.

of the problems of the CPUSA, Pogány seized the opportunity and at the very first meeting of this committee, on August 1, boldly offered a proposal for the settlement of the factional struggle. He suggested an agreement based on three principles:

a) that an illegal party was "an absolute necessity;
b) that there would also be an open party that would exploit "all legal possibilities";
c) and that the full transformation of the party must be accomplished at a convention.[8]

Although there was to be much bitter wrangling among the factions over the coming months, Pogány's proposal was to end up as the basis for the eventual settlement of the dispute.

The CP's national convention was held in mid-August 1922, on a farm near Bridgman, Michigan, about sixty-five miles east of Chicago. The planning and transportation arrangements for the convention were carried out in a highly secretive manner in order to avoid detection by local police or by the FBI. Accordingly, Pogány made his way from New York to Bridgman by a circuitous route, guided along by Ruthenberg, who at the convention served as his interpreter and introduced him to other delegates. Here for the first time Pogány met prominent native-born American Communists whose home base was Chicago rather than New York. Among them were several who in time would become his most severe critics, including William Z. Foster and Earl Browder. During the proceedings Pogány deferred to Walecki, who delivered the keynote address in German and offered ideological guidance during the debates. Pogány, for the most part, remained silent, but he nonetheless aroused a good deal of curiosity and speculation. He was "foppishly dressed and strutted about like a plump pigeon," and at one point even made a snide comment about one of the delegates who dared to object to a proposal Walecki had made.[9] In private conversations, however, he was conciliatory and sought to establish his credentials and to form a good relationship with delegates

8 Minutes of Adjustment Committee, August 1, 1922, RCPUSA, reel 7, 515/1/130/32.

9 When Walecki proposed the creation of a "convention presidium," Bertram Wolfe opposed the idea as alien to American traditions. Pogány, speaking in a deliberately audible stage whisper, said to Walecki: "This man thinks he's the American Lenin." Wolfe, *Breaking With Communism*, 267.

from both main factions. Walecki, he suggested, would probably depart for Moscow in the near future, but he, Pogány, would remain in the country as long as was necessary to help transform the CPUSA.[10]

In several votes taken at the Bridgman Convention, the "goose" faction prevailed by a narrow margin, but the decisions on the future course of the party left a certain amount of ambiguity. The underground or illegal wing of the party was to continue and, to a greater or lesser degree, control the activity of the WP, which would be responsible for open or "legal" work. The new setup would be ratified at a future unified convention.[11] The fact that the broad outline of this compromise had been adumbrated by Pogány in the preconvention deliberations, was apparently recognized and appreciated by many of the delegates, for he was unanimously elected, along with Foster, as a "non-factional" member of the new Central Executive Committee (CEC).[12] However, any possibility for further discussion that might have clarified the nature of the compromise that had been reached was eliminated when on August 22, the alarm was spread that a posse of police was in the vicinity and about to disrupt the proceedings. The great effort that had been made to keep the location of the convention secret had been in vain, since it turned out that one of the delegates was actually an FBI agent.

When it became clear that it would not be possible to arrange for a large number of delegates to flee, it was decided that priority should be given to finding a way for Walecki and Pogány to escape. Clearly it would be disastrous if the police were to arrest and identify two European Communists who had illegally entered the country. That would merely strengthen the widespread belief that the CPUSA was merely a tool of a Communist conspiracy directed by Moscow. Accordingly, Walecki and Pogány were quickly bundled into an old Ford driven by the son of the farmer on whose land the convention was being held. Huddled on the floor of the backseat and covered by blankets, they managed to evade the police and several hours later were dropped off in Chicago to fend for themselves. To thwart the FBI, whom they rightly feared would soon be searching for them in Chicago, they boarded a streetcar and rode nonstop for a full day, transferring frequently to different routes. Knowing very little English and afraid to arouse suspicion by trying to ask for directions, they rode on until eventually by chance they found themselves at the main train

10 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 89, 95.

11 Draper, *American Communism*, 373–75; Zumoff, "Communist Party," 84–87.

12 Draper, *American Communism*, 38.

station, where they were able to purchase tickets and make their way safely to New York.[13]

In the aftermath of the Bridgman Convention Walecki stayed on until October in order to assist in the implementation of the Bridgman decisions. This was made difficult by the fact that many of the CP leaders had been arrested at the convention or shortly thereafter. Through the remainder of 1922 and into early 1923, prominent party figures like Foster, Ruthenberg, and William Dunne were either in jail, on trial, or out temporarily on bail. In his ongoing discussions with those leaders who were available, Walecki relied on Pogány for assistance. In a report to the ECCI in Moscow he mentioned that "my friend Pichler" (Pogány) provided important assistance: "we supplemented each other."[14] This provided further support for the idea that when Walecki left the country, his collaborator, Pogány, would be able to step in and continue his work on behalf of the Comintern. Walecki did in fact depart later in October, making his way first to Canada and then on to Europe. Since both he and Pogány were targets of an FBI manhunt, Walecki decided it would be too dangerous to carry with him all his papers and reports. A courier was needed who was not known to the American police and who would not arouse suspicion when making a trans-Atlantic voyage. The assignment was entrusted to Pogány's wife, Irén, who had been serving as a kind of secretarial assistant to Walecki and who had helped in composing reports and making translations.[15] She made her way to Vienna and then on to Moscow, where she now took up residence with their daughters and awaited the arrival of her husband, whom she apparently believed would before long also leave the United States.

There was every indication, however, that Pogány intended to remain in the United States indefinitely, for he had convinced himself that he was uniquely qualified to make a valuable contribution to the American Communist movement. He apparently sensed that the atmosphere of uncertainty and confusion in the wake of the disrupted Bridgman Convention provided the opportunity for an outsider like himself to step forward and play a leading role in the organization of the emerging legal arm of the CPUSA, the WP. In addition, as a member of the CEC he was well positioned to hold a balance of power between the two main factions.[16]

13 Czóbel Memoir, 67; Wolfe, *Breaking With Communism*, 269.

14 Walecki to Kuusinen, October 8, 1922, RCPUSA, 515/1/128/106–29, reel 7.

15 Czóbel Memoir, 67.

16 Klehr and Haynes, *American Communist Movement*, 37.

However, his immediate task in the early fall of 1922 was to tackle the primary assignment the ECCI had given him, that is, to provide assistance to the Hungarian Federation and its fledgling newspaper. This he accomplished with characteristic resourcefulness and ingenuity. Speaking with the authority of a journalist who had written for the most respected Hungarian Socialist and Communist newspapers and journals, Pogány, supposedly writing from Moscow, declared in an article in the *Új Előre* that the newspaper had a "historic calling." It was the only Hungarian Communist daily newspaper in the world, and was destined to serve as a "beacon of light" for Hungarian workers everywhere, "from Moscow to Vienna, from Milan to Budapest."[17] To give the paper an aura of internationalism, Pogány had the editors announce the creation of an advisory board consisting of leading Hungarian Communists in Moscow, including Kun, Lajos Magyar, and Pogány himself, as well as the formation of a team of "special *Új Előre* correspondents" to be based in Vienna, Moscow, Berlin, and Paris. Pogány's intention was to create the impression that the *Új Előre*, which never in its sixteen-year existence was to have a paid subscription of more than five thousand, had a full stable of foreign correspondents. Articles by the "special correspondents" did begin to appear on a regular basis in the *Új Előre*, but in reality these items were merely translated versions of often outdated material that had previously appeared in European Communist newspapers.

Because most of the writers and editors of the *Új Előre* had little or no journalistic experience, Pogány bolstered the newspaper by contributing frequent essays and editorials. From 1922 to 1924, items by or about him appeared in nearly every issue. He wrote on a broad range of issues, including the lives of Hungarian-Americans, the white terror in Hungary (which he dubbed "Horthyország," i.e., "Horthy's land"), and social and political problems in the United States. One of his favorite themes was the need for all Hungarian immigrants living in the United States to learn English and to assimilate into American society. Writing in November 1922, he pointed out that less than half of the members of the Hungarian-American community could speak English. This would have to change, he argued, because communism could never succeed in America as long as it was regarded as an alien movement.[18]

As if to set a personal example of the need for Hungarians to assimilate rapidly into American society, Pogány embarked in late August 1922, on a

17 Sakmyster, "Communist Newspaper," 43–44.

18 *Új Előre*, November 8, 1922, 1.

project to immerse himself totally in the English language and American culture. He knew that if he was to succeed in his ambition of playing a leading role in the CPUSA, he would have to gain fluency in English. His language training seems not to have involved formal classes but instead focused on an intensive effort to engage in conversation with anyone willing to spend time with him. At first he practiced speaking with party comrades, but once he gained a rudimentary ability in English, he sought out individuals from all levels of American society, not just workers but journalists, professors, lawyers, artists, and even bankers and businesspeople. He also spent countless hours in the reading room of the New York public library, where he avidly read books on American history and daily newspapers from all across the country. He soon became engrossed in, and fascinated by, American culture, both high and low. He attended theater performances, went to the movies, learned about popular music, frequented nightclubs, and read American fiction.[19] In an endeavor to acquaint himself with American slang, he delighted in reading the "funny pages" (comic strips) in the newspapers. The rapid success of this "crash course" in Americanization astounded Pogány's American comrades. By the end of 1922 he could join in committee discussions and hold meaningful conversations. Early in 1923 his mastery of English was such that he was able to write articles and pamphlets and to deliver coherent speeches lasting two or three hours. According to one CP leader, almost overnight Pogány had become "an orator of dazzling facility and effectiveness" who spoke in English "faster and more furiously" than even native-born Americans.[20]

Even as he was working to achieve such fluency in English, Pogány managed to seize a leading role in the resolution of important problems confronting the CPUSA in the autumn of 1922. Members of the "goose" faction, which had won an apparent victory at the Bridgman Convention, believed that the underground party would continue to play the dominant role in the CPUSA. But in December 1922, the ECCI stated categorically that the legal and illegal arms of the CPUSA were to be amalgamated and that the WP would be the American section of the Comintern.[21] This greatly shocked those party members who firmly believed that in the

19 Pogány once advised a group of Communist leaders to "read good romances and novels, first for relaxation and enjoyment and second as a guide to a better understanding of human character." Gitlow, *Whole of their Lives*, 110.

20 Cannon, 77–78; *First Ten Years* Czóbel, *Memoir,* 67–68; and Gitlow, *Whole of their Lives,* 110.

21 Max Bedacht, who was serving as the CPUSA representative to the Comintern, sent a report on the decision in December 1922, RCPUSA, 515/1/201/110, reel 13.

United States Communists could survive only in an underground party, but came as no surprise to Pogány, who from the time of his arrival in the United States had acted on the assumption that the Comintern would eventually decide in favor of the legal party, the WP. This explains his conduct in October and November when Charles Ruthenberg, who had a very high opinion of Pogány's ability to persuade and cajole, sent him to address local Communist units in the New York area and in key cities elsewhere. At these sessions Pogány, still speaking mostly in German but with occasional utterances in English, put on virtuoso performances. Drawing on his experiences in Europe and relying on his growing reputation as the official representative of the Comintern, he forcefully explained why the WP must take the lead in the American Communist movement. The underground apparatus of the CP would of course remain in place, for only it could perform certain essential tasks. Moreover, the CP had to be "elastic" and be able to adapt to changing circumstances such as a renewed period of severe government repression of radical movements.[22] When some of those present were unreceptive to Pogány's arguments, he allowed them to speak out, although each dissenter was allotted only five minutes. When the speaker's time was up, Pogány interrupted him in mid-sentence and shouted "Schluss!" ("That's it, finished!").[23]

Another tactic that Pogány successfully employed in these sessions was to key in on the individual among the recalcitrants whom he considered to be the weakest. This person he would berate unmercifully as an ignoramus, scoundrel, and party-wrecker. Pogány seemed to relish heaping abuse on opponents. Before one encounter he boasted to a colleague: "If you want to see how a pig is stuck as you never saw one before, watch me!"[24] A few American Communists naturally resented this sort of browbeating, and though they kept silent for a time, some later became zealous members of the anti-Pogány faction that eventually developed in the CPUSA.[25] Most, however, were won over by Pogány's arguments, perhaps feeling that they must defer to the political wisdom of this famous revolutionary from Moscow. Moreover, Pogány proved to be generous in victory. Once former members of the goose faction capitulated, Pogány cleverly offered

22 Pogány elaborated on these arguments in a pamphlet he later published, *Underground Radicalism*, 26–27.

23 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 155.

24 Ibid., 156.

25 Cannon later recalled: "The factional fights before had been rough enough, but the game of 'killing' opponents, or people who just seemed to be in the way, really began with Pepper." Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 78.

them rehabilitation and a secure place in the WP. Some, such as Abram Jakira, Israel Amter, Robert Minor, and Benjamin Gitlow, would go on to play key roles in the CPUSA. Many of them became Pogány's strongest supporters. At the time of his departure for Russia in October 1922, Henryk Walecki had been privately pessimistic about the WP becoming in the near future a "living" party. He imagined that for the foreseeable future the underground wing of the CP would remain predominant.[26] Yet less than half a year later the leading role of the open party, the Workers' Party, was affirmed at a national convention. Most prominent American Communists agreed with the sentiments expressed by William Foster in a letter to Grigory Zinoviev in February, 1923. It was, he declared, the "splendid work" of comrade Pogány that allowed the CP to avoid "any very serious split" as it made "the transition from an underground to an open party."[27]

Another thorny issue that the CPUSA had to deal with in the aftermath of the Bridgman Convention, was how to respond to the Comintern's call for a united front and for the creation of a mass workers' party along the lines of the Labor Party in Great Britain. The initial reaction by American Communists to this new Comintern "line" was confusion and even passive resistance. Many who considered themselves hard-core revolutionaries were loathe to cooperate with other reform organizations and to join forces in a broad Labor Party, even though the proposal for the creation of such a party came from Lenin himself. In May 1922, the CPUSA had formally declared its commitment to the united front and to a Labor Party, but in the following months the idea had been treated more as a propaganda slogan than as a prescription for action.[28]

Pogány, whose American comrades were convinced that he was capable of discoursing at length and with apparent authority on almost any issue regarding Communist theory or policy, not surprisingly stepped forward to offer his sage advice on how the WP should proceed in order to comply with the Comintern's new "line." Ruthenberg was apparently so impressed by the persuasiveness of Pogány's analysis that he urged him to write a pamphlet in which he outlined a strategy to create a Labor Party in the United States. Always a fluent and rapid writer, Pogány needed only a few days to compose, in German, a forty-eight-page pamphlet. Ruthenberg,

26 Walecki to Kuusinen, October 8, 1922, RCPUSA, 515/1/128/106–29, reel 7.

27 Foster to Zinoviev, February 17, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/201/14–18, reel 13. Abram Jakira, secretary of the underground CP, expressed similar admiration of Pogány in a later letter to Zinoviev. Jakira to Zinoviev, March 26, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/297/23–25, reel 18.

28 Draper, *American Communism*, 33–36.

Lovestone, and Pogány then collaborated on the task of translating the manuscript into English and it appeared in mid-October with the title, *For a Labor Party*.[29] Priced at ten cents and promoted by the Workers' Party as a "scientific study" that "marked a new epoch in the political life of the American working class," Pogány's pamphlet was an instant success, the first CPUSA publication to achieve "best-seller" status in the world of early American political radicalism. In the coming months two revised editions were published and eventually perhaps as many as twenty thousand copies were sold, which suggests that the pamphlet found an audience beyond the confines of the American Communist movement.[30]

For a publication sponsored by the CPUSA and written by a veteran European Communist who previously had been well-known as an advocate of militant revolutionary action, *For a Labor Party* was remarkably moderate and free of Marxist jargon and theorizing. In fact, at no point in the text was there mention of Soviet Russia or for the need for revolutionary action. Instead, Pogány offered a relatively balanced survey of American history, with a focus on third party movements, the rise of trade unionism, and the social and economic changes caused by rapid industrialization. To emphasize his even-handedness, he frequently supported his assertions with references to the works of Roger Babson, John R. Commons, and others who were by no means political radicals.[31] Noting that there were nearly six million organized workers in the country, Pogány argued that conditions were now "most favorable from every standpoint" for the creation of a mass Labor Party that, unlike most other third parties in American history, would have solid prospects for survival. To ensure its success, however, several conditions had to be met. Trade unions had to represent the "backbone of the Labor Party," for otherwise it would be "swept out of existence by the first sign of prosperity." No reliance could be placed on Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor (AFL), for that group had pursued policies that brought "failure after failure" and resulted in political bankruptcy. Furthermore, it would be "a mistake of the greatest magnitude," if the Labor Party failed to draw in poor

29 *Worker*, January 27, 1923, 5.

30 See the review by a prominent German Communist, Thalheimer: "John Pepper," *Inprecor* 3, no. 54 (32): 581–82 (reprinted in *Daily Worker*, February 2, 1924, 4.) As part of its ongoing surveillance of the Communist movement, the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) added to the sales of the pamphlet by purchasing three copies. FBI report of December 18, 1922, in the Freedom of Information file of József Pogány, 61–2395 (hereafter cited as Pogány FBI File).

31 Sylvers, " Pogány/Pepper," 123.

farmworkers as equal partners with the urban proletariat. In most countries, he conceded, urban workers and farmers did not make good partners, but America and Russia were the exceptions. Here, it seems, Pogány was recalling one of the lessons he had drawn from the failure of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, namely that those seeking revolutionary change needed to take into account the interests of the agricultural workers.

Only at the very end of his pamphlet did Pogány briefly mention the participation of the WP in any Labor Party that was created. A meeting of organizations and parties interested in the amalgamation of trade unions and unifying workers was scheduled for December in Cleveland. Their work would be in vain, he warned, and a Labor Party would "sink into a swamp," if it failed to admit "the Communistic Workers' Party." It appears that the pamphlet did persuade some former skeptics on the American Left that the Workers' Party could be a suitable partner in a Labor Party. On the other hand, some CP members were made uneasy by the plan Pogány was championing, fearing that in joining such a mass Labor Party, the Communists would be greatly outnumbered and would be forced to abandon their distinctive identity and revolutionary program. In a report to WP units Ruthenberg tried to assuage these fears by asserting that Communists would be "the driving force which will constantly push the Labor Party along the road of more revolutionary action."[32] But such statements by leaders of the WP seemed to confirm the suspicion held by many on the non-Communist Left in the United States that the WP was "un-American" and had not abandoned the CP's goal of change through violence and revolution. Thus, the delegates to the Cleveland convention, led by the Socialists, were unanimous in rejecting the WP's bid to affiliate with the planned Labor Party. At the same time the convention, in a fairly close vote, put off to a later date definitive action on the formation of a mass Labor Party.

Despite this setback Pogány was undaunted. In a revised and expanded edition of the pamphlet, *For a Labor Party*, which appeared in May 1923, he offered his interpretation of the results of the Cleveland convention. He described the failure to seat the Communist delegates and make meaningful progress toward the goal of an authentic Labor Party as a betrayal on the part of right-wing trade unionists and Socialist Party leaders, who in effect placed a wreath "on the coffin of the idea of a Labor Party." Nonetheless, Pogány saw no reason to retract his earlier stated belief that

32 Ruthenberg, "Workers' Party and the Labor Party," an article in the Workers' Party bulletin to party units, November 27, 1922, RCPUSA, 515/1/147/44, reel 8.

the "idea of a Labor Party is marching forward to realization." He suggested that many right-thinking and militant labor union leaders, even some who had procrastinated at the Cleveland convention, were now firmly resolved to collaborate with the Farmer-Labor Party, which was calling on all unions, labor organizations, and workers' parties to send delegates to a new convention scheduled to be held in July 1923.

One important way in which the second edition of the pamphlet differed from the first was that the name of the author was given: John Pepper. At some point in mid-December Pogány found it imperative to take on a new alias. Once he had begun to give frequent speeches and to socialize with individuals from all walks of life in the New York area, it was inevitable that some anti-Communist Hungarian-Americans would discover that Joseph Lang was in fact, the notorious József Pogány. This information soon found its way to police officials in Budapest and to the FBI in Washington.[33] The Hungarian government, which was eager to capture the key leaders of the Communist government who had fled the country, informed the American consul in Budapest that Pogány was one of Hungary's most wanted criminals. A recently issued warrant for his arrest charged him with 228 murders, 18 burglaries, and 2 cases of counterfeiting.[34] With the aid of this information and a photograph provided by the Hungarian authorities, as well as reports from their own informants in New York, the FBI was able to circulate a description of the man currently using the name Joseph Lang. He was described as having what one agent regarded as "typical Jewish features": five foot six in height, clean-shaven, of a dark complexion with black, kinky hair, oval face, and a pronounced scar on the left side of his forehead. Lang, whom the FBI had been searching for since he had escaped during the police raid on the Bridgman Convention, was now identified as Pogány and termed a dangerous alien who had been sent to the United States by Moscow with large sums of money to engage in propaganda and subversion. He was therefore added to the FBI's most-wanted list and posters bearing his photograph were placed in post offices and in other locales in the New York metropolitan area.[35]

Understandably worried that his arrest might be imminent, Pogány met with WP leaders to chart a future course of action. Two things seemed obvious: he must become much more cautious in his movements around

33 FBI report of November 24, 1922 in Pogány FBI File.

34 Report of Edwin Kemp, American Consul, November 20, 1922, Department of State records (RG 59), 811.00B/119, National Archives (Washington).

35 FBI report of December 13, 1922 in Pogány FBI File; Czóbel Memoir, 37.

New York and he must assume a new identity. Following the practice of other Hungarian Communists who needed to operate clandestinely in the United States, Pogány chose a new name with the same initials as his old one: J.P. He was to become John Pepper, a native-born American from California who had lost all his personal records, including his birth certificate, in the San Francisco earthquake.[36] The new surname he selected seems to have been a kind of Communist in-joke. While working with the *Új Előre,* Pogány must have noticed the frequent attacks in articles and editorials on Senator George W. Pepper, a conservative from Pennsylvania, who seemed to be a bête noire of the Hungarian-American Communists. So why not call himself Pepper and thereby tweak the noses of the capitalists? Perhaps it was fitting that the first public mention of an American Communist named John Pepper appeared in late December in the *Új Előre.*[37] For a brief time Pogány was also referred to by the name "Short" in internal WP documents, but by early 1923 he became known as "John Pepper" to all his American comrades and to others on the Left. All of his numerous publications in 1923–24 were signed "John Pepper," and the name became so entrenched that he continued to use it for the rest of his life, whether residing in the United States or elsewhere.

When it became clear in early 1923 that the Workers' Party would be the dominant wing of the CPUSA, plans had to be made for forging a practical program of action. Most American Communists had considerable experience either in underground activities or in trade union organizing, but almost none knew much about how an open, legal CP should operate, what policies it should pursue, or how to coordinate effectively with the Comintern. Furthermore, they keenly sensed that they lacked the international reputation, connections in Moscow, and wealth of revolutionary experience that Pogány seemed to possess. As had been demonstrated in the resolution of the factional fight and the forging of a united front policy, Pogány apparently had a knack for rapidly finding solutions to difficult problems and producing one or more theories to meet any possible situation. His fertile imagination seemed stimulated by the fact that social and economic conditions in the United States differed in important respects from those found in Europe. Thus he could plausibly argue that theories or strategies used in other countries might not necessarily be applicable to America. This allowed him to indulge his propensity for applying the basics of Marxism in new and unexpected ways. He always seemed to be

36 Wolfe, *Breaking with Communism*, 179.

37 *Új Előre*, December 29, 1922, 1.

offering new perspectives on the phases or stages of revolution, the relationship of the proletariat to farmers and the bourgeoisie, the role of the foreign-born, and numerous other topics.

In time, some American Communists would discover errors, inconsistencies, and contradictions in Pogány's interpretations, which they usually attributed to the fact that he was a foreigner who really did not understand American society. But for most of 1923 WP leaders were mesmerized by what a historian has described as his "amazing political prognostications, his arcane 'theses,' and his aura of secretive Comintern *savoir faire*." As a result they seemed to have complete confidence in Pepper's ability to formulate efficacious policies.[38] Foster later recalled that he and others were at the time "prepared to accept as correct Communist tactics everything to which Pepper said 'yes' and 'amen.'" Cannon expressed the same sentiment in blunter language: "Pepper ran the party with an iron hand... and what he wrote was party policy; what he said, went."[39]

Pogány had been a member of the WP's CEC since his election at the Bridgman Convention. In early January 1923, he was made secretary of the Political Commission (PolCom), which was responsible for formulating policies that would then be submitted to the CEC for discussion and approval. In February, now using the name John Pepper, he was designated, along with Ruthenberg and Jakira, as a member of the newly created Secretariat, which was to be in charge of all administrative matters and to handle "emergency matters."[40] These key positions gave him considerable power, which, a colleague of his later recalled, he exercised as a "combination czar and commissar."[41] Pepper moved with characteristic swiftness to employ the power that had been entrusted to him, regulating party affairs "with the arbitrary authority of a receiver appointed by the court to take over a bankrupt concern." From February to May he bombarded his colleagues with plans for actions on numerous fronts. These originated in the PolCom, were approved by the CEC, and were carried out under his supervision with the cooperation of Ruthenberg and Jakira. One prominent American Communist later recalled that Pepper's constant stream of ideas,

38 Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 198.

39 Foster's comments at a session of the American Commission of the ECCI, May 3, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/257/135–45, reel 17; Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 79.

40 Minutes of CEC meetings, January 26 and February 10, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/178/15–16, reel 11; and 515/1/190/1–4, reel 12.

41 Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 79. Cannon, returning in February 1923 from a prolonged stay in Moscow, was amazed to find that Pogány/Pepper, a foreigner who had arrived in the United States only six months earlier, was "in full charge of everything, deciding everything, including the positions and the fate of individuals who pleased or displeased him." Ibid., 77.

plans, experiments, and schemes seemed to propel the WP on a "whirling conveyor" and created the sensation of a "merry-go-round which left everybody dizzy."[42] To generate support for these programs, Pepper began to produce a torrent of articles in *The Worker*, the WP's weekly newspaper and *The Liberator*, a Communist monthly in which items of a more theoretical or intellectual bent appeared.[43] In 1923, Pepper was so prolific a writer that for WP members and others on the radical Left he became the most prominent spokesperson for the Communist movement, rivaled perhaps only by Foster. In a remarkably short time Pepper was being praised by Mike Gold, a respected left-wing writer who was the editor of *The Liberator*, as one of the three leading Communist intellectuals and essayists in the United States.[44]

In order to ensure proper funding for his various initiatives, Pepper apparently asserted his right, as a special representative from Moscow, to be custodian of at least some of the substantial subsidies the Comintern was supplying to the WP and to put forward proposals for seeking new subventions from Moscow.[45] Although some of his comrades may have been made a bit uneasy by his brashness and shameless self-aggrandizement, no one dared to challenge him at the time, even though he began to use some of these funds to support a personal lifestyle that hardly seemed proletarian. He soon arranged for a "natty four-room apartment" in the Washington Heights area of New York to be used as headquarters for the PolCom, although in practice one of the rooms became his own personal office. Though he knew that he was the subject of an FBI manhunt, Pepper chose to live flamboyantly and, as one of his comrades later recalled, "whetted his appetite like a gourmand and let the tasteful delicacies linger in his mouth the better to enjoy himself."[46] He dressed foppishly, drank expensive cognac and wine, and at times dined at fine restaurants. And he seems to have taken advantage of his position of power and influence to engage in

42 Ibid., 76.

43 From April 1923 to March 1924, Pepper wrote a major article in nearly every issue of *Worker*. These in turn were quickly translated and appeared in *Új Előre* and perhaps in the newspapers of other CP language federations. In May, 1923 Pepper was appointed an associate editor of *The Liberator*.

44 Gold, "American Intellectuals and Communism," *Worker*, December 1, 1923, 3. Looking back on Pepper's work in the United States, Amter would later assert that Pepper "was the first to create a serious Communist literary tradition in America." Amter to Zinoviev, May 18, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/273/6, reel 18.

45 It appears that the WP in 1923 received subsidies amounting to at least $37, 500. Pepper may have received additional funds to pay his salary and expenses. Klehr, Hayes, and Anderson, *The Soviet World*, 111, 133.

46 Gitlow, *Whole of their Lives*, 110.

sexual dalliances with party secretaries and female comrades who took his fancy.[47] Pepper was not apologetic about his lifestyle. A good Communist, he told his comrades, "must not allow himself to be caught stewing in his own juice." He "must drink good wine in moderation and should not confine his taste to one brand." Nor should he "restrain his passion for novelty – a new, serious love affair every six months is a good tonic for a communist leader" because it "revives his energy and quickens his impulses."[48]

Pepper boasted of the accomplishments of the fledgling WP in periodic reports that he and Ruthenberg sent to the ECCI in 1923. These included the creation of a "Negro Committee," attempts to "splinter" the Socialist Party, support for the Irish Republican movement, a vigorous campaign to organize indigent farmers, and a program to defend foreign-born workers threatened with deportation.[49] But Pepper was determined to take on a grander mission that transcended these day-to-day activities: to teach his comrades what it meant to be a Communist in America. In the spring of 1923 he embarked on a program of public education in a four-part series of articles entitled "The Problems of Our Party." Here Pepper offered his comments and advice on a variety of topics. For example, he attempted to allay the fears of those orthodox party members who looked with great suspicion on the united front policy. This policy, he insisted, would bring great benefits to the Communists, but caution had to be observed. Yes, "we should form the united front with every workers' organization, and when it is necessary even with yellow Socialist leaders and with confused Anarchists," but good Communists "should not forget for a moment our distrust and hatred for those mis-leaders."[50] Moreover, whether as members of a united front organization, a WP language federation, or a trade union, Communists must never forget "the common interests of the party as a whole." Too often, Pepper warned, Communists adopt "the narrow-minded and ephemeral interests of certain groups" and forget the obedience they owe to the party and the need for discipline according to the principle of democratic centralism. Every militant Communist, in fact, should write on his shield: "My Party, right or wrong, my Party!"[51]

47 He apparently tried to "win the affections" of Clarissa Ware, an attractive CP activist, but was rebuffed because she was already having an affair with both Ruthenberg and Lovestone. Gitlow, *I Confess,* 154; Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 442, fn. 16.

48 Gitlow, *Whole of their Lives,* 110–111.

49 See, for example, the report sent by Pepper, Ruthenberg, and Jakira to the ECCI, March 9, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/201/19–21, reel 13.

50 "Problems of the Party – I: Limits of the United Front," *Worker*, April 28, 1923, 5.

51 "Problems of the Party – III: My Party, Right or Wrong, My Party," *Worker*, May 29, 1923, 5.

In his attempt to refashion the CPUSA, Pepper also elaborated on a message that he had earlier directed at his Hungarian American comrades. In articles and speeches in the spring and summer of 1923, he bemoaned the fact that a majority of the WP's members were not American citizens and did not speak English well or at all. Because the sixteen foreign language federations had their own particular concerns and published daily newspapers in their own language, the WP had a public image of being foreign and out of touch with American society. In fact, "if one were to read the nine dailies and twenty-one weeklies of the Workers' Party carefully, one would get the complete picture of all European countries, but a very incomplete picture of political life in America." The leaders of the WP thus faced a most difficult task in attempting to "keep this modern Babel together in one party."[52] American Communists, Pogány insisted, needed to overcome their insularity and adopt a new slogan: "Be American!" Communists must learn English and take an active part "in the general American life." Only by assimilating into American society could they become a factor in American political life and be able to respond to the call of the poet Walt Whitman "to lead America—to quell America with a great tongue."

Perhaps the most dramatic way in which Pepper tried to demonstrate that the CP was a truly American movement was in an article in *The Worker* in April 1923. Here Pepper reported on the trial of Communists in St. Joseph, Michigan, at which Foster, who had been arrested in the aftermath of the Bridgman Convention, was the chief defendant. This trial, Pepper declared, "afforded the first opportunity to present Communism, in its entity, before the entire American people." Hitherto, the American public had assumed that a Communist was "an ignorant foreigner." The hostile capitalist press had tried to hide "the face of Communism with the mask of the 'East Side Jew' or the 'imported Russian Bolshevik.'" But even the *New York Times* had been forced to admit that Foster, a humble, honest, and militant native-born American, did not fit that stereotype. The trial in Michigan made it clear to American workers that this Irish-American was "at once blood of the blood, flesh of the flesh, of the working masses; a worker himself, a leader of the masses, a trade unionist, a revolutionist, a Marxist, and a Communist." American workers, Pepper proclaimed, will after this trial "know that Foster is their leader," whether he would be set free or sent to prison.[53]

52 Pepper, "Problems of Our Party. IV. Be American!" *Worker*, May 26, 1943, 2.
53 Pepper, "Wm. Z. Foster – Revolutionary Leader," *Worker*, April 14, 1923, 1–2.

Pepper later came to regret that he had heaped such encomiums on a man who would become his chief rival, but at the time his article was considered a masterstroke. Foster was, in fact, an excellent symbol of the Communist movement, for precisely the reasons Pepper outlined in his article. During his trial he received considerable support from a broad range of workers and progressive organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union. In fact, this was one of the more successful attempts by the WP to create a united front. Foster, however, must initially have been ambivalent about Pepper's article, since for tactical reasons he had previously kept his membership in the CPUSA a secret. Thus, at his trial he and his lawyer denied that he was a Communist and insisted that he had attended the Bridgman Convention as an observer rather than as a delegate.[54] Pepper's exposure of Foster's affiliation with the CPUSA did not seem to have any effect on his trial, perhaps because so few Americans took notice of articles in *The Worker*. In any case, Foster apparently did not resent what Pepper had done and in fact for some time remained one of his more loyal supporters.

Not all of Pepper's ideas about ways to "Americanize" the CPUSA could be quickly and easily implemented. It required many years and the rise of a new generation of Communists before the influence and independence of the foreign language federations could be fully curtailed. Nonetheless, many party leaders heeded Pepper's advice and sought to accelerate the process by which members acquired citizenship and cut their ties to "the old country." The rise in the number and importance of native-born members in the mid-1920s is regarded by some historians as one of Pepper's important contributions to the American Communist movement.[55] Years later some CP leaders acknowledged Pepper's role in transforming what was a "romantic sectarian" movement into a full-fledged American political party that "kept abreast of the ever-changing social and economic advancement of the country." In this sense Pepper had "discovered the U.S. for the Communists" and was regarded by some of his admirers as the "Hungarian political Christopher Columbus."[56]

Perhaps Pepper's most important legacy to the CPUSA was the *Daily Worker*. He later claimed, with some justification, that "if anyone is

54 Barrett, *William Z. Foster*, 133–34; Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 192-94; Zumoff, "Communist Party," 161–;62.

55 Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 26.

56 Gitlow, *Whole of their Lives*, 109–10.

personally responsible for the birth of the *Daily Worker*, then it is I."[57] In January 1923, the ECCI had noted the "deplorable fact" that "against some ten foreign language Communist dailies there is not a single English Communist daily in America."[58] Always closely attuned to proclamations emanating from Moscow, Pepper became the earliest and most determined champion of a Communist daily, since the project dovetailed nicely with his ideas about the Americanization of the CP. However, some party leaders, concerned about the strain that the launching of a new daily would place on the time and energy of the WP leadership, were opposed to the idea or suggested it be postponed to a later, more favorable time. For these reasons Pepper's motion to launch a daily paper was defeated three times in the spring of 1923.[59] But he kept pressing the matter and eventually gained the CEC's approval for a fund-raising campaign to supplement a Comintern subsidy. The result of his perseverance was the launching of the *Daily Worker* in January 1924.

Of all the projects and campaigns Pepper sponsored in 1923, the one to which he devoted the greatest and most determined attention was the creation of a Labor Party in which the WP would be the guiding force. For many reasons this turned out to be a quixotic enterprise that did considerable long-term harm to the CPUSA. Along with other prominent Communists of his era, Pepper rejected out of hand any application of the Comintern "line" on the creation of united fronts that would require the CP to negotiate in good faith with the Socialist Party or other progressive organizations. Such a strategy, called the united front "from above" (i.e.,, set up by the leaders of various left-wing parties), was vehemently condemned by the Comintern. In the preferred approach, "from below," the CP would be the driving force in the organization of the united front and would appeal to workers over the heads of their union and party leaders. In some countries where the Communist movement was very weak, such as Great Britain, the Comintern was willing to allow some temporary soluti-

57 Pepper's letter to the editors of the *Daily Worker*, n.d. (but early 1926), RCPUSA, 515/1/441/51-53, reel 28.

58 Letter of ECCI to WP and WP language federations, January 25, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/164/1-3, reel 10.

59 Minutes of CEC meeting, June 21, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/190/16-18, reel 12. John Ballam, who served on the Daily Worker Campaign Committee, later recalled that Pepper "initiated and fought for the creation of a communist daily paper," but some, like Foster, Cannon, and Browder, did not support this effort, which they regarded as an example of Pepper's "putchist methods." Ballam (writing as John Moore) to Zinoviev, April 11, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/297/133-35, reel 19.

ons that combined efforts "from above" and "from below." To an impartial observer it might have seemed that the United States was the one country in which a strict application of the united front "from below" had no chance of success. The CPUSA, in 1923, had a membership at most of fifteen thousand. Its influence in the trade unions and local politics was minimal at best. By contrast, the other likely participants in any united front or mass Labor Party had considerable political clout and support from workers. In the early 1920s most of the approximately six million American workers owed their allegiance either to the AFL, the Socialist Party, or to other progressive organizations. Nearly three million were members of the AFL; the Socialist candidate for president in 1922, Eugene Debs, received nearly a million votes.

Perhaps because they continued to regard the United States as a relatively unpromising place for significant gains by the CP, the Comintern leadership, in 1923, did not seem to offer any specific advice to the WP on how to implement the united front "line." Since American Communists themselves were unsure as how to proceed, Pepper seized the initiative. He was shrewd enough to see that the WP could reap no benefit from a united front policy that required true cooperation with the Socialist Party, let alone the AFL, in forming a mass party for workers. If Pepper and his colleagues had tried to pursue a united front "from above," either they would have been rejected outright by the other left-wing parties or, if they had been allowed to participate, their influence in any Labor Party that might be formed would have been insignificant. Instead Pepper fashioned a policy that he seemed to believe would allow the WP to claim the leadership of a new Labor Party. Having total faith in the inexorable laws of history that Marx had posited, Pepper, like every orthodox Communist, believed that no matter how unpromising the situation at any given time, Communists must persevere because history was on their side. Eventually, the greed of the bourgeoisie and the oppressive and terrorist policies of the capitalists would become so unbearable that American workers would finally see the light and realize that the only solution was a violent revolution guided by the Communist Party.

At WP meetings in the spring of 1923, Pepper elaborated on the strategy for the creation of a united front "from below" that he had first sketched in the pamphlet, *For a Labor Party*. His plan involved cooperation with the only significant workers' organization that had shown a willingness to welcome the WP as a partner. This was the Farmer-Labor Party, which was based in Chicago, and had a membership of over half a million workers, and was headed by John Fitzpatrick, a respected labor leader

who was a pioneer in the attempt to create a unified Labor Party. Deeply disappointed by the failure of the Cleveland convention of October 1922 and determined to make another attempt to build a national party based on farmers and workers, Fitzpatrick and his colleagues in the Farmer-Labor Party announced that they had scheduled "a monster political convention of the workers of America" to be held in July in Chicago. Invitations were issued to every significant Labor Party or organization, including the Workers' Party. Unlike most other leaders on the American Left, Fitzpatrick had been willing to cooperate with Labor organizers who were professed Communists, including William Foster, whom he admired and considered a friend.

In the spring and early summer of 1923, Pepper worked diligently to shape events in such a way that the "Communist vanguard" would play a significant, indeed a leading, role at the Farmer Labor convention in Chicago. With inordinate optimism he predicted that the Chicago convention would create a "genuine Labor Party" that would have "half a million members at the very start" and would surely "take away millions of workers' votes from the capitalist parties."[60] Here was an opportunity for implementing a united front "from below" and "splintering" those workers' parties that had previously condemned the CPUSA. Pepper was probably delighted when the SP announced that it would not send delegates to the Chicago convention because they regarded the attempt to form a national Labor Party as premature and they were averse to cooperating with the WP.[61] This merely gave him more ammunition for his campaign to "unmask" the Socialist Party and recruit its more radical members. In numerous articles and several pamphlets, Pepper, in the three months leading up to the July convention, used abusive language to vilify and ridicule the Socialist Party. It was, he asserted, a "shilly-shally party" that was mired in "confusion and vacillation" and had no interest in the building of a mass Labor Party. Because most of its leaders had abandoned the commitment to socialism, their party had become "the reprehensible ally of the Gompers bureaucracy," "the worst calumniator of the Communists," and "the most deceitful slanderer of Soviet Russia."[62]

As part of his campaign to "splinter" the SP, Pepper attempted to open a dialogue with those few prominent Socialists who had voiced a willing-

60 Pepper, *For a Labor Party*.

61 Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, 278–79.

62 Pepper, "Problems of the Party – II," *Worker*, May 12, 1923, 1; Pepper, *Underground Radicalism*, 10–11.

ness to work with Communists in a broad labor coalition. But such appeals for example, to Eugene Debs and Sinclair Lewis, proved fruitless, in part because Pepper, though acknowledging their good sense in approving cooperation with the Workers' Party, could not resist lecturing them for being otherwise lacking in revolutionary fervor.[63] Although Pepper's propaganda efforts may have lured to the Communist side a few of the most radical and disaffected members of the AFL or Socialist Party, such successes had to be weighed against the fact that Pepper's fiery rhetoric tended to deepen the apprehension that many on the Left felt when there was talk of drawing the Communists into a mass Labor Party. Pepper's dilemma was that he could not easily claim that the SP was insufficiently Marxist and revolutionary without conceding that the WP was an orthodox Communist Party that allied itself closely to the Comintern and Soviet Russia. For this reason Pepper and his colleagues strove to use restraint and avoid language that would inflame the critics of the CPUSA.[64] Even so, in the prelude to the "monster convention" in Chicago Pepper felt it necessary on several occasions to point out that the WP aimed for "the elimination of the capitalists" and the use of force to establish a "dictatorship of the proletariat." Such language was worrisome to those on the Left, such as Fitzpatrick, who were seeking to forge some sort of working relationship with the WP. Fitzpatrick responded indirectly to Pepper by warning the WP leadership that the great majority of American workers rejected "imported programs" and preferred the "home-grown variety."[65]

Although no one in the WP leadership openly raised concerns about Pepper's strategy, and the proposals he made in April and May were unanimously approved by the CEC,[66] there were nonetheless some who had private doubts and misgivings. There was growing unease about the projected alliance with the Farmer-Labor Party among certain independent

63 Pepper's "Discussion with Upton Sinclair" appeared in "Problems of the Party – II," *Worker*, May 12, 1923, 1, 4. His "open letter" to Debs was in *Underground Radicalism*. Neither Lewis nor Debs deigned to respond to Pepper's overtures.

64 In a published statement, probably composed by Pepper, the ultimate purpose of the proposed Labor Party was said to be the replacement of the existing American government with one "springing out of the workers' organizations." "Proposed Program of the Labor Party. Submitted by the Workers' Party of America," undated (probably May or June 1923), RCPUSA, 515/1/189, reel 12.

65 Pepper, "Socialist Party Convention Rejects the United Front," *Worker*, June 12, 1923, 4; Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 180–81; Draper, *American Communism*, 39–41.

66 At a CEC meeting on May 6, 1923, Pepper's proposal to move forward with the Labor Party campaign was approved unanimously. RCPUSA, 515/1/190/13, reel 12.

Party thinkers, like Cannon, and among the midwestern trade unionists, such as Earl Browder and Arne Swabek. Some, including Foster, were skeptical of the wisdom of working so closely with poor farmers, the fear being that once prosperous times returned to the countryside, the farmers would disown any radical projects and return to their traditional conservative attitudes. Such concerns were heightened by the results of a preliminary meeting of representatives of the WP and the FLP in May. At the meeting Fitzpatrick gave a friendly but blunt warning: "Let's get the record straight—we are willing to go along, but we think you Communists should occupy a back seat in this affair." A few weeks later Fitzpatrick, who had been made even more apprehensive upon learning of the planned boycott of the Chicago convention by the Socialist Party, the AFL, and most large labor unions, proposed to the WP leadership a change of plan. Instead of proceeding immediately to the formation of a Labor Party, the convention should instead set up a committee to make further preparations and build additional support for the project.[67]

Because he was convinced that the WP was on the verge of a major breakthrough, Pepper reacted with outrage to the suggestions that plans for the mass Labor Party be delayed and that the Communists should "take a back seat" in the project. He saw no reason to compromise, even if this meant a break with Fitzpatrick. Others, however, including Ruthenberg and Foster, were fearful of alienating Fitzpatrick and were inclined to take his advice and proceed more slowly. The issue was debated at a key meeting of the CEC on June 21, 1923.[68] Pepper presented a proposal that rejected Fitzpatrick's recent suggestions and called for a full implementation of the original plan. The purpose of the Chicago convention would thus continue to be the creation of a mass Labor Party to be called the Federated Farmer-Labor Party (FFLP) and the election of a national executive committee to run the new organization. The WP would make an intensive effort to ensure that it was well represented at the convention. Ruthenberg, who had never before opposed Pepper on any substantive question, now offered some cautiously worded dissent.[69] He proposed a slower implementation of Pepper's plan, arguing that more time was needed to work-out a satisfactory relationship with Fitzpatrick. Foster, who remained cau-

67 Draper, *American Communism*, 41.

68 Minutes of CEC meeting, June 21, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/190/16–18, reel 12.

69 In taking this stand Ruthenberg may have been influenced by a letter from Cannon, who, with considerable prescience, warned of an ugly backlash should the WP succeed in stacking the Chicago convention and manipulating the results.

tiously optimistic about the partnership with Fitzpatrick, also suggested it would be best to move slowly until more national unions agreed to attend the Chicago convention. However, after extended discussion Pepper's proposal was approved with only three dissenting votes (Ruthenberg, Foster, and Katterfeld). Pepper's position on several other important issues also prevailed at this key meeting of the CEC. His proposal for setting a November deadline for the launching of a daily Communist newspaper was approved, and Ruthenberg's proposal to move the WP national headquarters from New York to Chicago, which Pepper opposed, was defeated.[70]

In the aftermath of the CEC meeting, Ruthenberg and Foster, adhering to party discipline, set to work to help implement the plan Pepper had outlined. However, it seemed likely to Pepper that others, particularly supporters of Foster in the Midwest, would pose a challenge to his leadership. That he was prepared to retaliate quickly against any comrades who might sabotage his plans is shown by his conduct at a PolCom meeting later in June. Having arrived late for the meeting, Pepper discovered that a steering committee, to include himself, Ruthenberg, and four others, had already been elected to coordinate the WP's activity at the July 3 convention. When he was told who was on the committee, Pepper histrionically declared that he would refuse to serve on such a committee, since several of its members were in fact "antagonistic to the policy approved by the CEC." He was referring, apparently, to Earl Browder, J. Louis Engdahl, and Alexander Bittelman. Such was Pepper's aura of authority that the members of the PolCom quickly rescinded their previous decision and elected a new steering committee in which the three individuals unacceptable to Pepper were replaced.[71] Even this did not completely satisfy Pepper. He then insisted that those midwestern trade unionists who were hostile to the CEC decisions should not be delegates to the Chicago convention. As a result Browder and several other like-minded Communists were barred from attending.

In retrospect, June 1923 represented the acme of Pepper's rule over the WP as "czar and commissar." Two of the most respected leaders of the Communist movement, Ruthenberg and Foster, had expressed opposition to his plan for building a Labor Party, but Pepper had prevailed. A solid majority of the CEC was apparently willing to follow his lead and submit

70 Minutes of CEC meeting, June 21, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/190/16–18, reel 12. See also Draper, *American Communism*, 41–42.

71 Minutes of PolCom meeting, June 27, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/197/34–35, reel 12.

to his decisions on personnel and strategy. He had become what one historian would call the "de facto leader of American Communism."[72]

Whether he would be able to cling to this exalted position depended, of course, on the outcome of his grand plans for the FFLP. Would the "monster Chicago convention" be a great triumph for the Communist movement? Or, as a few in the WP privately worried, would Pepper's plan prove to be a "get rich quick" scheme and a "resounding fiasco" that resulted in disaster?[73]

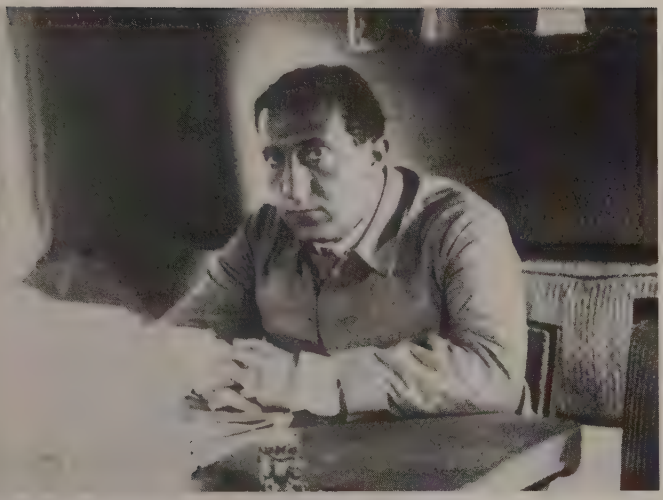
72 Draper, *American Communism*, 61.
73 Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 79.

József Pogány in 1919

Pogány, head of the Soldiers' Council, delivers a speech to soldiers leaving for the frontier at Józsefváros railway station, February 5, 1919 (courtesy of Irina Pogány)

József Pogány (1), Zsigmond Kunfi (2)
and Béla Kun (3) leave the Party Congress in 1919
(© Getty Images)

Pogány on a train (courtesy of Irina Pogány)



Pogány standing with Károlyi during a speech on land distribution, 1919 (courtesy of Irina Pogány)

Pogány speaks, caricature by Alajos Dezső, 1919

CHAPTER 6
"Pepperism" in America

He [Pepper] shoved me here...
he shoved me there.
He stepped all over me.
I went black and blue,
I was sore as hell.
But I waited, waited, waited,
And did not have the guts to lead a fight
Till Foster took the cudgel up,
Till Foster led the row.
"MEDITATION, A MONOLOGUE,"
BY JAMES CANNON

Of the hundreds of delegates who were to attend the "monster convention" scheduled to begin on July 3, 1923, in Chicago, only ten were officially allocated to the Workers' Party. But Pepper, who as an organizer in Hungary and Germany, had learned certain innovative methods for artificially enhancing the influence of the Communist movement, was confident that with proper planning the Workers' Party would be able to play the leading role in the transformation of the FLP into a mass Labor Party dominated by the CP. What the Communists lacked in numbers would be compensated for by discipline, ingenuity, and a bit of chicanery. In studying the Farmer-Labor Party leaflet announcing the calling of the convention, Pepper identified a loophole that the Communists could take advantage of. In order that the "rank-and-file" would be fully represented, local labor and farm organizations, even small ones, had been encouraged to send accredited delegates. To take advantage of this opportunity, the CEC, at Pepper's urging, encouraged members throughout the country to volunteer to serve as delegates to the convention on behalf of their union or fraternal organization.[1] These volunteers would receive generous travel funding, which was made possible by substantial subsidies that the Comintern was providing. Since in many cases there were no other members of such organizations who were interested in taking on this responsibility, Communists arrived at the convention in numbers greatly disproportionate to

1 Minutes of the CEC meeting of June 21, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/190/16–18, reel 12.

their actual influence at the local level. Furthermore, WP members were creative in locating, and even in some cases inventing, organizations that they could claim to represent. In this way such fictitious or newly created groups as the Romanian Progressive Club, the Philadelphia United Workingmen Singers, the Lithuanian Workers' Literature Society, and two obscure organizations from Bartlesville, Oklahoma, supposedly authorized Communists to act on their behalf. As a result, of the approximately 550 delegates who arrived in Chicago, about 190 were Communists and a significant portion of the rest were not particularly hostile to the ideology of the Workers' Party.[2]

Fearful that they were about to lose control of their own convention, Fitzpatrick and his colleagues made futile attempts to stop the momentum of the Communists. They discovered, however, that the majority of those who had made their way to Chicago, although not necessarily ready to ally completely with the Communists, were determined to create a new Labor Party and were unsympathetic to Fitzpatrick's belated call for caution and further planning. On the second day of the convention, the caucus system Pepper had helped set up, with runners facilitating communication between ten-man groups headed by captains, was highly effective in maintaining WP discipline and winning over delegates. The enthusiasm and determination of the WP contingent proved to be contagious, and when Ruthenberg put forward a proposal for the immediate organization of the new party, the FFLP, it was approved despite strenuous opposition from the FLP leadership.

Though euphoric in victory, Pepper and Ruthenberg tried in various ways to appease Fitzpatrick, for example, by ensuring that neither in the party platform nor in the convention speeches was their any revolutionary rhetoric that would cause alarm on the non-Communist Left.[3] However, no one familiar with the contemporary American labor scene, least of all Fitzpatrick, was taken in by these attempts to disguise what had happened. Communists formed a solid majority of the executive committee of the FFLP, and the key position of national secretary was given to Joseph Manley, a Pepper loyalist (and also Foster's son-in-law). The journal of the FLP was taken over and renamed. Fitzpatrick was deeply embittered by what he regarded as the perfidious and ruthless conduct of the WP leader-

2 Draper, *American Communism*, 44; 450, fn. 38.

3 Ibid., Draper, 47–48. Pepper offered his own tendentious account of the convention, including the many concessions that the WP allegedly made to the FLP, in his long report to the ECCI of October 2, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/199/46–80, reel 12.

ship. He angrily withdrew from the Chicago convention and declared that the WP had "killed the Farmer-Labor Party." What the Communists have done, he insisted, was "on the level of a man being invited to your house as a guest and then once in the house seizing you by the throat and kicking you out the door." Representatives of the FLP complained that the Communists in the WP did not know how to "behave themselves" and were not the kind of people that others could live with "in peace and harmony."[4]

Accustomed to being attacked by political rivals in even more truculent language than that employed by Fitzpatrick and his colleagues, Pepper was unperturbed by these comments, which he branded as the usual complaints of those who had lost out in a political struggle. What is more surprising is that Foster and Ruthenberg, who before July 3 had advocated a cautious approach that would ease Fitzpatrick's concerns, were carried away in the enthusiasm over the apparent success of Pepper's experiment. Foster was dazzled by the highly disciplined and efficient operation of the WP at the convention and the "tremendous outburst of militancy and enthusiasm" among the delegates. In his exuberance Foster declared that the creation of the FFLP was a "landmark in the history of the working class" and that the "hesitant and undecided" Fitzpatrick had in the end betrayed the labor movement.[5] Ruthenberg also seemed convinced that the FFLP was an authentic mass Labor Party that truly represented the interests of over six hundred thousand workers. In late July he reported to the ECCI that the "tactic of the united front has achieved a very important victory" and that "the overwhelming majority of the party stands solidly behind the Central Executive Committee."[6] Ruthenberg's confidence in Pepper's political genius was apparently renewed and even strengthened.

As the Chicago convention came to an end on July 5, Pepper was in an exultant mood. Like the proud parent of a newborn child, he walked about the convention hall with a beaming smile, shaking hands, and accepting

4 "The F.L.P. Convention," *New Majority*, July 21, 1923, vol. 10, no. 3, p. 4. See also Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, 283.

5 Foster, "Federated Farmer-Labor Party," http://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/1923/08/0800-foster-theffip.pdf, accessed on December 12, 2010. See also Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 199; and Barrett, *William Z. Foster*, 138. Among his colleagues, Foster was equally exuberant, declaring that "our party won the biggest victory in its life at the Chicago convention." Report of Ruthenberg and Pepper to ECCI, late July 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/199/101–14, reel 12.

6 Report of Ruthenberg and Pepper to ECCI, late July 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/199/101–14, reel 12.

congratulations.[7] In the numerous articles he wrote over the following weeks he used the most extravagant language in describing the significance of the FFLP. What had happened in Chicago was nothing less than the "declaration of independence of the American working class" and the beginning of the "Third American Revolution."[8] The American worker had grasped the initiative and was now the "hero of the political stage." The old capitalist parties, the Republicans and Democrats, presented a picture of "chaos and disintegration," while the new mass Labor Party, the FFLP, was "advancing with seven league strides" and was poised to fill the political vacuum. Responding to the growing criticisms from others on the American Left, Pepper insisted that it was "a ridiculous lie to assert that the Federated Farmer-Labor Party is nothing but a new name for the Workers' Party." The FFLP was, to be sure, "a militant revolutionary party," but it was not a Communist Party and its members were not for the most part advocates of the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Pepper conceded that the Workers' Party had been deeply involved, as a kind of midwife, in the establishment of the FFLP and it would in the future be "a driving force within the new party" so that it would be able to "serve the exploited workers and farmers ... better and on an even greater front." But this had become necessary because Fitzpatrick and his colleagues had played a "sorry role" at the Chicago convention. They had good intentions, Pepper concluded, but "the road to revolution is paved with the political corpses of well-intentioned leaders."[9]

For several weeks the leaders and members of the WP basked in the glory of what they believed to be the great political triumph engineered by Pepper. At first only a few dissident voices were heard from those who had already clashed with Pepper and who now insisted on a more realistic evaluation of the FFLP. Browder was so disgusted by the turn of events that at a Chicago meeting of WP leaders he denounced Pepper as a trouble-

7 Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 186. Alex Bittelman, later to become one of Pepper's bitterest enemies, was in a "triumphant" mood and warmly congratulated Pepper on having "scored a great victory." Bittelman's unpublished memoir, "Things I Have Learned," 403.

8 Pepper, "First Mass Party of American Workers and Farmers," *Worker*, July 14, 1923, 3. This article also appeared, with minor changes, in the official newspaper of the Comintern, *Inprecorr* 3, no. 53 (31): 552–54. This was the first of many articles that Pepper would publish in *Inprecorr* in the 1920s.

9 Pepper's commentary on the importance of the FFLP is found in "Important Task of the Workers' Party at the Historical July 3 Convention in Chicago," *Worker*, July 7, 1923, 1; "Slogan of Workers' and Farmers' Government," *Worker*, August 4, 1923, 3; "Declaration of Independence of the American Working Class," *The Liberator*, July 1923, 8–9; "Workers' Party and the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, *The Liberator*, August 1923, 10–11.

maker who should be asked to return to Moscow. Pepper immediately brushed aside such criticisms, claiming that they came from "inexperienced comrades" who did not properly understand the dynamics of revolutionary situations. But other WP leaders soon had good reason for concern. By early August it was becoming clear that Fitzpatrick's revulsion for the WP was spreading quickly to other unions and political organizations of the Left. Having seen his flirtation with the Communists lead to disaster, Fitzpatrick now drew closer to Gompers and the AFL and warned against any cooperation with the FFLP, which he accused of being under the direct control of Moscow. Representatives of many labor groups ridiculed the idea that the Chicago convention represented the beginning of the "third American revolution." Most shared the view expressed in the headline of a St. Louis labor newspaper: "Workers' Party Captures Itself and Adopts a New Name."[10] As a result the party that, according to Pepper and Ruthenberg, had the support of over six hundred thousand workers quickly crumbled like a house of cards.[11] Most unions repudiated the action of their delegates at the Chicago convention and expelled members who were known to be Communists. Those local unions in which Communists had gained significant influence were broken up or merged into larger units. Many Communists at the local level, like Dunne, blamed the WP leadership in New York for the debacle: "We have alienated a lot of support to which we were entitled, and are now completely isolated."[12]

Stunned by these developments, and fearful that that his carefully constructed relationship with a range of non-Communist labor organizers in the Midwest was being destroyed, Foster now began to rue that he had been swept away by the stirring atmosphere of the Chicago convention. But any attempt to dissociate himself from Pepper's grand experiment would be difficult, given the firm public statements of support for the FFLP he had made only weeks earlier. He concluded that if he was to mount a successful challenge of Pepper's leadership, he needed support from an independent-minded individual with high standing in the Communist movement. Some of his midwestern colleagues, such as Browder and Swabek, were already under attack from Pepper and did not have sufficient stature to hold their own. However, to his great satisfaction

10 Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, 284–85.

11 Scott Nearing, a radical writer sympathetic to Communism, offered a far lower, and more accurate, estimate of FFLP membership: "I doubt whether he [Pepper] has 5,000 that he can rely on." "An Open Letter to William Z. Foster," *Daily Worker*, May 10, 1924, section 2, p. 5.

12 Cited in Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 189.

Foster did find a suitable collaborator in Cannon, who had spent the last half of 1922 and early 1923 in Moscow as the CPUSA representative to the Comintern. Upon his return to the United States Cannon had become a member of the CEC but had spent much of his time crisscrossing the country on a lecture tour for the WP. Thus, he at first had few direct encounters with Pepper and, as a perceptive observer and shrewd analyst, he took with a grain of salt the suggestion of some of his colleagues that this Hungarian Communist was a political genius who was in the country as a representative of the Comintern.

Cannon could see that Pepper was indeed a man of exceptional qualities and abilities. He later conceded that he was an "orator of dazzling facility" who had won for himself a "fanatical following" among many American Communists. Moreover, he clearly was a leader who could get things done quickly and overcome all "natural obstacles." In that respect, he seemed "more American than any hustler or corner-cutter" he had ever known. Pepper was, so Cannon later recalled, a "manipulator deluxe" who did not feel himself bound by the rules that acted as restraints on "ordinary mortals."[13] What concerned Cannon were not only the devious methods Pepper employed but also his at times inadequate, and even perverse, understanding of American social and political realities. Cannon believed that his boast that the FFLP was the beginning of the "third American revolution" was clearly a preposterous exaggeration. Cannon was also keenly aware of the fact that the Communists had as yet little influence among workers and it was unrealistic to think that they could lead a mass Labor Party "without the cooperation of a substantial wing of the trade union bureaucracy." For this reason he had privately advised Ruthenberg in May 1923 of his concerns and by July was convinced that the creation of the FFLP was a "big mistake."[14]

What truly perplexed Cannon was the fact that such otherwise level-headed WP leaders as Foster and Ruthenberg had supported Pepper so enthusiastically in his misguided adventure. In an extended conversation in late July 1923, Cannon asked Foster how he could have been deceived by the "fantasies" that Pepper had peddled. Foster at first tried to defend the current CEC interpretation of the situation, as he had done in recent articles, but soon admitted that he had been having doubts and "second thoughts." Sensing that he could speak freely to Cannon, and perhaps beginning to see him as a useful ally, Foster finally admitted that he,

13 Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 76–77.

14 Ibid., 86; Draper, *American Communism*, 78–79.

Ruthenberg, and others had got swept up by the "enthusiasm of the moment" at the Chicago convention. He had allowed himself to be carried away and convinced against his "will and better judgment." As a result Fitzpatrick were being driven into the arms of Gompers and the AFL. Unfortunately, the "others in New York," by which he meant Pepper, Ruthenberg, and their supporters, were "still living in a fool's paradise" and unless something was done "we will soon fritter away all the gains of our trade union group up to now." Once they had determined that they were in fundamental agreement about the problems confronting the WP, Cannon and Foster began to plan a course of action to eradicate from the WP the corrosive influences of "pepperism." This meant, as Cannon later put it, that "the dictatorial regime of Pepper had to be overthrown."[15]

In the first few weeks after the Chicago convention Pepper, exultant in victory, heaped scorn on those few Communists who dared to voice even muted opposition to the FFLP and the course that he had plotted for the WP. He did not seem concerned that such dissidents as Browder, Alfred Wagenknecht, and Dunne might try to mount a serious challenge to his leadership, since they were politically inexperienced and without sufficient stature in the WP.[16] Before long, however, he began to sense that a more formidable opposition was beginning to coalesce. At the July 20 meeting of the CEC the proposal for moving the WP's headquarters from New York to Chicago was once again discussed. A month earlier Pepper had been successful in opposing the idea, but this time he found himself on the losing side of a ten-to-seven vote.[17] This defeat had both practical and symbolic importance for Pepper. Throughout 1923 his office in Washington Heights had served as the hub of the WP's political activity. Now he and his closest collaborators (Ruthenberg, Lovestone, and Bedacht) would not only have to make the inconvenient journey to Chicago for meetings, but would be forced to find lodging for those occasions when a longer stay in the nation's "second city" was required.[18] But the shift to Chicago had other broad implications. Those who were mounting the challenge to "pepperism" were largely from the Midwest and felt a certain animosity

15 Ibid., 87–89. See also Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 187–88; Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 205–6; Barrett, *William Z. Foster*, 139.

16 Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 186.

17 Minutes of CEC meeting, July 20, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/190/119-20, reel 12. It is significant that Ruthenberg, seeking to dampen any factional tendencies, joined Foster in supporting the move to Chicago.

18 As a cost-saving measure Pepper and Bedacht usually shared a room when staying in Chicago. Czóbel Memoir, 38.

toward the leadership in New York, and Pepper in particular, as European-style intellectuals and theorists who had little or no actual contact with American workers. The Communist movement could not survive if it continued to be dominated by intellectuals who, in Cannon's words, "knew nothing of the labor movement and had no roots in American reality." By contrast, those Communists who considered Chicago their base, like Foster, Cannon, and Browder, tended to be experienced trade unionists who had been born in the United States. For the WP rank-and-file the transfer of party headquarters to Chicago might well have been understood as a shift toward "an American-proletarian-trade union orientation."[19]

It was in mid-August that Pepper first came to the full realization that the challenge from Foster and Cannon was indeed serious. At a PolCom meeting on August 22, Foster gave a lengthy report on the FFLP in which he proposed certain changes in WP policy. He argued that it would be best to view the FFLP "as an instrument for the formation of a labor party" rather than a Labor Party itself. Although Foster did not criticize Pepper directly, all present must have realized that what he was proposing was a repudiation of the WP program that Pepper had been promulgating over for the past few months. Certainly Pepper understood the purport of Foster's words, for he responded immediately by declaring that "he disagreed with every word Comrade Foster had said." He dismissed Foster's suggestion that the FFLP be viewed as a kind of "propaganda organization" and insisted that the WP should continue to secure the affiliation of state labor unions. All of this, he declared, would have to be thrashed out in a CEC meeting, and in case of disagreement the matter should be referred to the ECCI in Moscow.[20]

By suggesting that the Comintern should be the final arbiter of any disputes in the CPUSA, Pepper was subtly reminding those present that he was presumably in a better position than any American Communist to divine the intentions of the ECCI. No doubt Pepper believed that his application of united front tactics would meet with approval in Moscow because at the recently concluded third plenum of the ECCI, Zinoviev had reaffirmed the idea that the toppling of capitalist governments would require a joint effort by "all the forces of the workers and the farmers." In fact, he had singled out the WP in the Untied States for its creative application of the slogan "workers' and farmers' government."[21] Thus, Pepper

19 Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 90.

20 Minutes of PolCom meeting, August 2, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/197/49–57, reel 12.

21 Report of Israel Amter, August 1, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/212/5–6, reel 12.

seemed confident that the aura of authority he had been able to create since his arrival in America would enable him to forestall any challenge and to retain the support of a majority of WP leaders. Still, he would take no chances and whenever possible would make things difficult for his opponents by removing those whom he considered "troublemakers" from important positions. Earlier in 1923 he had on several occasions succeeded in placing potential rivals on committees or assignments that reduced their ability to play a major role in policymaking. It was a sign of his diminished authority that this strategy now sometimes met resistance. Thus, his attempt to have Cannon placed on the Organization Committee rather than on the PolCom failed to win approval of the CEC.[22]

One sign of Pepper's growing distress in the late summer of 1923 were occasional petulant outbursts at party meetings in which he offered to resign as secretary of the PolCom if his comrades no longer trusted him. But his motions along these lines were routinely voted down, as he no doubt anticipated, although they did draw support from his most embittered opponents.[23] Though Pepper could hardly have failed to notice that the FFLP was not garnering the support he had so exuberantly predicted, he was naturally loathe to admit this. Instead, as one historian has so aptly put it, he "tried to bluff his way out by brazenly converting every Communist defeat into a triumphal victory."[24] Ruthenberg, though he tried to play a conciliatory role in the growing factional dispute, nonetheless joined Pepper in trying to put the best face on a policy that the dissidents were calling a disaster. At the August 24 CEC meeting they introduced a resolution, termed the *Pepper-Ruthenberg theses*, that sought to explain away the backlash against the WP since the Chicago convention and to project a brighter future for the FFLP. By year's end, the resolution stated with Pepper's typical braggadocio, that the FFLP would attract 250,000 workers and 50,000–80,000 farmers. Depending on the course of events, this would be a suitable nucleus for either "a mass party of labor" or, alternatively, a "mass Communist Party." This represented a concession of sorts to the opposition, since it implied that the FFLP might be jettisoned if "situations arise in which the interests of the Workers' Party conflict

22 Minutes of CEC meeting of August 24, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/190/21–22, reel 12; Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 88.

23 Thus, the only two votes for such a motion at a November 13 meeting of the CEC were cast by Browder and Pepper himself. RCPUSA, 515/1/190/27–30, reel 12.

24 Draper, *American Communism*, 79. For a good example of Pepper's attempt to depict his failing policy as a "triumphal victory," see his long report to the ECCI dated October 2, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/199/46–80, reel 12.

with the goal of the formation of the Labor Party." The Pepper-Ruthenberg theses were thereupon approved in a nine-to-five vote.[25]

The fact that Pepper still enjoyed the support of a strong majority of the CEC did not deter Cannon, who now sought to take the fight into the open. Pepper was furious when he learned that Cannon proposed to write a five-part series of articles on the state of the WP and its prospects for the future. He no doubt assumed that Cannon would be critical of his leadership, but in addition he may have regarded it as presumptuous on the part of his rival, for he, Pepper, had over the past year arrogated to himself the writing of such sweeping assessments of American communism. Pepper therefore raised the matter at a PolCom meeting at which Cannon was present. Such articles, Pepper argued, must not be written without the consent of the Political Committee, by which he presumably meant without his consent.[26] Cannon bristled at Pepper's interference: as he later put it, he was "sore as hell" and was not going to allow Pepper to step "all over me."[27] He thus found a way around Pepper's objections. When the five-part series appeared, Pepper's fears proved justified. Although Cannon's interpretation of the role of Communists in a mass Labor Party was in fact similar in many ways to that advanced by Pepper, Cannon made it clear that he regarded the WP's political strategy at the Chicago convention as badly misguided. It must have been clear to readers of *The Worker* that the serious problems he identified could only be attributed to Pepper. Cannon noted that while the united front against the capitalists remained merely a "propaganda slogan," the "united front against the Communists" had become a reality. In fact, he declared with a hint of sarcasm, "we seem to be organizing our enemies faster than we are organizing our friends." Cannon was probably correct in his belief that his articles "were understood by everybody as an indirect criticism of the prevailing party policy" and "encouraged a lot of other people to express themselves along the same lines."[28]

25 Minutes of CEC meeting of August 24, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/ 190/121–22, reel 12. See also Draper, *American Communism*, 80–81.

26 Minutes of Political and Organization Committee, August 2, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/ 197/49–57, reel 12.

27 RCPUSA, 515/1/692/15-16, reel 49. This comes from the satiric poem composed by Cannon in 1926 that is found at the beginning of this chapter.

28 Cannon's articles, entitled "Workers' Party Today – And Tomorrow," which appeared between August 25 and September 22, 1923, are found in *James P. Cannon and the Early Years*, 127–49. See also Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 191–92.

By September 1923, the factional struggle was in full swing, and both sides thought it wise to make an appeal to the Comintern.[29] But no definitive response was to come from Moscow for many months. Meanwhile the efforts of the WP leaders to implement the plans outlined in the "August theses" made little headway, for the anti-Communist sentiment in labor circles continued to intensify. In their frustration Ruthenberg and Pepper attributed the lack of success to dissidents in the party who secretly opposed the August theses. Particular blame was placed on the trade unionists, who, it was asserted, lacked confidence and were afraid of losing their former non-Communist allies in the labor camp. These skeptical comrades were in effect sabotaging the will of the majority of the WP.[30] Pepper complained in *The Worker* that some comrades "identify the party too closely with the trade unions, and if not in their theory, yet in their practice, they wish the party would not be a political party, but simply a left wing of the trade union movement."[31]

In the early autumn of 1923, Pepper seemed truly under siege, facing threats from a number of quarters.[32] Taking their cue from Browder, other dissidents were emboldened to suggest that the best solution to the current difficulties of the WP would be for Pepper to return to Russia. Moreover, the FBI had intensified its search for the elusive Hungarian, whom J. Edgar Hoover, the agency's director, described as "the directing spirit of the communist movement in this country today."[33] On several occasions it was only through luck or the timely intervention of his colleagues that Pepper evaded the FBI dragnet.[34] An additional problem for Pogány was posed by his wife Irén, whose situation in Moscow was becoming dire. She complained to the CPUSA representative to the Comintern, Amter, that she had not heard from her husband in a year. She had no job, was with-

29 Foster put forward his case in a letter of September 10, and Pepper countered on October 3, with a thirty-five-page missive, which was cosigned by Abram Jakira. RCPUSA, 515/1/199/46–80, reel 12. The gist of Pepper's argument was that Foster's views were "in direct contradiction of all the facts."

30 Draper, *American Communism*, 81.

31 *Worker*, September 8, 1923, 1.

32 There were particularly acrimonious exchanges between Pepper and his critics at the PolCom meeting of September 19, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/197/68–77, reel 12.

33 Hoover's conclusions in report of October 13, 1923, in Pogány FBI File.

34 On one occasion Pepper escaped only because Ruthenberg ran to meet a streetcar and pulled him off one block before the stop where FBI agents were waiting to arrest him. Czóbel Memoir, 37. For details on another close call, see Al Schaap's letter of July 18, 1925 to Pepper, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

out means, and had health problems. She demanded to know if and when he was planning on returning to Moscow. If he had no such plans, she was thinking of "going to America to be with him."[35]

Beset by such pressing political and personal problems, Pepper reacted as he had done in similar circumstances during the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Like a desperate gambler hoping to recover his money by doubling his bet, he began to resort to even more extravagant, indeed messianic and mystical, language and proclamations. Thus he assured readers of the *International Press Correspondence* that the laboring masses of the United States regarded the Communists as their leaders, and "they expect us to show them the best ways and means of fighting against... the capitalist government," which was on the verge of collapse. Indigent farmers were being stirred to action and even the formerly docile "eight million Negroes in the south" were "making an unarmed Spartacus uprising."[36] Pepper's articles in *The Worker* in this period were pervaded with similar sensationalism. Clearly he was seeking to divert attention from the fiasco of the FFLP by launching extreme attacks on the capitalist government and by making bold predictions of imminent Communist advances. The content of these articles was suggested by the blaring headlines: "Coolidge Restores the State of War!" and "Coolidge's World Conspiracy!"

Pepper's growing desperation was perhaps best reflected in a remarkable article he wrote for *The Liberator* in September. Here he suddenly proposed yet another grand project that would supposedly enable the WP to escape its isolation and join a vibrant united front movement. As a keen student of American third-party movements, Pepper's interest was piqued by the success of Senator Robert La Follette and the Progressive Party. By late 1923 the labor movement seemed to be lining up solidly behind La Follette, who was poised to launch a campaign for the presidency in 1924. Only months earlier Pepper had condemned the Socialist Party for being "an open ally of bourgeois political leaders of the La Follette type."[37] Now, however, he had nothing but praise for the progressive leader from Wisconsin, who, he declared, was the herald of America's "third revolution." Conveniently forgetting that only two months earlier he had proclaimed that the FFLP was the first step toward the "third American revolution,"

35 Report of Israel Amter, October 14, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/176/90-93, reel 11. Amter used a number code to refer to the name of the person in question, but it is clear from the context that his unhappy visitor was Pepper's wife.

36 Pepper, "Workers' Party at a Turning Point," *Inprecorr*, September 27, 1923, vol. 3, no. 62, 698–99.

37 Pepper, *Underground Radicalism*, 11.

Pepper offered a gushing tribute to the "La Follette revolution": "It will contain elements of the French Revolution and the Russian Kerensky Revolution. In its ideology it will have elements of Jeffersonianism, Danish cooperatives, Ku Klux Klan and Bolshevism." Pepper conceded that the Progressive movement of La Follette was based on "the well-to-do and exploited farmers, small businessmen and workers," and that the proletariat "as a class" would not be able at first to play an independent role. He held out the promise, however, that after the victory of the "La Follette revolution" the opportunity would come for the workers and exploited farmers to foment the "fourth American revolution, the period of the proletarian revolution."[38] At no point did Pepper seem to consider the possibility that La Follette might reject the proffered aid of the Communists.

It is a reflection of the growing incoherence of Communist policy in this period that Pepper's grandiose project to form a new united front based on the La Follette movement was generally well received by his colleagues, even by Cannon and Foster. One would have thought that Pepper's opponents, who had been decrying his propensity for arcane theories and political "adventurism," would have been wary of yet another one of his "get rich schemes." But so many of America's labor and left-wing groups were jumping on the La Follette bandwagon that the Communists perhaps began to fear that unless they joined, the isolation of the WP would become even more pronounced.[39] Pepper's new project may even have helped to facilitate a temporary compromise between the two warring factions in the WP. The debate over the fate of the FFLP reached a crescendo at a meeting of the CEC in early November. To bolster their position Cannon and Foster prepared a long report, entitled "Statement on Our Labor Party Policy," in which they recapitulated and strengthened the arguments that they had been presenting privately and in Cannon's series of articles. The report was fiercely critical of "the false policy of the CEC" and Pepper's disastrous FFLP experiment, which was based on "an overestimation of the tempo of revolutionary developments" and on "a greatly exaggerated idea of the present strength of the Communist forces." Cannon and Foster bemoaned the fact that "our alliance with the progressives has been broken" and that the policy of the CEC "has entrenched the reactionaries and isolated the Communists." Furthermore, the claim that the FFLP was a rapidly growing mass party of six hundred thousand members had "absolutely no foundation in fact." All evidence suggested that at

38 Pepper, "Facing the Third American Revolution" *The Liberator*, September 1923, 12.
39 Draper, *American Communism*, 82–83.

the local level the FFLP had had no success whatsoever and it was time for the CEC to recognize this reality and abandon the project.[40]

Perhaps because he had convinced himself that the idea of joining forces with the La Follette movement now offered the best way to promote the interests of the WP and bolster his own authority, Pepper was in a relatively conciliatory mood at the CEC meeting of November 5–6. He and Ruthenberg put forward a new "thesis" in which they acknowledged certain tactical errors with regards to the July 3rd convention and offered compromises on certain other issues. These concessions seemed to mollify Foster, who declared that, though he still had fundamental disagreements with the policy of the majority faction, he was prepared for the sake of unity to work with Ruthenberg and Pepper along the lines they were proposing. With the support of both Foster and Browder the November theses were thus approved in a twenty-one-to-three-vote.[41]

For the remainder of 1923 the CEC and PolCom were able to conduct business without rancorous debate, although it was clear to everyone that the ceasefire that had been achieved in the factional struggle would be temporary. All attention now turned to the annual convention of the WP, scheduled to begin on December 30 in Chicago. Cannon, Foster, and their allies had, as their primary goal, to win over enough delegates to enable their faction to gain the ascendancy in the CEC. In this campaign political and ideological differences tended to be submerged in personality clashes and in the simple desire to gain control of the American Communist movement. To be sure, the two factions were seen by many in contrasting categories: Chicago vs. New York; midwestern trade unionists (or syndicalists) vs. east coast theorists and intellectuals; and native-born Communists vs. European immigrants in the Bolshevik mold, many of whom were of Jewish origin. But there were prominent Communists who defied these categories. Bittelman had been born in Russia of Jewish parents, had strong ties to the Comintern, resided in New York City, and was one of the most respected Communist theorists and intellectuals in the 1920s. Yet he became one of Foster's staunchest defenders and allies.[42] What drew Bittelman and other unlikely individuals to the Foster-Cannon camp was animosity toward Pepper. In fact, by the time of the annual convention in late December, the chief point of contention between the two factions was

40 "Statement on Our Labor Party Policy, submitted by Coms. Foster and Cannon," undated (but early November 1923), RCPUSA, 515/1/194/18–34, reel 12. See also Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 193–94.

41 Minutes of CEC meeting of November 5–6, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/190/123–26, reel 12.

42 Draper, *American Communism*, 88–89.

the future role of Pepper in the CPUSA. Foster, Cannon, and their allies believed that Pepper was a supercilious and obnoxious outsider who had muscled his way into the WP leadership by falsely claiming to be a Comintern representative. The "fantastic unrealism" of his internal policies and his "external adventurism" had poisoned the atmosphere and destroyed all possibility of harmonious relations between various groups in the Communist movement.[43] Pepper's supporters, most prominently Ruthenberg, Bedacht, and Lovestone, rejected this view. They regarded Pepper as an astute theorist and able organizer who, despite some personal foibles and occasional policy missteps, had made valuable contributions to the fledgling American Communist movement.

Sensing that his political life in the WP was at stake, Pepper spent much of November and December giving talks to various groups in an effort to solidify his support and win over opponents. The latter, it soon became evident, were more numerous and vindictive than he had suspected, for his abrasive style had alienated quite a few people who had hitherto remained silent. Moreover, some of the policies he had championed, though in general supported by the WP leadership, were strongly opposed by groups at the local or middle level. For example, his campaign to Americanize the CP was resisted by the leaders of some of the language federations, who preferred to retain the autonomy they had long enjoyed and resented Pepper's interference. As a result, prominent figures in the Finnish Federation, the largest ethnic group, threw their support to the Foster-Cannon faction. The same was true of several leaders in the Jewish Federation, who had "burning grievances" against Pepper for his "meddling" in their affairs.[44] Nonetheless, Pepper had many loyal supporters, even in the language groups. Not surprisingly the Hungarian Federation was solidly in his camp. In this period the editors of the *Új Előre* acclaimed him as the "American Lenin" and emphasized what they regarded as the positive influence of "pepperism."[45]

In the weeks before the national convention Pepper did not shrink from arguing his case even in hostile venues. On one occasion he appeared, unannounced, at a membership meeting in Chicago where the minority faction held sway. Cannon, though unpleasantly surprised by Pepper's appearance, could not hold back a grudging admiration for his adversary:

43 On Pepper as the main cause of the factional struggle, see Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 118–19.

44 Ibid., 93–94.

45 *Új Előre*, October 10, 1923, 1; January 10, 1924, 2; and January 24, 1924, 2.

"Facing a hostile crowd, which was excited to the brink of a free-for-all, he took the floor to debate with us – in English! – and his speech dominated the debate from his side of the meeting. It was a magnificent performance that failed."[46]

When the national convention in Chicago opened on December 30, the initial signs were not favorable to Pepper. Some of the more outspoken acolytes of Foster and Cannon showed open hostility to him, and a few apparently even directly accused him of lying about his Comintern credentials. Nonetheless, Pepper continued his desperate attempts to change the minds of his opponents. After one meeting in which he once again displayed his dazzling oratorical skills, Foster was heard to remark: "This room shakes when that man talks."[47] That the tide had turned against Pepper became evident when he failed to win over Ludwig Lore, a leading figure in the German Federation who controlled a sizable group of uncommitted delegates. The problem, as Benjamin Gitlow later explained, was simply that "Lore hated Pepper."[48] As a result, when the election of a new CEC was held, the Foster-Cannon faction captured an eight-to-five-majority. Pepper and his allies found themselves relegated to minority status.

Although this seemed to be a repudiation of the leadership of Pepper and Ruthenberg, it had been brought about more by successful political maneuvering than the triumph of the ideological views or policy preferences of Foster and his allies. In fact, the actions taken by the national convention were muddled and contradictory. Apparently unaware of the latest developments in the CPUSA, the ECCI sent the convention a congratulatory telegram in which, among other things, it described the WP's organizing of the FFLP as "an achievement of prime importance." Not wishing to take any action that might offend Comintern officials, the delegates proceeded to endorse the WP's handling of the July convention and proclaimed the formation of the FFLP to be a "victory for the party. "[49] Pepper and his allies were baffled and embittered by this turn of events. They were convinced that the new majority had won through trickery and blatant opportunism. Reflecting the views of Pepper and his allies, Jay Lovestone later complained to a friend about the bizarre results of the convention: "Practically everything our side stood for was adopted. Yet we

46 Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 94.

47 Ibid., 94.

48 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 184.

49 Draper, *American Communism*, 91–92. Members of the Foster-Cannon group were dismayed by the Comintern message and at first believed it to be the "final crushing blow." Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 199.

were voted down." He acknowledged that "enmity to Pepper" played a key role.[50]

When the leaders of the new minority gathered after the convention for a post-mortem, the ever resourceful Pepper was ready with a plan: "Comrades, we must have patience in politics. To gain a majority is one thing, to maintain it is another. We must take a lesson from Foster and organize our own forces, but secretly and carefully."[51] Yet the turn in his fortunes seemed to weigh heavily on Pepper, and he even began to contemplate a more drastic resolution of his problems. Perhaps he should give in the demands of his enemies and return to Moscow, but if so he would do it on his own terms. At the first CEC meeting of 1924 he startled the group by proposing that he be sent to Russia as the permanent representative of the CPUSA to the Comintern. But Pepper's motion garnered only one other vote besides his own.[52] His friends much preferred that he remain in the United States and help them regain the majority. His enemies wanted him to return to Moscow, but they fully realized that he would remain a menace if installed, on a permanent basis, as the party's representative to the ECCI.

Perhaps because they realized that the majority position they had obtained was built on a somewhat unstable foundation, Foster and Cannon were cautious in exercising their new power. Among the concessions they made were allowing Ruthenberg to continue as executive secretary of the WP. Of course, they immediately replaced Pepper as secretary of the PolCom, but feared the consequences of removing him entirely from that committee. This relative moderation prevented the eruption of full-scale factional warfare, but by no means restored harmonious relations. In the first few months of 1924 the CEC was able to accomplish very little. Much of the energy of its members was devoted to composing frequent reports to the ECCI, as each faction endeavored to win the support of Comintern leaders in *Mecca*, the term often used for Moscow.[53] Finding his ability to influence policymaking on party committees severely curtailed, Pepper turned to a new outlet for his political pronouncements, the *Daily Worker*, which appeared for the first time in mid-January. Perhaps in recognition of the key role he had played in founding the party paper, Pepper was given almost free rein to write articles on topics of his choice. In the first few

50 Lovestone's letter of January 8, 1924 to Ella Wolfe, Lovestone Papers, Box 711, folder 26.
51 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 187.
52 Minutes of January 3, 1924 meeting of CEC, RCPUSA, 515/1/276, reel 18.
53 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 187.

months of 1924, his contributions dealt with a range of issues, including unemployment, the Teapot Dome scandal, the Comintern, and the shortcomings of parliamentarianism. When Lenin died in mid-January, it was Pepper who was given the assignment of writing a memorial to the Soviet leader.[54]

Even though in the changed circumstances members of the minority faction found it difficult to continue to promote the FFLP as the nucleus of a mass Labor Party, Pepper was not about to abandon his campaign to bring about a united front of workers and farmers. His determination was strengthened by a letter from Zinoviev that arrived in mid-January.[55] Among other things, the Comintern leader praised the WP for its pioneering work with indigent farmers and declared that "the underestimation of the role of the farmers is the fundamental original sin of International Menshivism." Pepper advanced similar arguments in a forcefully and eloquently written article in the *Daily Worker* on January 19.[56] Given Zinoviev's strong support for Pepper's initiative, the new WP majority found it expedient to follow his lead and cultivate a relationship with the only state farmer-labor organization that remained open to cooperation with the Communists, the Minnesota Farm-Labor Party (MFLP). The WP's strategy, which Pepper set out in several articles, called for Communists to participate actively in a national convention called by the MFLP in order to create a national Farmer-Labor Party. There was a general consensus in favor of this strategy, referred to as the "third party alliance," among WP leaders, but the Foster-Cannon faction nonetheless had lingering misgivings and objected to certain tactics proposed by Pepper and others in the minority faction. At the February 15–16 CEC meeting this led to heightened recriminations and a resulting deadlock. In despair Ruthenberg declared that the factional struggle had become so bitter that the time had come to make a direct appeal to the ECCI. It was thus agreed that a small

54 Pepper, "Lenin," Daily Worker , January 23, 1924, 1. To stake out his claim as the caretaker of Lenin's legacy, Pepper launched a project for a ten-volume library of Lenin's works in English translation. Pepper, " Lenin Library in America, "*Daily Worker*, February 16, 1924, 2. It appears that only volume 1 of this series ever appeared, and Pepper had no role in its publication.

55 "Letter to the Workers' Party of America on the Establishment of an English-Language Daily from Grigorii Zinoviev, Chairman of the Communist International in Moscow," *Daily Worker*, January 21, 1924, 1, 6.

56 Pepper argued that, with the exception of Russia "in no other country is there such an old and deep-rooted tradition of political cooperation between farmers and city workers as in the United States." "Farmers and the American Revolution," *Daily Worker*, January 19, 1924, Section 2, 5–6.

delegation, headed by Foster and Pepper, was to travel to Moscow and seek the guidance of the Comintern on how to proceed.[57]

To set the stage for what they hoped would be a final confrontation with their nemesis, Pepper, the leaders of the majority faction decided to take preventive action. Foster, Cannon, and five other members of their faction signed a letter that was dispatched to the ECCI on March 27, 1924.[58] In it they asserted the need for a clarification of Pepper's status in the United States. Some in the WP assumed "that he is here by the authorization, direction, or commission of the ECCI." If so, they wished the Comintern leadership to know that it was their conviction that the welfare of the American party imperatively demanded that Pepper be recalled permanently to Moscow. To show that their action was supported by the majority of American Communists, the signers of the letter suggested, somewhat misleadingly, that the matter had been discussed at the WP's national convention and that 37 of the 52 delegates had authorized the leadership to make this request to the ECCI. A full explanation of the reasons for this proposed action was to be provided by Foster in Moscow.

Although they learned only later of the contents of this fateful letter, Pepper's American allies assumed that in Moscow Foster would do his best to discredit Pepper in the eyes of the Comintern leaders and would urge that he be recalled. They thus decided to take their own preventive action. In April Lovestone, Ruthenberg, Bedacht, Minor, Robert Moore (John Ballam), and Joseph Manley sent individual letters to the ECCI that were effusive in their praise of Pepper and scathingly critical of his opponents. All recalled Pepper's resourcefulness and pertinacity in guiding the party as it moved from an underground to a legal status. Minor pointed out that it was under Pepper's effective leadership that the Communists in 1922–23 were able to "transform a seeming catastrophe [the Bridgman Convention] into an opportunity for advance." Bedacht suggested that it was Pepper, whom the majority faction were now calling the "foreign intruder," who had "taught the American party and its leaders the forms and conditions of the American class struggle." With his tactfulness and "Marxian clarity and Bolshevik obstinacy" he had unified the party and led it "out of the cave of fruitless scholastic discussions into the field of political action." All the letter writers agreed that Foster and Cannon were responsible for fomenting factionalism and for allowing "the Chicago

57 For the minutes of the February 15–16, 1924 CEC meeting, see RCPUSA, 515/1/306/23–24, reel 20. Ruthenberg informed Amter, the CPUSA representative in Moscow, of what was planned in a letter of February 18, 1924, Klehr, *Soviet World*, 26.

58 RCPUSA, 515/1/297/33, reel 19.

Fitzpatrick disease" to infect the WP. To counteract this dangerous movement to the Right and the factionalism it had sparked, the Comintern was urged to return leadership of the party "into the hands of the central, Marxian group." Lovestone concluded his letter with this warning: "To deport Comrade Pepper today and to deprive the party of his ability, his strength and his talent for leadership means to lay the basis for a split in the near future which will be more dangerous and deeper than any of the previous examples of this kind."[59]

Pepper did not himself write to the ECCI in this period but he prepared for the impending clash in Moscow by launching a new maneuver aimed at discrediting his opponents and bolstering his faction. On the basis of information he was receiving from Moscow, Pepper began to sense that some sort of power struggle was emerging in the Soviet Union and that Trotsky would be pitted against Zinoviev and other Comintern leaders. Because he had openly clashed with Trotsky as early as 1921, Pepper was eager to lend his support to any anti-Trotsky movement, especially if it would win points for him with Zinoviev, whom he considered his benefactor. In March he thus became the first Communist in the United States to voice support for an anti-Trotsky offensive.[60] At first he did so in the form of attacks on Lore, who was widely known as Trotsky's strongest supporter in the United States. Of course, this was also an indirect attack on the majority faction, which had relied on Lore's support at the national convention. At successive CEC meetings in March Pepper insisted that the WP must formally censure Lore and declare its support for what he called the "old guard Bolsheviks," a phrase that in the developing Soviet power struggle implied support for Zinoviev (and ultimately Stalin) against Trotsky.[61] Several such initiatives by Pepper along these lines were rejected by the majority, but he kept up the pressure, perhaps with the intention of calling attention to the fact that Foster in America, like Trotsky in Russia, was a

59 Minor to ECCI, April 3, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/297/99-106, reel 19; Bedacht to ECCI, undated (April 1924), 515/1/313/78–80, reel 20; Ruthenberg to ECCI, April 11, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/297/143–45, reel 19; Manley to Zinoviev, April 2, 1923, RCPUSA, 515/1/297/35–40, reel 19; Moore to Zinoviev, April 11, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/297/133–35, reel 19; Lovestone to ECCI, undated (April 1924), Theodore Draper Papers, HIA, Box 32. In his letter Manley described Pepper's leadership as "indispensable" and explained that he was breaking with Foster because of his unfair attacks on Pepper. This was particularly noteworthy because Manley was Foster's son-in-law.

60 Zumoff, "Communist Party," 162.

61 Minutes of CEC meeting of March 7, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/303/18–23, reel 20; and meeting of March 18, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/276/20–26, reel 18.

relative newcomer to the Communist movement and thus could not be regarded as an "old guard Bolshevik."[62]

When Pepper finally made his way to Moscow in early May, a Comintern commission on the "American question" had already begun its proceedings. To prepare himself for his participation in the commission Pepper sought out and was granted brief private meetings with several Soviet leaders. From these conversations he learned that he had been correct in believing that a power struggle was underway. What he had not anticipated was the growing skepticism in the ECCI about Lenin's united front policy, which some now regarded as unproductive and ripe for reversal. Some indication of an imminent change in the Comintern "line" came in a conversation Pepper had with Trotsky, who could barely disguise his astonishment when Pepper informed him that the American Communists were proposing to consort with the likes of La Follette and "ruined farmers." Trotsky at first thought that this heretical policy was simply a "curious case of an individual aberration," but he soon found that Pepper had persuaded the whole CPUSA to embrace "this low-grade policy of parliamentary opportunism." Trotsky thus concluded that the poison of "pepperism" was leading American Communists into "deep inner crises."[63] Although Zinoviev and Stalin were already laying the foundations of an anti-Trotsky campaign, they and others in the Russian Politburo did in fact agree with him on the dangers of associating with a "capitalist adventurer" like La Follette.[64]

Deeply concerned by what he had learned, Pepper thereupon held a strategy session with those American Communists on hand who were sympathetic to the minority faction. He first took part in the deliberations of the American Commission at the session of May 3. In his introductory remarks he declared, with typical superciliousness, that he had read what the speakers had said in the earlier sessions and disagreed with all of them.[65] In fact, no one had as yet touched on the "main problems." He then proceeded to give an exposition of all his pet projects: the Federated

62 A proposal by Pepper that he write an article in *The Liberator* in support of the "old guard Bolsheviks" was vetoed by Cannon. Minutes of CEC meeting of March 7, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/303/18–23, reel 20.

63 Trotsky recalled his 1924 meeting with Pepper in an article published in June 1929, "Letter to the American Trotskyists," http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1929/03/letter-american.htm, accessed on January 17, 2011. See also his contemporary denunciation of the CPUSA's "conciliationist illusions" in his introduction (dated May 1924) to *First Five Years*, 12.

64 Grove (Amter) to the CEC, May 6, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/274/53, reel 18.

65 Minutes (in German) of the May 3 session of the American Commission, RCPUSA, 515/1/257/107–130, reel 17.

Farmer-Labor Party (FFLP), the need to bring together workers and indigent farmers, and the "third party alliance." In this way he completely disrupted the previous agenda of the American Commission, for members now found themselves forced to respond to Pepper's "theses" and to the insults that he was flinging with abandon. Very familiar with the terminology employed in the Comintern to denounce those regarded as less than pure Communists, Pepper branded Foster and Cannon as syndicalists and opportunists who were infected with "Gomperism." Once given the floor, Foster responded in kind. Pepper's policies and campaigns, he asserted, amounted to "simple idiocy" and were "laughable in practice"; basically he practiced a policy of "rule or ruin." He sought to "annihilate all those who, however sincerely and honestly, found themselves in disagreement with any of his policies." In his "reckless struggle for power" he had gambled with "the life and health of the party."[66]

As the American Commission sessions continued, the exchanges became increasingly strident and muddled. The occasional questions and interpellations of the ECCI leaders as they listened to the presentations of Foster and Pepper and the ensuing debates, seemed to indicate that they had only a hazy idea of conditions in the United States and regarded the factional dispute as both tiresome and baffling.[67] About one thing they were certain: the American Communists were inexperienced and had gone too far in applying the concept of the united front. At the final session of the American Commission, Radek and Zinoviev elaborated on the formal resolution that was being presented to the American delegates.[68] Despite the fact that the "third party alliance" with La Follette was about the only policy that Foster and Pepper had been able to agree on, the ECCI instructed the WP to repudiate La Follette and break with the Minnesota FLP. Radek had earlier conceded that such a policy change would be disruptive and that American Communists might have "to face isolation for a year or two,"

66 On Foster in Moscow see Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 210; and Barnett, *William Z. Foster*, 143–45.

67 Klara Zetkin admitted privately that though she had listened carefully to the presentations and made her way through a mountain of material, "I still feel I know too little." Zetkin's letter to Zinoviev, May 18, 1924, RGASPI, 528/2/61/1–2.

68 The decisions of the ECCI were conveyed in several different documents, with oral interpretations at the final session of the American Commission. This added to the confusion about what in fact the Comintern was demanding of the CPUSA. See "Report of the American Commission in the Presidium of the ECCI," May 20, 1924, in Lovestone Papers, Box 210, HIA. Cited hereafter as "Report of the American Commission." The report was transmitted to the CPUSA as "Letter of the Executive Committee of the Communist International to the American Workers' Party," RCPUSA, 515/1/256/22–26, reel 17.

but this was preferable to a continuation of an "opportunist" policy that was tantamount to making the WP a "tail to the bourgeois kite."[69] The ECCI further insisted that the primary task of the WP in the future was to focus on its identity as a mass Communist Party of workers, although that formulation was hedged by the suggestion, which no doubt had been inserted by Zinoviev and was meant to placate Pepper, that an effort also had to be made to establish a "firm bond with the farmers who are at present in a state of strong fermentation."[70]

Although the ECCI had firmly rejected his plan for an alliance with La Follette, Pepper was able to persuade himself that the ECCI's general pronouncements on the "American question" were "very significant and favorable" to the minority faction. The ECCI, he pointed out, was intent on dragging "the whole American Party to the left." In doing so they criticized both WP factions, but it had been made clear that while "we made a mistake as communists," members of the Foster-Cannon faction had made a much graver mistake and in fact "had failed to maintain the communist position." As for Lore and his followers, Zinoviev had denounced them simply as "a non-Communist group."[71] Pepper also took great satisfaction in the fact that Zinoviev, bucking almost all of his colleagues, had reaffirmed his previous statements in support of cooperation between the WP and indigent farmers.[72]

For his part, Foster could also point to sections of the resolution of the American Commission that were favorable to his faction. Members of his group had come in for some criticism, but the ECCI had made no attempt to alter the balance of power in the CEC. Most importantly, the demand made by the majority faction that Pepper be permanently recalled to Moscow was ultimately approved by the ECCI. During the public and private deliberations of the American Commission several Comintern leaders made it a point to praise Pepper, even while criticizing some of the policies he had pursued.[73] Ultimately, however, Zinoviev appears to have persuaded his colleagues that Pepper, despite all his sterling qualities, was too

69 Amter to CEC, May 18, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/274, reel 18. See also Morgan, *Covert Life*, 40.

70 "Report of the American Commission."

71 Pepper's letter to Lovestone, July 5, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/273/83–85, reel 18.

72 "Report of the American Commission."

73 Radek went so far as to declare that Pepper understood the problems in America better than anyone else, and Zetkin even suggested that he should receive a new mandate to return to the United States, where he could serve as a needed "counter-weight to the strong opportunistic current" represented by Foster and his group."Report of the American Commission" and Zetkin's letter to Zinoviev, May 18, 1924, RGASPI, 528/2/61/1–2.

divisive a figure to remain for an extended period in any one country. There is evidence that he privately suggested to Pepper that the ECCI preferred to give him an important new assignment that would require that he remain in Moscow. In the circumstances, it might be best if Pepper were on his own initiative, to express a preference for such a solution. Zinoviev might also have intimated that he would see to it that Pepper and his family would be given the kind of privileges that were accorded to high-level Soviet and Comintern officials.

In making the trip to Russia Pepper had almost surely intended to return to the United States with his comrades, if only to demonstrate that Foster and Cannon could not dictate to the ECCI on such a matter. But in the final analysis he concluded that, even if he had significant support in the Comintern leadership, he dare not thwart the will of Zinoviev, in whose good graces he wished to remain. Accordingly Pepper sent a letter on May 13 to Zinoviev in which he requested the permission of the ECCI to remain in the Soviet Union.[74] His explanation for this decision bordered on self-pity. He asserted that the Foster-led majority in the WP, which was imbued with the spirit of factionalism, had treated him with "bitterness and aggressiveness." Unless the majority agreed to cooperate and share power with the minority, the American CP would never prosper. But it seemed that his presence was an obstacle to party amity: "In such [a] situation I as an immigrant cannot take ... the responsibility to be the center of the factional fight and to be against my own will the instrument of a split." Pepper also announced his decision at the May 17 session of the American Commission. Here he repeated the explanation he had offered in his letter to Zinoviev, with the added observation that he had not really been the cause of factional strife in the CPUSA. To the contrary, it was he who had prevented a renewed split in the CP as it made the transition from an underground to an open party. Finally, he added, it would not surprise him at all if factionalism continued unabated in the United States even though he was no longer on the scene. Foster managed to get the final word on the subject: "As for the factional fight, I have no doubt that it will go on after Pepper has left America, but not so skillfully as it has up to the present. Pepper has done one service, that is, to teach all the American comrades the most up-to-date methods of factional fighting."[75]

74 Pepper enclosed a copy of his letter in a communication to Lovestone, July 5, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/273, reel 18.

75 Session of American Commission, May 17, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/257/271–74.

Pepper's letter to Zinoviev set the stage for the ECCI's resolution on the American factional struggle. Zinoviev announced that the Hungarian Communist, who had done much good work in the United States, now desired to remain in Russia. The ECCI would grant his wish, and "we should be able to find very responsible work for Comrade Pepper" in the Comintern. Several ECCI members warned Foster that the majority should not use Pepper's departure from America as an excuse to increase their factional activity, for example by starting a campaign against Ruthenberg. In his remarks Radek went even farther: "As far as the work of Comrade Foster is concerned, I believe that we may have some very serious difficulties with this comrade."[76]

When he later wrote to Lovestone and gave a lengthy report on recent developments, Pepper naturally tried to put the best possible light on his decision to remain in Moscow and the ECCI's resolution on the "American question."[77] As he had done before the American Commission, he attempted to portray himself as a martyr for the cause of authentic American Communism. Why had he sent a letter to Zinoviev asking to remain in Moscow? "I was forced to write this letter, not because I am a coward. You know I am a pretty hard fighter, but I was helpless against such a campaign of slandering which manifested itself not only in the 'Gomperlike' letter [of Foster to Zinoviev], but in our private talks and speeches in the commission. I was helpless against such a hatred because I stood here alone against the majority of the CEC as an immigrant." In other words, Pepper added, he had "sacrificed himself on the altar of cooperation" in order to ensure that the Comintern would take a firm stand against the factional activity of the Foster group. And this tactic had been successful, because Zinoviev had openly stated that "it is the will of the CI that the Foster group must work together with our group" and had insisted that Foster "make a public promise against any factional and discriminatory persecution of our group."[78]

Once things had settled down and he was acclimating himself to his new role as a Comintern functionary, Pepper assured his friends that although he intended to remain in the Soviet Union "for the time being," he was confident that the WP, under proper leadership, still had before it "big possibilities." It soon dawned on Pepper that as an active member of the Com-

76 "Report of the American Commission," May 20, 1924.

77 Pepper's letter to "Dear Comrade" (Lovestone), July 5, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/273/83–85, reel 18.

78 See an ECCI statement along these lines dated July 5, 1924, RGASPI, 495/163/354/7–8.

intern apparatus and as a confidante of Zinoviev, Radek, and other ECCI leaders, he would be in a perfect position to keep track of the ongoing power struggles and plot a course that would eventually restore his faction to power in CPUSA. He thus resolved to keep in close touch with his American friends and sent them frequent letters containing his sage advice. He began with a letter in July 1924 that was sent to Lovestone but addressed simply to "Dear Comrade."[79] In it he offered a detailed analysis of the contemporary political scene in Moscow and suggestions on how his comrades should proceed in their quest to regain majority status in the CEC. This letter, the first of many such missives he would write in the coming years, was clearly meant to be circulated among American Communists. In this way Pepper could continue to guide his flock, much as the early Christian apostles had kept in touch with their far-flung congregations. It did not take long for Foster and Cannon to become aware of Pepper's intentions. They thought that they had finally banished the arrogant Hungarian from the American scene, but were soon to learn that he would continue to be their nemesis even though he was five thousand miles away.

79 Pepper's letter to "Dear Comrade" (Lovestone), July 5, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/273/83–85, reel 18.

CHAPTER 7
The Comintern Cadre

A small number of personnel at Comintern headquarters were regarded as specially suited to undertake missions abroad. They were known collectively as "international cadres," but did not form a special department, as people might be sent abroad from any section or grade in the hierarchy. However, the chosen band all had certain aptitudes for secret work; they were political rather than technical operators, knew foreign languages, and had lived and worked outside the Soviet Union. / AINO KUUSINEN, *BEFORE AND AFTER STALIN*

Although in the summer of 1924 Pepper indicated to his American friends that he had hopes of returning before long to the United States, upon sober reflection he must have realized, with regret, that such a prospect was highly unlikely, at least in the immediate future. His nearly two-year long sojourn in the New World had been an exhilarating time for him. He had employed his dazzling oratory, leadership skills, and writing prowess to help form the newly emergent American CP. To be sure, he had become the focal point of an acrimonious factional fight and had been in constant fear of arrest by the FBI or police, but he had managed to carve out for himself a relatively pleasant lifestyle in which he could partake of "the luscious bourgeois life of America" and to take advantage of the sexual adventures that were available to CP leaders.[1] In Moscow, by contrast, he would have to become accustomed to a much lower standard of living and new responsibilities as a Comintern functionary, a husband, and a father.

Reunited with his wife and two daughters after an absence of nearly two years, Pepper now faced the problem of finding suitable housing for his family. This was no easy matter to resolve, for suitable apartments were almost impossible to find in Moscow. Here his "connections" with Comintern leaders were to prove to be indispensable. From them he was able to obtain a *blat* (certificate) entitling him to preferential treatment in

1 Gitlow, *Whole*, 110.

the allotment of housing, food supplies, and other perks.[2] Soon Pepper and his family were settled in Room 177, one of the most desirable in the Lux, a hotel operated by the Comintern. To the other foreign Communists residing in the Lux this was a sure sign that Pepper had strong support in the ECCI leadership. This impression was confirmed when it was learned that Zinoviev himself was Pepper's official "sponsor" or "patron" as he embarked on his work for the ECCI.[3]

When they arrived to take up an assignment in the Comintern, Communists from all over the world were required to fill out a questionnaire called the *anketa*. On his, Pepper dutifully answered questions about his parents (whom he described simply as "workers"), the posts he had held in the HCP and the CPUSA, his social status or "estate" (he claimed to be a "proletariat"), his language ability (fluent in Hungarian, German, and English), and his profession ("party journalist").[4] There was one question, however, that he was unable to answer and had to leave blank: In what country did he have citizenship? Pepper was a man without a country. He could not return to Hungary, for if he did so, he would face certain arrest, trial, and probable execution and he had lived for considerable periods of time in Germany and the United States as an illegal alien, having entered those countries using aliases and forged travel documents. But his status as a stateless, international Communist was by no means unique. There was a sizable group of such individuals in the USSR in the 1920s, many of them Central Europeans like Pepper. Within this group the Hungarians had the special distinction of being "failed revolutionaries," having participated in an unsuccessful Communist regime. It was from this group of Communist émigrés that the Comintern leadership tended to recruit the individuals who comprised what was called the international cadre. Some became permanent members of the Comintern apparatus in Moscow, while others were deemed suitable for dispatch on missions to countries all across the globe as itinerant Comintern agents. They became known, in the words of Bertolt Brecht, "for changing countries more often than pairs of shoes."[5] Their loyalty to the Communist movement seemed guaranteed, since they

2 Vatlin, "Einwirkungen," 2–3; Studer, *Der stalinistische Parteikader*, 75. Pepper was fortunate in having as one of his benefactors Karl Radek, who was the key "facilitator" in securing a good room in the Hotel Lux.

3 On the Comintern "questionnaire" Pepper filled out in this period, he listed Zinoviev as the person who was serving as his sponsor. Anketa No. 1914, undated (but summer or fall of 1924), RGASPI, 495/199/1586/54–57.

4 Ibid.

5 From Brecht's poem "To Those Born Later," Brecht, *Poems*, 318–20.

had no native country to which they could return and the Soviet Union represented for them their only safe haven.[6]

Pepper had already displayed his ability as an international cadre through missions to Germany, Austria, and the United States. He had fluency in German, the lingua franca of the Communist world, and seemed adept at such conspiratorial practices as frequent name changes, traveling with false passports, and evading police surveillance. Comintern leaders planned to continue to send Pepper on occasional missions abroad, but for the most part his work for the next few years was to be at Comintern headquarters in Moscow. The Comintern, widely known as the "general staff of the world revolution," directed and coordinated the activity of Communist parties throughout the world. By the time of Pepper's return to Moscow in 1924 it had acquired a bloated bureaucracy that spent much of its time in seemingly endless discussions on committees and at congresses, plenums, and conferences. There was a constantly shifting array of secretariats, commissions, and subcommissions. Because the Communist revolutions that had been anticipated in Germany and elsewhere had not materialized, much of the ensuing debates in the last half of the 1920s centered on what had gone wrong and whether or not the emphasis should now be placed on "socialism in one country," i.e., in Russia. Theses or strategic plans proposed by Soviet or Comintern leaders were discussed at length in debates often characterized by their excessive nit-picking and occasional rancorous exchanges. The theses proposed by Comintern leaders were invariably approved, but given the ongoing power struggle in the Soviet leadership and the elasticity of Marxist and Leninist theory, theses were often found to be in need of refinement or complete revision. In this way, the Comintern "line" was subject to frequent, abrupt zigzags, and Communist leaders worldwide had to be constantly vigilant so as to avoid criticism that they had strayed too far to the "Left" or to the "Right."[7] All of this sowed confusion and created fertile ground for factional struggles in Communist parties throughout the world.

With his fine-tuned opportunism, polished debating skills, and experience in factional struggles, Pepper had no difficulty in acclimating himself to the political culture prevailing in the Comintern and the situation created by the power struggle underway in the Soviet leadership. Indeed, as

6 Kuusinen, *Before and After Stalin*, 58–59; Hornstein, *Arthur Ewert*, 60–61; Service, *Comrades*, 110. In addition to Pepper, among the more prominent agents in the Comintern's international cadre were Arthur Ewert, Jules Humbert-Droz, Gerhardt Eisler, Aino Kuusinen, and Samuel Guralski.

7 McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 48.

one historian has observed, Pepper can be said to have even anticipated Stalin "in his willingness to adapt the programmatic orientation of the revolutionary movement to cynical, if often cleverly formulated, 'theoretical' pronouncements."[8] Although in the summer of 1924 he had as yet no official appointment in the Comintern apparatus, Pepper was given a prominent role in the proceedings of the Fifth World Congress, which took place in late June and early July. Through Zinoviev's intervention he received a plum assignment on the Political Commission, which provided him with several opportunities to take the floor and to display his oratorical skills. He presented the Political Commission's theses on the world economical situation, commented on a range of issues from the colonial problem to the possibility of revolution in China, and summarized his views on contemporary conditions in the United States.[9] Pepper saw no need to tread lightly and to show deference to his fellow delegates. He spoke as if he were an expert on the Asian subcontinent, gently admonishing M. N. Roy, the respected Indian nationalist and Communist, for his criticism of past Comintern tactics. And though he admitted that he had no special mandate to speak about developments in England, he nonetheless proceeded to do so and offered a critique of the British CP's policy toward the Labor Party.[10]

Pepper's comments about one particular issue received a warm greeting from the Congress delegates. His suggestion that there was a pressing need for a "move to the Left" in order to "bolshevize the existing communist parties" and to "win new sections of the earth for communism" was greeted, according to the Congress minutes, with "great applause."[11] It was at the Fifth World Congress that the slogan of "Bolshevization" was first officially proclaimed. Ostensibly this was a call for a more rigorous application of Leninism by Communist parties that had strayed from original Bolshevik principles. But in practice it implied a Russification (and ultimately Stalinization) of the Comintern and the subordination of local Communist parties to the Soviet leadership.[12] In 1924 Pepper had no reason to suspect that the process of Bolshevization might eventually place

8 Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 221.

9 *Protokoll. Fünfter Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationalale*, 304–11, 697–700, 1004–7.

10 Ibid., 309, 698. In his response, Arthur McManus, a leading figure in the CPGB, implied that Pepper's criticism was baseless. Ibid., 369. From this point on most British Communists in Moscow viewed Pepper with disdain if not outright hostility.

11 *Inprecorr*, June 24, 1924, 484.

12 McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 44–45.

him and many other prominent Communists in mortal danger. According to his calculations his interests would best be served by being an early and open advocate of any policy that was promoted by Zinoviev, Stalin, and other "old guard" Bolsheviks.

Not all delegates to the Fifth World Congress shared Pepper's enthusiasm for a policy that demanded the complete subservience of local Communist parties to the Comintern. Most were cautious enough to remain silent about their misgivings, but one, the hitherto highly respected leader of the Swedish CP (SCP), Zeth Höglund, was bold enough to voice his concerns at the Congress. He declared that the policy the Comintern was trying to impose was "incorrect and unwise." In Sweden it would lead not to "Bolshevization" but to "fragmentation."[13] Once back in Sweden he was even more outspoken. He asserted that the workers' movements in Scandinavia were "fully developed from an intellectual and organizational point of view" and thus had no need to adopt the "primitive methods" of the Comintern. He summoned a national congress and persuaded a majority of Swedish Communists to support his defiance of the Comintern.[14] Comintern leaders were not about to allow insubordination of this kind to go unpunished. Although he had been an associate of Lenin's and had helped establish the Communist International in Moscow, Höglund was now denounced as a traitor to the Communist movement. In August the ECCI leadership sent a two-person delegation to Sweden to undermine Höglund's authority and rally those Swedish Communists who were willing to subordinate the SCP to the Comintern. The two Comintern functionaries who were given this assignment were Kuusinen, a leading member of the ECCI presidium, and Pepper, who was selected for this mission apparently because of the success he had, at least at the start, in unifying the CPUSA and bringing it into compliance with Comintern directives. Zinoviev may also have been aware of the fact that Pepper, as József Pogány, had once written a book about the Danish peasantry and was thus qualified as something of an expert on Scandinavia.

During the mission to Sweden, which lasted for several weeks in late August 1924, Pepper for the first and only time in his career as a Communist allowed himself to be addressed as "Doctor." He did so at the insistence of Kuusinen, who knew Sweden well and who was conversant in the language. Sweden, he told his companion, was fundamentally a petit bourgeois country and even the Communists would be inclined to trust him

13 *Protokoll. Fünfter Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationalale*, 1036–37.

14 "Die schwedische Parteireinigung," *Die Rote Fahne*, September 10, 1924, 2.

more as Dr. Pepper rather than simply as Comrade Pepper.[15] When Pepper and Kuusinen found Höglund unwilling to back down, they worked to build up the minority faction that was prepared to cooperate with the Comintern. Many in the SCP were apparently impressed by Pepper, who exuded self-confidence and buttressed his arguments with frequent references to Marxist and Leninist theory. When the suggestion was made that a pamphlet outlining the chief elements of the controversy was needed, Pepper dazzled the Swedish Communists by immediately dictating it in German directly to a typist.[16] As a solution to the crisis Pepper and Kuusinen proposed that a referendum be held to determine the true attitude of ordinary party members. No doubt many Swedish Communists were swayed by the fact that in July the Comintern had directed an open letter to the SCP in which Höglund was denounced as a "renegade." Höglund rejected the idea of a referendum organized by Comintern representatives and advised party members not to participate, but a strong majority apparently did vote and by a lopsided margin endorsed the call for continued loyalty to the Comintern. Höglund thereupon withdrew from the SCP and in time shifted his allegiance back to the SDP.[17]

Upon his return to Moscow Pepper felt confident enough to proclaim that the result of the mission had been "a complete victory for the Communist International." In several articles he continued to heap scorn on Höglund, whom he derided as a "has-been" who had finally shown his true social democratic colors and become the "most prominent Bolshevik slayer in Sweden."[18] Pepper had been so successful in Sweden that over the next two years the ECCI would send him to Norway and Denmark to help the local parties resolve similar issues.[19] In the autumn of 1924, however, there remained the question of what permanent position Pepper was to be given at the Comintern. In October Zinoviev informed him that the ECCI thought his talents could be best employed in two spheres of activity: as

15 Rákosi, *Visszaemlékezések*, 722.

16 Ibid. The pamphlet was thereupon published with only minor editorial changes.

17 "Die schwedische Parteireinigung," *Die Rote Fahne*, September 10, 1924, 2; Pepper, "Results of the Split in the CP of Sweden and the Sweden Elections," *Inprecorr*, November 6, 1924, 871–72.

18 Pepper, "New Two and a Half International," *Inprecorr*, October 2, 1924, 778–79; "Results of the Split in the CP of Sweden and the Sweden Elections," *Inprecorr*, November 6, 1924, 872.

19 Czóbel Memoir, 25. In the United States Pepper's friends were delighted to hear of his success. Lovestone later boasted that "John has won considerable recognition... because of his Swedish exploits." Lovestone to "Dearest Friends," February 21, 1925, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

director of the Comintern's newly formed Information Bureau and as coordinator of all English-language correspondence in the ECCI Secretariat.[20] In addition, he was to be made a member of the ECCI Political Commission and chair of the newly established Negro Commission.

Pepper was pleased with these appointments. Although the Information Bureau was a new and as yet not very prestigious section of the Comintern, it presented an opportunity to become acquainted with a broad range of Comintern activities as reported in newspapers, journals, and other publications. Pepper may have regarded the opportunity to supervise all English-language correspondence in the Comintern as an even more desirable and useful assignment. It would allow him to read and oversee the translation to or from German of all communications involving the American and British parties. As will be seen, this placed Pepper in a very advantageous position as he continued his involvement in the affairs of the CPUSA and sought to project himself as an expert on the development of the CP in Great Britain.

Pepper tackled the problem of organizing the Information Department with his usual vigor and efficiency. In April 1925, he presented a report on his efforts to the ECCI.[21] In only a few months, he boasted, the Information Department had been transformed from its "embryonic state" into "a political instrument of the Executive." Pepper described how arrangements had been made to facilitate the transfer of information to and from the ECCI. Relevant material was being systematically collected from the various sections of the Comintern and all CP parties and given general circulation. To accomplish this exchange of information the department had "reporters" assigned to most parties, but needed additional staff to create an efficient operation. Furthermore, parties needed to be reminded of the necessity of providing regular reports on relevant issues in their countries. Pepper praised the efforts of the CP in Germany and the CPUSA in this regard, but noted that others had been derelict in their duty. He listed several topics about which the collection of information had been notably successful: the "Trotsky problem," the impact of the Dawes Plan, and "the

20 Pepper's appointment was approved by the ECCI on October 14, 1924, RGASPI, 495/199/1586/46. Pepper had earlier expressed interest in the Information Bureau, and Zinoviev moved to secure his appointment as director, despite the fact that he had already promised the post to Edgar Woog, a leading figure in the Swiss CP Instead it was suggested to Woog that he become Pepper's deputy, but he declined that honor. Hofmaier, *Memoiren*, 27.

21 Pepper, "Report on the Activity of the Information Department of the ECCI," April 6, 1925, *Inprecorr*, May 6, 1925, 535.

shameful corruption and bribery in the ranks of Social Democracy." Members of the ECCI seemed impressed by Pepper's report. One of them, Heinz Neumann, declared that the Information Department was "one of the best run departments of the Executive."[22]

Nonetheless, Pepper's tenure in the Information Department turned out to be of fairly short duration. Although the ECCI leadership was apparently satisfied with the work he had accomplished, there were soon reports that some of Pepper's subordinates were unhappy. In May 1925 the spokesperson for a dissident group, Richard Sorge, the future Soviet spy, expressed open opposition to the program Pepper was implementing.[23] Pepper rejected this criticism and Sorge soon moved on to other assignments. But this new aggravation may have taken its toll on Pepper. By the summer of 1925 he was complaining of severe fatigue and stomach pain. The doctors he consulted diagnosed his condition as cardiac dilation, which Pepper's wife called the "revolutionary's disease," since so many Communist activists supposedly suffered from this disorder which proved to be fatal. Pepper was sent, at his own expense, to Kislovodsk, a spa town, for rest and possible recuperation. There, however, doctors discovered that he in fact was suffering from malaria, which he had contracted several years earlier in the Crimea. Although at first there seemed little hope for recovery, Pepper apparently had a sound constitution and during a several-month-stay in the Kremlin hospital in the fall of 1925 he slowly regained his health. In reporting on his illness to friends in America, Pepper complained about his long confinement and the side effects of quinine. In general, he lamented, the "Russian climate wasn't doing him much good."[24]

During this long period of hospitalization Pepper attempted, through written correspondence, to keep abreast of developments in the Information Department and in other Comintern offices in which he had an interest. This proved to be difficult, not the least because he soon found himself in financial trouble. The basic medical treatment he received was of course free, but the trip to Kislovodsk and other incidentals were at his own expense. Furthermore, the Comintern accounting office determined that because Pepper would probably remain for the foreseeable future in the care of the Kremlin hospital, he should not receive his normal salary but should seek compensation through the hospital insurance fund. In a

22 Ibid. Neumann's attitude toward Pepper was later to become quite hostile.

23 Letter of Sorge to Org Department, July 1925, RGASPI, 495/18/465/126.

24 Czóbel Memoir, 70; Pepper to "Dear Comrades," October 2, 1925, RCPUSA, 515/1/441/34–36, reel 28.

series of letters Pepper complained bitterly about the unfair treatment he was receiving, pointing out that he was "severely ill" and that "the money was urgently needed by my family." Other Comintern officials at his level who had been sick for extended periods had continued to receive their salaries, so why shouldn't he? Why was he being treated like a "temporary stenographer?"[25]

When no satisfactory response to his complaint was forthcoming, Pepper turned in desperation to Zinoviev and begged for help.[26] He informed his mentor that he was suffering from an extremely severe case of malaria and that his financial situation had become "catastrophic." He was unable to cover the expenses relating to his treatment and convalescence and was behind in his rent payments. In fact, the governing board of the Hotel Lux had lodged a complaint against him with the Moscow Control Commission. In addition, he could not afford winter clothing for his family. Even while suffering from a high fever of 102 degrees, he had been forced to write letters to Comintern bureaucrats to demand that he receive his normal salary. For the immediate relief of his family he needed a grant or stipend of at least 100 *chervonzas*. Since the Comintern bureaucracy had refused to help, he hoped that Zinoviev would be able to procure the funds from the Central Committee of the Russian CP. In concluding, Pepper apologized for writing on such a "small, unpleasant matter," but he trusted that Zinoviev knew him well enough to realize that he would not have done so if he were not confronted with a "true exigency."

Although there is no record of a response from Zinoviev, it seems that he did intervene on Pepper's behalf. His regular salary was resumed and his debts were paid, which suggests that he did in fact receive the special grant that he had requested.[27] The relief from financial stress seems to have accelerated his recuperation. Later in 1925 he was released from the hospital and by the beginning of 1926 he was back at work. He quickly resumed his production of articles for various journals and newspapers, which helped bring in modest sums of money to supplement his regular salary. Before long he was as active as ever in various venues of the Comintern. In late January he gave a speech on international labor to the

25 Pepper to Office of the Secretariat, September 28, 1925, RGASPI, 495/18/398/25.

26 Pepper to Zinoviev, October 13, 1925, RGASPI, 495/18/398/26.

27 Having learned of his comrade's plight, Kun intervened with the Russian Central Committee and was able to secure 40 of the *chervonzas* that Pepper had requested. Nonetheless Pepper repeated his request to Zinoviev, insisting that he must have the additional 60 *chervonzas*. Pepper to Zinoviev, October 18, 1925, RGASPI, 495/18/398/27.

Presidium of the ECCI,[28] and at the enlarged plenum of the ECCI held in late February and early March, he was elected a candidate member of the ECCI secretariat and of the Orgburo.[29] In May he became director of the Agitprop department, taking over the reins from his Hungarian comrade Kun. At the same time he was appointed a member of the "Inner Commission" of the ECCI. Throughout this period he continued to serve as an active member of the Political Commission.

In the course of 1926 Pepper thus became an increasingly ubiquitous figure in the Comintern, leading the American representative in Moscow to report back that "John's star is rising."[30] As director of the Agitprop department he frequently sent messages to the ECCI and to local parties advising them of which propaganda themes were to be emphasized. In addition, he continued to supervise the production and transmission of English-language material, was appointed to relevant commissions, and wrote pamphlets and numerous articles that appeared in *Pravda* (Truth), *Inprecorr* (International Press Correspondence), and other prominent Communist publications.[31] As will be seen, from the time he began work in the Comintern, Pepper was also an active member of successive American commissions. But he was not content with his reputation as the resident expert solely on the CPUSA. He wished to expand his horizons to all Anglo-Saxon countries, and to Great Britain in particular. Early in 1926, probably with the assistance of Zinoviev, Pepper was appointed secretary of the British Secretariat. In this capacity he demanded the right to read the reports sent by all Comintern representatives in England. Without access to such reports, he argued, he could not properly carry out his responsibilities.[32] As was his custom when studying a country about which he had previously had scant knowledge, Pepper quickly accumulated and voraciously read all available books, pamphlets, and reports. Before long he felt confident in expostulating on all matters relating to the social, economic, and political problems of Great Britain. At sessions of the British Secretariat he had full rein to voice his opinions on any and all problems

28 "Speech by Comrade Pepper at the Presidium," January 27, 1926, RGASPI, 495/164/11/50–65. A summary of this speech appeared as "New Phenomena in the International Labor Movement," *Inprecorr*, February 4, 1926, 158.

29 Kahan, "Communist International," 168–69.

30 "Bill" (William Dunne) to Lovestone, April 11, 1926, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

31 Among Pepper's important publications in 1926 was a pamphlet, *Die Vereinigten Staaten des sozialistischen Europa* (1926); and broad surveys of international affairs, such as "Imperialist War Manoeuvres and Opportunist Peace Manoeuvres," *Inprecorr* 6, no. 60 (September 1926): 1019.

32 Pepper to the Secretariat, January 12, 1926, RCPUSA, 515/1/418/5, reel 28.

in the Anglo-Saxon world, from the state of the Canadian economy to the plight of the proletariat in Australia.

Thus, when the need arose for someone in the Comintern to describe and interpret the momentous events in Britain during the course of 1926, it was Pepper who volunteered for the assignment. In mid- and late 1926 he wrote a pamphlet and several articles on developments in Britain,[33] but his crowning achievement was the publication of a long pamphlet entitled *The General Strike and the General Betrayal*.[34] Here Pepper offered a systematic account of the origins and development of the general strike. His analysis was, of course, highly tendentious. His major conclusion was that British workers would gain from this "gigantic battle" the knowledge that "neither the trade unions as pure and simple economic organs, nor the simple parliamentary political struggle, are sufficient alone to carry the working class to the liberation from capitalist exploitation." His bold prediction was that the oppressive actions of the British government in ending the strike would "contribute heavily towards the crystallization of the Communist Party as a mass party."[35]

No doubt leaders of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) were less than enthusiastic about the fact that a Hungarian Communist should take the lead in writing about the pivotal events occurring in Britain in 1926, even if they might privately acknowledge that Pepper had done an impressive job of drawing on contemporary newspapers and periodicals. What was galling, however, was Pepper's constant interference in internal CPGB matters and his tendency to flaunt his knowledge at Comintern meetings and to make deprecating comments about the leaders of the CPGB.[36] To the dismay of British Communists, in the spring of 1926 Pepper was placed in charge of a commission studying a proposal for future action that they had been required to submit. In the final report of

33 The pamphlet dealt with English imperialism: *Warum greift der englische Imperialismus die Sowjetunion an*? The articles included "Split in the English Liberal Party," *Workers Monthly* 5, no. 10 (August 1926): 417–18; "Fight of the English Miners in Danger," *Inprecorr*, July 8, 1926, 835; "Britain's Balance-Sheet for 1926," *Communist International*, December 15, 1926, 5–13; and "Miners' Struggle in England. The Results of the British Miners' Fight," *Inprecorr*, December 16, 1926, 1500.

34 The pamphlet was first published in a German-language edition in Moscow, but quickly appeared in Russian, French, and English editions.

35 Ibid., 99.

36 When in April 1926, Pepper learned of a decision to allow the CPGB to select its own representative to the ECCI, he complained bitterly about the fact that he, the person responsible for overseeing the affairs of the British Secretariat, had not been consulted. Pepper to ECCI, April 2, 1926, RGASPI, 495/18/465/31.

the commission, drafted by Pepper, the "theses" put forward by the British Communists were criticized as "too abstract" and "built on false foundations." They offered "a completely unsatisfactory analysis," particularly as they related to domestic problems in Britain.[37] When the ECCI presidium discussed the "English question" at a meeting in June, Pepper again made disparaging remarks about the CPGB leadership. The policy they had pursued during the general strike, he argued, had been unsatisfactory because they had underestimated the tempo of the decline of British capitalism. When Tom Bell offered a defense of his party's strategy, Pepper responded by accusing him of being "to the Right of the [ECCI] theses."[38] No doubt Bell and his colleagues would have liked to respond vigorously to Pepper's irritating comments, but they were restrained by the fact that Nikolai Bukharin, who presided over the meeting, had concurred in Pepper's criticisms, though his remarks were made in a friendlier tone. In the remaining months of 1926 Pepper continued to adopt a supercilious attitude in his dealings with the CPGB. At an ECCI session in November he spoke at length and with assumed authority about the British coal-miners' strike, which he called "the most important event" during all of 1926.[39]

Through most of 1926 the British Communists in Moscow and others whom Pepper had alienated were hesitant to retaliate against him, since he clearly had powerful patrons in Zinoviev and Stalin. Indeed, for the first two years of his work in Moscow Pepper had benefited in many ways from his friendly relationship with Zinoviev. As recently as the meeting of the enlarged plenum of the ECCI in March 1926, Zinoviev had singled out Pepper for praise, citing his remarks about the status of workers in America and his incisive report on international labor, which proved to be correct.[40] In turn Pepper had given strong support to Zinoviev on various contentious issues, including the developing campaign against Trotsky. But by the spring of 1926 Pepper, who was constantly on the alert for subtle changes in the intramural Comintern power struggles, concluded that Stalin and Bukharin, who at this point were collaborators, intended to isolate Zinoviev and to remove him from any responsible positions in the CPSU and the Comintern. Sensing this, Zinoviev began to seek a rapprochement

37 Pepper to Secretariat, May 29, 1925, RGASPI, 495/38/10/1–2. In a marginal comment on the document Kuusinen expressed his agreement with these conclusions.

38 Thorpe, *British Communist Party*. 97.

39 Communist International, *Protokoll. Erweiterte Executive der Kommunistischen Internationale. Moskau, 22. November, bis 16 Dezember, 1926*, 442.

40 Communist International, *Protokoll. Erweiterte Executive der Kommunistischen Internationale. Moskau, 17 Febr. bis 15. März, 1926*, 41.

with Trotsky, who was also under attack, in order to thwart Stalin's bid for power.

Throughout his career as a Socialist and a Communist, John Pepper (and earlier József Pogány) had gained the reputation of being a shameless opportunist. He seemed willing to abandon friends and drastically shift his political views or ideological preferences if he decided that his own political survival and future success were at stake. In the Comintern milieu, as one historian has observed, "the ability in an emergency to leave friends and associates in the lurch was a positive quality."[41] Thus it is not surprising that in 1926 Pepper felt little compunction about turning against Zinoviev, the one Communist leader who had been most helpful to him since he had first arrived in Moscow in 1920. In fact, Pepper realized that he himself might be in political danger precisely because he was known to be a protégé of Zinoviev. Privately he spoke of the need to make an abrupt change of course with vulgar humor: "Just now I've discovered that ... I've been kissing the wrong ass!"[42] Since he was apparently convinced that Stalin would emerge triumphant from the ongoing power struggle, it was incumbent on Pepper to be an early volunteer in the campaign against Zinoviev. In the summer of 1926 he therefore took preventive action. In articles written for the *Daily Worker* he began to make critical comments about Zinoviev and to offer flattering assessments of Stalin.[43] In August he strongly encouraged his comrades in the WP's CEC to take a firm stand in the political confrontation taking place in Soviet Russia, since Zinoviev posed "the greatest danger not only for the Russian party but for the Communist International as a whole."[44]

At the ECCI plenum in late 1926, Pepper's negative comments about Trotsky, Zinoviev, and even Radek were so pronounced that Comintern insiders began to suspect that Pepper and Stalin were cooperating in some sort of nefarious project.[45] Pepper declared that the mere appearance of Zinoviev at the ECCI session was an affront to the Russian delegates and

41 Vatlin, "Der Einfluss," 228.

42 Draper, *American Communism*, 239.

43 *Daily Worker*, November 4, 1926, 1; November 18, 1926, 1, 3.

44 Pepper to Ruthenberg, August 17, 1926, RCPUSA, 515/1/692/60, reel 49. The CEC of the WP dutifully passed a resolution condemning Zinoviev. Even earlier Lovestone had assured Pepper that "every one of our boys is solid with Stalin" and that the CPUSA membership would be fully informed about the "anti-party conduct" of Trotsky. Lovestone to Pepper, July 30, 1926, RCPUSA, 515/1/692/230–32, reel 49.

45 Although Pepper and Stalin are known to have met several times in this time period and Pepper did write occasional letters to the Soviet leader, there is no evidence that at the November ECCI session Pepper was acting at the behest of Stalin.

an invitation to a deepening of the factional struggle. He further suggested that Zinoviev's speech had contained no systematic analysis and was buttressed with quotations from the writings of Marx and Engels in the 1840s that had no relevance for contemporary problems. In fact, Pepper insisted, the theses presented by Zinoviev, Trotsky, and Radek in tandem were "inadequate," "incorrect," and "false."[46] Zinoviev and Radek did not deign to respond to Pepper's caustic remarks, but Trotsky, who had sparred with Pepper (as József Pogány) five years earlier at the Third World Congress, could not resist a reply, especially when Pepper at one point interrupted his speech and, as Trotsky pointed out, robbed him of some of his "restricted speaking time." Trotsky offered a sarcastic appraisal of what he termed the three *gospels* of Pepper. The first, preached in 1921, suggested the need for "permanent, that is, uninterrupted revolutionary activity in the West." This had resulted in the "false tactic of the March Action" in Germany. Pepper's second gospel, promulgated in America, was based on cooperation with the bourgeois party of La Follette and the bizarre idea that the revolution in America would be fomented not by the workers but by the "ruined farmers." Now Pepper was introducing a third gospel, which in Trotsky's estimation bore no relationship to the first two. His favorite project now was "a kind of Monroe Doctrine for the building of socialism in Russia." Trotsky ended with a characteristic blend of mockery and humor that drew laughter from the audience: "Despite my grey hairs I am ready to learn even from Comrade Pepper, but I find it impossible to relearn his gospel every two years."[47]

No doubt some at the ECCI session privately agreed with Trotsky about Pepper's blatant opportunism and rapidly changing and inconsistent theoretical views. But Pepper had apparently taken the right side in the power struggle. Already by the end of 1926 Zinoviev was forced to step down as president of the Comintern. Before long he, Trotsky, and Radek were expelled from the Comintern and the RCP. But Pepper was soon to discover that he, too, had to pay a price for his ruthless opportunism. By December 1926, the British Communists in the Comintern, who had lost all patience with Pepper, decided to take a stand. In a letter to the ECCI presidium of December 7, 1926, Bell reported that by a "unanimous resolution" the leaders of the CPGB had declared that they had "no confidence in Comrade Pepper's political discretion." They therefore requested that the ECCI "rearrange Comrade Pepper's work in such a manner as to

46 Communist International, *Protokoll. Erweiterte Executive der Kommunistischen Internationale. Moskau, 22. November, bis 16 Dezember, 1926,* 160–63; 570–71.

47 Ibid., 584.

ensure as far as possible that he shall have no direct or indirect voice in British affairs." In particular, they urged that Pepper be replaced as director of the British Secretariat by someone in whom the CPGB could have full confidence.[48]

To Pepper's consternation, the ECCI moved with unusual speed to comply with the request of his British comrades. He was duly removed from the British Secretariat, but this was not the only indignity he was forced to endure at the end of 1926. Because of a general realignment of the structure of the ECCI, elections were being held for a newly reorganized Presidium. Pepper lobbied hard to win a place on the new Presidium, but failed. Furthermore, in a reshuffling of the heads of Comintern departments, Pepper lost his position as director of Agitprop. By early 1927 Pepper's decline thus seemed complete: except for membership on some minor committees, he no longer had any specific role to play in the Comintern. Pepper was stunned by this rapid fall from grace. What had gone wrong? He had long realized, of course, that he had made numerous enemies in the Comintern apparatus who would dearly have liked to knock him down a notch or two. But in the past he had always had powerful allies in the Comintern and Soviet leadership, most notably Zinoviev, on whom he could depend for protection. But Zinoviev, thanks in part to the efforts of Pepper himself, had been isolated by Stalin, failed to win election to the new Presidium, and was deposed as president of the ECCI. There remained Stalin himself, who in the past had shown some goodwill to Pepper. But when Lovestone, who happened to be in Moscow at the time, wrote and asked him to support Pepper, he declined to intervene.[49]

Pepper's enemies, both in Russia and the United States, observed his plight with a barely concealed Schadenfreude. An American Communist in Moscow at the time, a Foster loyalist, reported back to his colleagues on what he called "the fall of John P," which caused a "dull and sickening thud" that was "heard from one end of the CI to the other." He suggested that Pepper's career in the Comintern could well be at an end, which "would be very beneficial to our Party as well as to the Comintern as a whole."[50] For many weeks after his "fall" Pepper was depressed and lackadaisical as he brooded over his fate. He privately uttered bitter invectives against his British comrades, who, he insisted, had engaged in indecent

48 Bell to ECCI, December 7, 1926, RGASPI, 495/100/329/1–2.

49 Lovestone argued that since the CPUSA had nominated Pepper for the Presidium, his failure to be elected would be "a severe blow aimed at it." Lovestone to Stalin, December 17, 1926, Lovestone Papers, Box 212.

50 "Jack" to "Dear Comrade," December 22, 1926, RCPUSA, 515/1/692/246–51, reel 49.

slander against him. When Pepper was offered a position on the Comintern's World Economic Commission, he turned it down and told his American friends in Moscow that he was thinking of withdrawing entirely from Comintern work and going "to Berlin to write a book."[51]

Before long it became clear, however, that although his pride had been wounded and his prestige damaged, Pepper was resourceful and resilient enough to make a comeback as a leading Comintern functionary. Not all had been lost. He continued to be a member of various Comintern committees and retained the right to participate in plenums and conferences. He did not have to give up his two-room apartment at the Lux, and apparently suffered no loss in salary. Moreover, he soon found that Bukharin, who replaced Zinoviev as the leading figure in the Comintern, could be relied on to offer political support and the appropriate *blat*.[52] Perhaps sensing that a new mission abroad would revive Pepper's spirits, Bukharin arranged for him to be sent in February 1927 to Norway to assist the small and struggling local party. Pepper's subsequent report on the labor movement in Norway may have somewhat enhanced his previous reputation as an expert on Scandinavia,[53] but his ego demanded a bigger platform on which to perform. In the spring of 1927 he apparently decided to shift his focus of attention to an entirely new part of the world. He would become one of the Comintern's leading experts on Asia. He began to pursue an interest particularly in China, which was becoming the focus of attention as an area deemed ripe for revolution.

An American Communist who arrived in Moscow in May 1927 found Pepper's apartment in the Hotel Lux strewn with books, pamphlets, and reports on China. Pepper bubbled over with excitement about his new project and explained that "Chinese developments would be of the greatest importance to Russia and to the future of the Comintern."[54] At this time Pepper, at his own request, was made a member of the Japanese Secretariat and of a commission on China. With his typical brashness he was soon engaging in polemical exchanges concerning the situation in China and reporting to his American colleagues on how "the Chinese Revolution

51 Decision of English Commission of the Secretariat, April 19, 1927, RGASPI, 495/6/5/43; "Bill" (William Kruse) to Lovestone, March 17, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/992/2–3, reel 73; "Duncan" (Robert Minor) to Lovestone, March 25, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/946/44, reel 70.

52 "Bill" (Kruse) reported to Lovestone that Bukharin was trying to find "suitable work" for Pepper. Letter of March 17, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/992/2–3, reel 73.

53 Pepper, "Regrouping in the Norwegian Labour Movement," *Inprecorr* 7, no. 17 (March 3, 1927): 352–53.

54 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 426.

[has] entered a new stage."[55] Pepper's mood was further brightened in the summer of 1927 when, as will be described, he was designated by the CPUSA as its official representative to the ECCI. In this capacity he regained a place in the ECCI presidium. His American comrades in Moscow noticed that he was "beginning to feel and act much his old self." He had regained many of his old perks, such as access to a car "whenever he pleases."[56]

In this period Pepper's steady political recovery was briefly interrupted by an incident that, though seemingly trivial at the time, was to have important long-term repercussions. As the new CPUSA representative to the Comintern, Pepper was obliged to attend a variety of functions involving American visitors in Moscow. One such meeting occurred in May 1927, when a delegation of American Communist leaders was invited to a session with Stalin, who seemed eager to receive a full report about conditions in the United States. During a three-hour meeting the Soviet leader asked a series of questions, most of them directed at, and answered by, Gitlow. At one point, however, Pepper attempted to supplement one of the answers Gitlow had given. This annoyed Stalin, who "curtly and with a great show of anger interrupted him and told him to remain silent." Pepper, who may not have been previously aware of Stalin's violent temper, "winced and turned red as a beet."[57] The meeting proceeded without further incident, and when in the following months Pepper's stature in the Comintern seemed unaffected, he probably concluded that Stalin's outburst against him would have no serious consequences. He was unaware of the fact that Stalin had a very long political memory, and that those who had slighted or displeased him in any way could in time be subject to unpleasant, and even deadly, consequences.

Pepper thus was able to dismiss his contretemps with Stalin as unimportant, and continue his normal routine of work. He apparently felt so secure in his renewed status as a high-level Comintern official that in the late summer of 1927 he decided to take a long vacation in the Caucasus Mountains, where, like a true Magyar, he spent much of his time horseback riding. He returned to Moscow in September in time to play a leading role in the final act of the anti-Trotsky campaign. At an ECCI meeting Pepper was chosen to deliver one of the major speeches vilifying Trotsky,

55 Minutes of the Chinese Commission, May 30, 1927, RGASPI, 495/166/150/26–27; Pepper to PolCom of WP, July 21, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/946/64–66, reel 70.

56 "Bill" (Kruse) to J (Lovestone), September 11, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/992//30–32, reel 73.

57 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 429–30, 547.

whom he regarded as the bitterest of personal enemies. Pepper declared that Trotsky's address to the plenum was filled with "false assertions." In his personal attacks on himself and others, Trotsky had repeatedly lied, apparently in the hope that "after he has repeated a lie ten times he can make the truth out of it." This was Trotsky's modus operandi: "He had always united Left phrases and Right deeds with methods of personal slander." In conclusion, Pepper demanded on behalf of the CPUSA, that Trotsky be expelled from the ECCI, a step that "must absolutely be completed today."[58]

In normal circumstances Pepper's outspoken denunciations of Trotsky would have won for him some additional favor with Stalin. But in October Pepper was dealt an unpleasant surprise. He was instructed by the ECCI to prepare to embark immediately on a mission to Korea, where he was to help organize the local party. On the one hand, this assignment could be seen as a recognition of his newly acquired expertise in the countries of Asia. On the other hand, it was in China that important developments were expected, and a high-level Comintern mission was being prepared for dispatch to Canton, under Stalin's tutelage, to coordinate with the Chinese Communist leadership. Korea was at best a sideshow, and a dangerous one to boot. Among the Comintern cognoscenti it was regarded as the "graveyard of Comintern representatives" because the efficient Japanese intelligence service arrested any Comintern agent who crossed the border into Korea. Pepper's American friends were convinced that his new mission had been arranged by Stalin as punishment for having annoyed him at the meeting five months earlier.[59]

Whatever the true origins of his Korean mission, there seemed no way Pepper could turn down the assignment. He prepared himself by reading all available Comintern literature on Korea and meeting with anyone who had some familiarity with the country, although there were apparently no Koreans residing in Moscow at the time. He departed on his journey in early December, accompanied by a German-speaking secretary and equipped with a false passport that enabled him to pose as a Canadian journalist for the Associated Press.[60] It is difficult to reconstruct the details of Pepper's ill-fated trip, which lasted the entire month of December. The report he submitted upon his return to Russia was deliberately confusing

58 Pepper's speech, October 6, 1927, RGASPI, 495/2/107/48–58. Earlier in the session Trotsky had declared that Pepper and people like him were not the kind of Communists "who can take upon themselves the initiative in the proletarian struggle for power."

59 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 547.

60 Czóbel Memoir, 26–27.

and misleading.[61] One thing is certain: he was so fearful for his safety that he never ventured to travel to Korea. Instead, he first made his way to Shanghai, and from there traveled on to Japan, where he spent some time in Tokyo, Kobe, and Yokohama. He managed to meet up with several Korean Communists in Tokyo, and may also have encountered some radical Korean students in Shanghai. But he was able to accomplish very little. The language problems were nearly insurmountable and in any case the Korean Communists he met seemed incapable of providing reliable data or a realistic picture of social and economic conditions in their country. In short, his mission was an almost complete failure.

How was Pepper to explain this failure, and the fact that he never even set foot in Korea? Unwilling to tell the truth and risk humiliation and possibly even disciplinary action, he decided to take the great risk of presenting a trip report that contained a good deal of exaggeration, many misleading statements, and a few outright lies. He did give a truthful account of the Japanese and Chinese cities he had visited and the difficulties he had had in making contact and communicating with representatives of the Korean Communist Party (KCP). Moreover, he no doubt told the truth when he explained how muddled the situation in Korea was, how thorough and effective the Japanese police were in spying on Communists, and in general how difficult it was for outsiders, particularly Europeans, to carry out clandestine operations in Asian countries. "Korea is a very interesting country," he asserted, "but it has many peculiarities and it is impossible to understand her in such a short time." Having explained all the difficulties he had encountered, Pepper claimed that he had nonetheless achieved a good deal through "a whole series of conferences with our Korean comrades." Among other things, he had reached agreement with them on how to organize the upcoming national congress of the KCP. This statement was at best a gross exaggeration, if not an outright lie. Certainly there was no truth at all to Pepper's claim that he had in fact traveled to Seoul, Korea, where he allegedly posed as a tourist. But he did not feel that he could go so far as to claim he had made contact there with Korean comrades: "I never saw any of the Korean Communists in Seoul for to have any connections with them would have been suicidal for them."

Apparently no awkward questions were asked of Pepper when he gave his mendacious report in January 1928. Such was the ignorance of, and perhaps also indifference towards, the miniscule KCP that at first no one

61 "Report of Comrade Pepper to the Bureau of the Anglo-American Secretariat, January 21, 1928, on the Korean question," RGASPI, 495/72/30/16–32.

in the Comintern thought it necessary to scrutinize Pepper's statements. When more than a month passed without any further comment on his mission to Korea, Pepper may have felt that his gamble had worked and that he could turn his attention to other matters. Perhaps to divert attention from his Korean mission, he made an effort to project himself as an expert on the recent uprising in Canton, China.[62] In February, however, a respected Comintern figure who did have some knowledge of the KCP and current conditions in Korea had occasion to read Pepper's report. This was Sen Katayama, an American-educated Japanese who had helped found the CP in Japan. Katayama was sufficiently alarmed by what Pepper had reported that he submitted a memorandum with his own observations. Without mentioning Pepper's name, he strongly implied that the description he had provided of the current status and activity of the KCP was misinformed. Furthermore, it seemed certain to him that the Korean Communists Pepper had dealt with were an oppositional group with Trotskyite tendencies. Pepper must have blanched when he read Katayama's conclusion: "I call the Comintern to the most serious attention that must be given in order to correct the mistakes made in backing the wrong horse through a mistaken channel."[63]

By late February the steering committee of the Comintern Secretariat, of which Pepper was a member, was apprised of the situation and decided that the matter had to be clarified. The decision was made to identify a reliable Comintern agent who spoke either Japanese or Korean and send that person to Korea as a representative of the ECCI. At the same time, the executive committee established a commission that was instructed to gather information about Korea and to determine if Pepper had conducted himself properly.[64] This ominous development provided the final impetus to an idea that Pepper had probably been contemplating ever since his return to Moscow in late December. If he was to be disgraced, he would prefer to be in the United States and not Russia at the time. At least there he would have a group of comrades who would console him and offer new opportunities for useful party work. The only question was whether he would be able to overcome the obstacles that had prevented his return to America for the previous four years.

62 In early 1928 Pepper wrote several articles on the Canton uprising and raised the subject on Comintern committees. See "After the Canton Uprising," *Communist* 7, no. 3 (March 1928): 154–59.

63 Sen Katayama, "On the Korean Communist Party Problem," February 25, 1928, RGASPI, 495/72/34/32–34.

64 Minutes of Executive Committee of Secretariat, March 2, 1928, RGASPI, 495/6/11/51.

CHAPTER 8
Pepper and the "American Question," 1924–1928

We have noted that at several periods in the party when the groups were approaching towards unity, we have received some letter from comrade Pepper to the party; some new maneuver, some new scheme whereby the factional fires were intensified, and we turn to the comrades of the Executive Committee of the Communist International with a very direct request ... to relieve our party of this unnecessary difficulty. / JAMES CANNON, JUNE, 1927

In the first two years of his Comintern work, 1924–26, Pepper had become involved in a myriad of activities. Few of his colleagues could match him in the production of articles and pamphlets, which he managed to publish in many languages in leading Communist journals and newspapers worldwide. It is true that his ambition to become the Comintern's acknowledged expert on Great Britain had been thwarted. But no one was able to successfully challenge his claim to be the authoritative voice on all things American. Pepper devoted a good deal of time to maintaining his connections to the CPUSA. In the back of his mind there always remained the thought that someday he would want to return to the United States and continue the work he had been forced to abandon in 1924. Since this would be possible only if the party faction to which he was attached once again gained control of the WP, he sought whenever possible to influence Comintern leaders to turn against the Foster faction. His success in this endeavor was perhaps his greatest accomplishment in the period up to 1926.

Beginning in August 1924, Pepper was kept apprised of developments in the WP through frequent, and sometimes very long, letters from friends and associates in the United States, particularly Lovestone, Amter, and Bedacht.[1] Some of the letters had almost a fawning quality. Pepper was told again and again how indispensable to the WP he had been, how much he was missed, and how all his supporters were pledged to continue a "pepper-policy" or "pepperism." The concluding sentence of one of Bedacht's letters was typical: "With high hopes for the future of our party, and also

1 Between late 1924 and 1928, Lovestone wrote to Pepper usually once a week, often at great length. Other less frequent correspondents included Nat Kaplan, Max Bedacht, Israel Amter, Bob Manley, and "Sven Finn."

for the chance of having with us soon again the one man that has helped our party out of its pitiful embryonic stage into that of healthy baby- and child-hood."[2] Pepper was assured that the efforts of the Foster faction to besmirch his memory were finding no resonance among the party rank-and-file, and he had no reason to fear, since "you have your champions here, if you need any."[3] Many, though not all, of such Pepper loyalists were in the New York City area. In an otherwise poorly received speech by Bittelman, one of Pepper's staunchest enemies, at the national convention of the Hungarian Federation in New York in December 1924, a passing reference to Pepper sparked a spontaneous demonstration of support that lasted several minutes.[4]

The information Pepper received in late 1924 and early 1925 made it clear that the Comintern's hopes for a cease-fire in the factional struggle had been dashed. Pepper's informants declared that the majority faction under Foster had no intention of seeking an honest compromise and intended instead to destroy the Ruthenberg group. According to Amter, the situation was "tenser than ever" and "our comrades are demoralized and disorganized."[5] Bedacht described sessions of the PolCom as "dreary affairs" that produced no worthwhile results: "We have not had a political discussion of importance since you left."[6] Lovestone wrote in typically melodramatic and at times florid terms. He and Ruthenberg were of the opinion that the CP had not been "at such low ebb in spirit and work for many years." The proceedings of the CEC were disorganized and thoroughly unproductive: "We spend a lot of time sorting pigeon shit." Lovestone concluded that "unless we succeed in reestablishing a Communist majority on the CEC with you as one of the members, the party in America is doomed to a long period of sterility." In that case it might be best if the Comintern simply put the WP into "receivership."[7]

It was perhaps only natural that as the recipient of such outpourings of praise and adulation from his American friends, Pepper would feel it incumbent on himself to do his utmost in Moscow to promote the interests of the Ruthenberg faction, which appeared to be under siege. But he had to proceed carefully, for the official representative of the CPUSA to the

2 Bedacht to Pepper, December 13, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/273/149–53, reel 18.
3 Amter to Pepper, November 1, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/273/129–30, reel 18.
4 Amter to Lovestone, December 6, 1924, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.
5 Amter to Pepper, November 19, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/273/131–40, reel 18.
6 Bedacht to Pepper, October 5, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/273/114–17, reel 18.
7 Lovestone to Pepper, August 24 and September 30, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/273/109–11, 189–94, reel 18; November 17, 1925, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

Comintern in 1924–1925 was Dunne, a Foster loyalist. Still, Pepper had important advantages. Unlike Dunne he spoke fluent German and had personal access to high-level Comintern and Soviet leaders. Furthermore, he could claim the right to speak on matters pertaining to the WP because he had been elected a member of its CEC in December 1923 and technically remained in that position until the next annual congress. As director of the Information Department and later of the Agitprop Department he was also in a position to influence the way in which issues relating to the CPUSA were depicted in Comintern publications. For example, the "Lore question" was presented in information bulletins in a way damaging to the Foster faction.[8] Finally, whereas Foster and other leaders of his faction were unaware of the possible implications of the emerging power struggle in the Soviet leadership, Pepper was well-positioned to gauge the shifting winds and how they might affect the CPUSA.[9]

Roughly once a month Pepper responded to the numerous letters he received from his American colleagues by composing a "Dear Comrades" letter, which was sent to Lovestone who then passed it along. In these missives, which were written in English or German or a combination of both and sometimes ran to nine or ten pages, Pepper offered his sage advice on tactics and personnel decisions. He provided "insider" information on developments in the ECCI in general and on matters relating to the CPUSA in particular. There were occasional hints that he yearned for the day when he could return to the United States, since he found the Russian climate uncongenial and he sorely missed the camaraderie of the "New York gang." It did not take long for Pepper's enemies in the WP to discover that he continued to interfere in CPUSA affairs and that his "Dear Comrades" letters were circulating among members of the Ruthenberg faction. Foster lodged a complaint about these letters with the ECCI, but no Comintern leader was about to try to prohibit Pepper from remaining in contact with his American friends.[10]

Once it became clear to Zinoviev that the factional struggle in the CPUSA had not abated, the ECCI decided that another American Commission was in order. The WP was informed that the annual party congress would have to be postponed until the problem was thrashed out

8 See Information Department bulletins, RCPUSA, 515/1/429–430, reel 27. Lovestone fully understood the advantages for the CPUSA of having a trusted friend in these key Comintern departments. See Lovestone to "Dear Friends," November 26, 1926, RCPUSA, 515/1/692/60–63, reel 49.

9 Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 235–36; Zumoff, "Communist Party," 231.

10 Foster to ECCI, RGASPI, 495/18/230/14.

once again in Russia in early 1925. Accordingly, the CEC made plans for a four-man delegation to be sent to Moscow in February for the deliberations, which were to overlap with the ECCI's 5th enlarged plenum. Foster and Cannon were to represent the majority faction and Ruthenberg and Lovestone the minority. At his end Pepper made careful preparations. In November he sent Lovestone a long, detailed letter in which he offered advice on how the "Marxist group" (by which he meant the Ruthenberg faction) should conduct itself in Moscow and what sort of theses should be presented. In a later letter he warned his colleagues not to raise their expectations too high. In his opinion the ECCI was unlikely, in the present circumstances, to oust the Foster group and to confer majority status on the Ruthenberg faction.[11] For his part Pepper sent letters and memorandums to ECCI leaders in which he tried, without seeming too one-sided, to raise doubts about the reliability of the Foster group. For example, he pointed out, correctly, that an important policy difference between the two factions concerned the farmer-labor campaign, which the Foster group wanted to abandon. He also tried to create the suspicion that Foster had "Trotskyite" tendencies: "It can be no accident that all the groups of various political shades who support the Foster faction ... also often support Trotsky."[12]

When the American delegates arrived in Moscow in mid-February 1925, they learned that Pepper had set up meetings with key Soviet leaders, but only for Ruthenberg and Lovestone. Foster and Cannon had to scramble to arrange similar meetings, since their intermediary, Dunne, lacked such useful "connections" in Moscow. Shortly after their arrival Lovestone and Ruthenberg, joined by Pepper, had an initial two-hour meeting with Stalin that proved to be very satisfactory from their viewpoint. Stalin, Lovestone later gushed, was "a peach." The Soviet leader in general approved Pepper's formulation of a Labor Party "as the only door thru which the WP can become a mass CP." In fact, he was so interested in what the minority faction leaders had to say about conditions in the United States that he requested a second meeting, which lasted three hours. Afterwards Lovestone concluded that of the Soviet leaders Stalin "is closest to our point of view" and has "a very low opinion of Zee [Foster]."[13]

11 Pepper to "Werter Genosse," November 15, 1924, RCPUSA, 515/1/273/120–29, reel 18; Pepper to "Liebe Genossen," January 6, 1925, RCPUSA, 515/1/441/1–8, reel 28.

12 Pepper's memorandum, "Die amerikanische Lage," undated (late 1924 or early 1925), RCPUSA, 515/1/253/120–22, reel 16; Pepper to Zinoviev, March 15, 1925, RCPUSA, 515/1/446/9, reel 29.

13 Lovestone letters to "Dear Friends," February 17 and March 4, 1925, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

Things seemed to go equally smoothly for the minority faction in the meetings Pepper set up with Bukharin, Zinoviev, and Kuusinen. Bukharin was friendly and, in Lovestone's opinion, was "absolutely for our position." Kuusinen was also sympathetic, although he was looking for "some middle of the road solution."[14] He intimated that although the ECCI did not regard Foster as a true Communist, "we must do everything to make him one." Despite this ambiguous message, Lovestone was confident enough after his group's meetings with Soviet leaders to declare privately that "unless an earthquake happens, we will wipe the floor with them [the Foster faction]."[15]

The minority faction did in fact score a major symbolic victory at the very outset of the deliberations of the American Commission. Foster and Cannon had been annoyed to discover that after his "exile" in the summer of 1924 Pepper continued to interfere in WP affairs through regular letters that were circulated among his American party friends. Their annoyance turned into indignation when, upon their arrival in Moscow in February 1925, they discovered that the minority faction intended to put forward Pepper as a third member of their delegation, which would mean that the Foster group would be outnumbered three to two. This, Cannon complained, was all too typical of Pepper's devious maneuvers: "When Comrade Pepper was in America, he wanted to appear as representative of the CI. In Moscow he wants to appear as representative of our party." The majority faction wanted to make it clear that Pepper did not speak for the WP and represented a "constant menace to the unity of the party."[16] But the Comintern leaders on the American Commission were not moved by Cannon's condemnations of Pepper. As Lovestone noted privately, Zinoviev "was so concerned over the attempt to hinder John that he let it be known in very strong terms ... that he would not tolerate such nonsense." The minority faction was thus allowed to have Pepper as a member of its delegation, and to rub salt in the wounds, Lovestone insisted that Pepper be the chief spokesperson for the Ruthenberg faction in the American Commission. In his presentations to the American Commission, Pepper showed no inclination to conciliate his enemies. In fact, he went out of his way to taunt them, for example, by repeating his earlier attacks on Foster as the "Gompers of the Workers' Party." Moreover, he insisted that he was still a legal, elected member of the CEC, even though, as his

14 Lovestone's letter of February 21, 1925 to "My dearest friends," Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

15 Lovestone letter, February 17, 1925, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

16 *James P. Cannon*, 319–20.

enemies never ceased to point out, he was "an emigrant and not a 100% American."[17]

After a month of deliberations, which consisted largely of a rehashing of familiar positions, the ECCI rendered its latest decision on "the American question." As far as policy issues were concerned, the majority faction suffered another setback. To the surprise of most of the American delegates, and the consternation of the Foster group, the Comintern seemed to execute a complete volte-face with regard to its previously stated policy on third-party alliances and the farmer-labor movement. Less than a year earlier Soviet leaders, with Trotsky in the forefront, had ridiculed the idea that American Communists could profitably ally themselves with the "bourgeois" La Follette and "ruined farmers." Now, however, with Trotsky in political retreat, La Follette was credited with having achieved "an important victory" and it was implied that the CPUSA would do well to join forces with the Progressives. Although Comintern leaders had previously sent out mixed signals concerning the idea of cooperation of farmers and workers in a Labor Party, they now suggested that it would "for a time represent a definite step forward in the American labor movement." American Communists were thus instructed to do their "utmost to further the movement," even if it meant that "there will be for a time at the head of the Labor Party similar reformist labor traitors to those in England, or worse." The argument made by Cannon and Foster that the Farmer-Labor Party was a lost cause and should be abandoned was declared to be "incorrect." Ruthenberg and Pepper had been "right" in this matter and in fact had not gone far enough in seeking to build a broadly based Labor Party.[18]

All of this, of course, was music to Pepper's ears, for it seemed to be a complete vindication of the policies he had first promoted in 1923 and doggedly pursued ever since. It was no great surprise that Soviet leaders, especially Stalin, should have approved Pepper's formulation of the Labor Party issue before the American Commission, for Pepper was careful to frame the issue along the lines suggested by Stalin in their private meetings.[19] Now that Stalin and Zinoviev had both apparently given their

17 Protocol of February 13 session of American Commission, RGASPI, 495/163/339; Lovestone letter to "Dear Friends," March 4, 1925, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

18 Draper, *American Communism*, 137–39.

19 Lovestone and Ruthenberg had chosen Pepper to state their case on policy issues before the American Commission. Lovestone was in awe of his performance: "John did splendidly in dealing with the question from the international point of view. His understanding of the Europeans and their attitude was of tremendous service." Lovestone to "Dear Friends," March 4, 1925, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

imprimatur to his conception of a Labor Party, Pepper felt confident about developing his ideas into yet another elaborate theory on a vast historical scale. In a speech at the ECCI plenum that was attended by all of the American delegates, Pepper suggested that the Comintern was in its third period of development, which would center on the problem of the Labor Party. The geographic focus of the first and second periods had been Central Europe and the Far East, respectively. In the third period the Communist world would need to turn its attention westward: "I believe that the policy of the CI will be dominated ever more powerfully by England, the United States of America, and Latin America."[20]

The Foster faction certainly experienced a number of setbacks in the course of the deliberations of the American Commission. They had been rebuked for their "incorrect" approach to the farmer-labor movement. They had failed in their attempt to disenfranchise Pepper and had to endure long speeches by their nemesis in which he pontificated on the "American question" before the American Commission and at other Comintern forums. Yet in April 1925, as the American Commission drew to an end, the prospects for the majority faction brightened considerably. For one thing, they were able to persuade the ECCI to issue a clarification of Pepper's status. During the deliberations of the American Commission Zinoviev and other Comintern officials had argued that as a member of the WP's CEC and as an expert on American affairs, Pepper had every right to contribute to the discussions and be a member of the minority faction delegation. Why, they had asked, were Foster and Cannon so worried about Pepper? He was deeply immersed in Comintern problems of all kinds and there were no plans to send him back to the United States. Seizing on these statements, Cannon drafted a resolution and presented it to the ECCI. After editing by Zinoviev to eliminate the harsher anti-Pepper language and to emphasize the need for the end of factionalism, the following statement was approved by the ECCI:

> "In particular, the Executive Committee must point out that it regards a campaign conducted against comrade Pepper as absolutely uncalled for, all the more since, firstly, comrade Pepper himself has no intention of returning to work in the Workers' Party, and secondly, the Executive Committee desires to use his energies for other important tasks. The Executive Committee knows that comrade Pepper

20 Communist International, *Protokoll. Erweiterte Exekutive der Kommunistischen Internationale, Moskau, 21. Marz–6. April 1925*, 147–48.

during his brief stay in America performed services for the Workers' Party for which he deserves praise. The Executive Committee demands that all personal polemics between the two sides should cease."[21]

In this way Foster and Cannon were able to gain the assurance that their worst nightmare would not occur: Pepper would not, at least in the foreseeable future, return to the United States.

Lovestone fully expected that the final decisions of the American Commission would represent a "crushing defeat" for the majority faction. But this was not to be. As Pepper himself had predicted months earlier, the ECCI leadership was not inclined to intervene to change the current balance of power in the CPUSA. Thus, despite the criticisms of the Foster group that members of the ECCI had made, Zinoviev informed the American delegates that the Comintern would not take sides in the factional fight: "The future will show which of the two [factions] has deceived itself. We can only wish both wings the best of good luck."[22] It was expected that at the forthcoming national congress of the WP, now scheduled for August, all outstanding issues would be resolved and the factional struggle would be put to rest. The Comintern planned to send a representative to the United States to serve as an "impartial chairman" to oversee this process and offer guidance. In the meantime the majority faction was instructed to stop all attacks on the minority group, especially Pepper, and allow them at least one-third representation on the CEC and in the operation of the *Daily Worker*.

For Pepper these decisions had one practical result. Since the main focus of his work was now officially recognized to be in Moscow, he would have to transfer his membership from the CPUSA to the Russian party. Once this occurred in June 1925, he could no longer argue that he remained a member of the CEC in the United States. This did not mean, of course, that he had to sever his ties with American friends or discontinue his efforts on their behalf. Far from it. During the spring and summer of 1925 he continued to receive frequent reports from Lovestone and others. Even when because of his illness he had to spend considerable amounts of time away from Moscow, he arranged to have all his "American letters and reports" sent to him in a timely fashion.[23] From these reports he received

21 "Proposal on Comrade Pepper," April 6, 1925, James P. Cannon, 328.

22 Draper, *American Communism*, 138–39.

23 Henry (Pepper) to Lovestone, May 27, 1925, RCPUSA, 515/1/418/27, reel 27.

disquieting information about the continuation, and even intensification, of the factional struggle. Lovestone reported that Foster was paying no heed to the Comintern's advice and "was hell bent on smashing us to pieces." He, Ruthenberg, and Bedacht were being viciously attacked, and the "vilest lies" were once again being told about Pepper, despite the ECCI resolution calling for an end to such tactics. A session of the CEC in May was, according to Lovestone, "the most disgraceful meeting ever held in any labor organization, communist or otherwise." The majority faction opened the meeting to the public and arranged to bring in "riff-raff, gangster types" who were instructed to "terrorize the minority" through "sneering, swearing, yelling, and howling."[24]

Sergei Gusev, the Russian Communist appointed to restore discipline and amity to the CPUSA, arrived in the United States in July 1925, and at first scrupulously played the role of "impartial chairman." When the convention delegates elected Foster party chair by a vote of 40–21, Gusev approved the result, even though the minority faction claimed there had been fraud and gerrymandering in the election of the delegates.[25] The Comintern representative thereupon suggested that representation of the two factions on the new CEC and on other WP organs should roughly reflect Foster's margin of victory. The leaders of the two factions agreed to this solution, since it corresponded to Zinoviev's earlier insistence that the Ruthenberg group be given at least a 33 percent representation. For a brief moment, it appeared that Gusev's mission had been successful. Foster, however, could not resist the temptation to take immediate advantage of his victory. His party rivals were appalled to see him begin to settle scores with "the ruthlessness practiced in the trade unions with which he was so familiar."[26] Before the convention was over he pushed through plans to take Ruthenberg's place as national secretary, oust Lovestone and Engdahl from the CEC, neutralize the other opposition leaders, and take complete control of the *Daily Worker*. This development caused an uproar among minority delegates, who threatened to stage a walkout. Tensions mounted quickly and heated arguments lead to vociferous exchanges and actual fistfights. The ECCI, having heard from Pepper of these developments, sought confirmation from Gusev, who immediately cabled a report that was

24 Lovestone letters to Pepper, May 6, 1925, Lovestone Papers, Box 384; and May 15, 1925, RCPUSA, 515/1/441/4–6, reel 29. For the continuing campaign of vilification against Pepper, see letter of Jack Bradon to Parity Commission, August 3, 1925, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

25 Draper, *American Communism*, 142–43; Wolfe, *Life*, 381.

26 Wolfe, *Life*, 381.

factual but "somewhat favorable to the Ruthenberg group." He did not, however, offer any recommendations on how the Comintern should proceed.[27]

The response from the ECCI was rapid, decisive, and unprecedented. On August 28, Gusev summoned the leaders of the WP and solemnly read to them the contents of a cable he had just received from Moscow.[28] The American Communists were thunderstruck by this latest pronouncement from "Mecca." The ECCI peremptorily declared that "under no circumstances" should the majority faction be allowed to suppress the minority, since it had "finally become clear that the Ruthenberg Group is more loyal to decisions of the Communist International and stands closer to its views." It was further asserted that the Foster group employed "excessively mechanical and ultra-factional methods" and that the Ruthenberg faction in fact represented a majority or "an important minority" in most of the key districts of the WP. As a result the Comintern had to insist on certain minimum demands. The Ruthenberg group was to receive no less than 40 percent representation on the CEC, with Ruthenberg remaining as national secretary and Lovestone as a member. The two factions were to have an equal role in the production of the *Daily Worker*. There would have to be "maximum application of parity on all executive organs" of the WP. If the Foster faction refused to accede to these demands, the Comintern would create a temporary CEC with a neutral chair (presumably Gusev) that would, once "passions have died down," call a new national convention. Any American Communist who refused to submit to this solution would be expelled from the CP.

Given the specific details of the Comintern cable of August 28, it was assumed by American Communists at the time, as well as by future historians, that it could only have been instigated by Gusev, who must have advised Comintern leaders on what measures were needed. But in fact Gusev had made no recommendations, and the ECCI acted on the basis of advice offered by Pepper, who had been kept abreast of developments by frequent telegrams from Lovestone.[29] When he learned on August 27, of the

27 Pepper's letter to "Lieber Genosse" (Lovestone), September 14, 1925, RCPUSA, 515/1/441/24–29, reel 28.

28 For the text of the cable see Draper, *American Communism*, 144. According to Draper, of the numerous cables sent by the Comintern to the CPUSA, this one "was never equaled in its melodrama or in its consequences."

29 Pepper explained his and Gusev's role in the genesis of the August 28 cable in a letter to "Liebe Genossen," October 2, 1925, Lovestone Papers, Box 384. Gusev later asserted that before the receipt of the Comintern cable of August 28 he had always maintained a strict neutrality in his reports to the ECCI. Pepper to Lovestone, December 9, 1925, RCPUSA, 515/1/441/42–46.

drastic steps that Foster had taken to cement his hold on the WP, Pepper immediately wrote and hand-delivered a letter to Zinoviev in which he described, in terms definitely favorable to the Ruthenberg faction, "the very serious and troubling news" he had received concerning developments at the WP national convention.[30] He transmitted and supported Lovestone's claim that at the local level the majority had used "devious means" and "blatant cheating" to gain an artificial advantage at the convention. In reality, Pepper argued, the Ruthenberg group had received a majority of votes in such key cities as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Cleveland. Furthermore, Foster, in direct opposition to the ECCI's instructions, was attempting to force Ruthenberg, Lovestone, and Engdahl out of leadership positions in the CEC and at the *Daily Worker.* To deal with the "extremely dangerous" and "untenable" situation that Foster had created, Pepper urged the ECCI to take immediate action. Zinoviev, who perhaps regarded Foster's reported actions as a direct defiance of his plea for amity in the CPUSA, was now inclined to accept Pepper's arguments and recommendations. The Comintern cable of August 28 was thus closely modeled on Pepper's letter sent one day earlier, and it is even possible that Pepper helped Zinoviev compose the fateful ultimatum to the CPUSA. After all, the idea that "the Ruthenberg Group is more loyal to decisions of the Communist International and stands closer to its views" was something that Pepper had for months been whispering in Zinoviev's ear.

Outraged by the unexpected turn of events, Foster was inclined at first to rebel against what he considered an entirely perverse decision by the ECCI. But most of his allies, including Cannon, were loathe to place themselves in opposition to the will of the Comintern and thereby risk expulsion from the Communist movement. With great reluctance Foster thereupon gave up all hope of immediate resistance and agreed that his faction should abandon its majority status and submit to the rulings of Gusev as an "impartial chairman" of a reconstituted CEC.[31] They anticipated that the two factions would in fact share power on the basis of "parity." But Gusev now felt constrained to interpret the Comintern directive in a way favorable to the Ruthenberg faction, for after all that group was now viewed in Moscow as "more loyal to the decisions of the Communist International." As Bertram Wolfe later recalled, Gusev now routinely "sat at the front of the table ... as if he were ... a member of our group."[32] On the CEC Gusev consistently favored the Ruthenberg group. As a result, when

30 Pepper's letter to Zinoviev of August 26, 1925, RCPUSA, 515/1/446/21–22, reel 29.

31 Barrett, *William Z. Foster*, 149–50.

32 Wolfe, *Life*, 384. See also Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 248–49.

he finally departed from the United States in October 1925, Ruthenberg and his allies were once again in control of the WP. Cannon and others had broken from the Foster faction and were willing, at least for a time, to join forces with Ruthenberg to carry out the will of the Comintern. The new majority, headed by Ruthenberg until his sudden death in March 1927 and thereafter by Lovestone, naturally expressed effusive loyalty to the Comintern. This new political alignment in the CPUSA was to remain in place until 1929, although Foster and those who remained loyal to him by no means abandoned hope of regaining power. They simply realized that they must bide their time until a change in the Soviet leadership or a shift in Comintern strategy created in Moscow conditions that were more favorable to their cause.

In the late summer and early fall of 1925, Pepper, who was now bedridden and struggling to recuperate from his bout with malaria, was not able to follow events in the CPUSA as closely as was his wont. It took some time for him to realize how great an effect his intervention in late August had had on the course of events. However, once he learned the details of what had occurred, he expressed astonishment at the result: no one, he suggested, had imagined that the "whole party apparatus would fall into the hands of the Ruthenberg group."[33] In his delight over this result, Pepper could not resist boasting about the role he had played in achieving what "not a single comrade in America could have anticipated." He had placed "heightened demands" before the ECCI and had been able to achieve "just about everything that was humanly possible." His American friends were duly appreciative: "we take our hats off to you!" Reflecting on how valuable Pepper's presence in Moscow was, Lovestone concluded that "a good friend at court is worth much more than a half dozen army corps."[34]

In the last months of 1925, Pepper, though still confined to his hospital bed, managed to continue to dispatch his customary letters of advice to his American comrades, albeit on a more irregular basis. One thing that apparently concerned him was that the leaders of the new majority would become complacent, convinced that their position was now secure. He thus warned that it would be a grave error to believe that the ECCI had "the intention or the will" to maintain the Ruthenberg group in its current majority status. To solidify its position, the new majority needed to demonstrate to the ECCI and even to hostile WP members that it offered

33 Pepper to "Lieber Genosse" (Lovestone), September 14, 1925, RCPUSA, 515/1/441/24–29, reel 28.

34 Lovestone to Pepper, October 8, 1925, RCPUSA, 515/1/443/4–11, reel 29.

better leadership than that which the Foster group had provided. This, Pepper insisted, would require his colleagues to work with "unheard-of speed" and with "truly revolutionary energy and concentration." Among the many specific suggestions he made were an effort to win over Cannon to the Ruthenberg faction and a vigorous campaign, in line with Comintern policy, to diminish the autonomy and importance of the language federations, particularly the Finnish Federation, which was a bulwark of the Foster group.[35]

Late in 1925, once he had been released from the hospital and returned to his normal work routine, Pepper resumed his behind-the-scenes lobbying for the Ruthenberg group. He had now to proceed more cautiously, since he was no longer officially a member of the CPUSA and, as he pointed out to Lovestone, would find it difficult in Comintern circles to pose as a neutral observer of American affairs.[36] But his relationship with key Soviet leaders was by this time so strong that he felt no compunction about approaching them privately and offering them his analysis and recommendations. In December he submitted to Zinoviev a long memorandum designed to bring him up-to-date on the "new direction in the American question."[37] He assured the Soviet leader that the Ruthenberg group now had a substantial advantage on the CEC (18–4), which reflected its growing support in the party. Former adherents of Foster in the youth organization and the Finnish Federation, as well as Cannon, had pledged their support to the unity movement under Ruthenberg's direction and in conformance with Comintern guidelines.

When the "American question" was once again on the agenda of the ECCI in January 1926, and Foster arrived with the demand that the Comintern issue a new, clearer directive, Pepper thwarted his effort by winning support beforehand from Zinoviev, Stalin, and Bukharin.[38] Foster's call for a reevaluation of Comintern policy toward the WP went unheeded. Pepper was also successful in placating Cannon, with whom he held friendly talks

35 Pepper's letters to "Liebe Genossen," October 2, 1925, Lovestone Papers, Box 384; and October 7, 1925, RCPUSA, 515/1/441/38–40, reel 28. Lovestone was more confident than Pepper that his group would be able to retain the support of the ECCI since "we were given the majority and organized as a majority and inspired as a majority and baptized as a majority and circumcised as a majority by George [Gusev]." Lovestone to Pepper, November 9, 1925, Lovestone Papers, Box 197.

36 Pepper to Lovestone, October 27, 1925, RCPUSA, 515/1/441/40, reel 28.

37 Pepper to Zinoviev, December 10, 1925, RCPUSA, 515/1/446/30–32, reel 29.

38 Pepper to Stalin, January 12, 1926, RCPUSA, 515/1/603/3–5, reel 42; Pepper to Bucharin, January 12, 1926, RGASPI, 495/18/465/5–6.

in Moscow early in 1926. Cannon, who in this period tried to play an independent role in the factional fight, was even persuaded to sign a letter to the American Commission calling attention to a report that there continued to be "unmistakable signs of factional work on the part of the [Foster] opposition."[39]

For Pepper perhaps the most important practical result of the return to power of the Ruthenberg faction was that he was no longer prohibited from contributing to the *Daily Worker* and other American Communist publications. After an absence of over a year, his articles began once again to appear regularly starting in January 1926. To the annoyance of Foster and his colleagues, who condemned the action as "provocative," Pepper trumpeted his return in a front page letter of "greetings" to his American comrades on January.[40] At this time he began a column called "Notes of an Internationalist" in which he offered an analysis of a variety of issues in the world Communist movement.[41] Articles by Pepper also began to appear again regularly in *The Workers Monthly* and *The Liberator*. In January he set forth his views on the Labor Party movement, which had just received a stamp of approval from the ECCI, and followed up with related articles on international labor conditions.[42]

For most of 1926, that period in his Comintern tenure in which he was at the peak of his influence in Moscow, Pepper paid less attention to the "American question." He continued to write frequently on American topics for *Inprecorr*,[43] but most of his time was taken up by responsibilities as director of Agitprop, committee work, and active participation in the various intrigues associated with the ongoing Soviet power struggle. In any case, since the Ruthenberg faction was now firmly in control, there was not much of a need for his personal intervention. He even joked with colle-

39 The letter was signed by Pepper, Bedacht, and Cannon, January 30, 1926, RCPUSA, 515/1/419/2, reel 27. Cannon also told Lovestone privately that he was not opposed in principle to the idea of Pepper returning to the United States, although he believed the timing was not yet right. Lovestone to Pepper, January 14, 1926, Lovestone Papers, Box 384. See also Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 289–90, 296.

40 "Anniversary Greetings from John Pepper," January 9, 1928, 1.

41 The first such article was "Workers' and Peasants' Government – with Large Land Owners!" *Daily Worker*, January 19, 1926, 6. Over the coming months there followed articles on such wide-ranging topics as the counterrevolution in Hungary, deviationists in the Czechoslovak CP, the Locarno Treaty, the Labor Party in Norway, the apostasy of Sven Höglund, and the Labor Party in Britain.

42 Pepper, "Why a Labor Party?" *The Liberator* 5, no. 3 (January 1926): 99–102; "New Phenomena in the International Labor Movement" 5, no. 6 (April 1926): 243–48.

43 For example, "Political Significance of the Elections in America," *Inprecorr* 6, no. 76 (November 18, 1926): 1304.

agues that he was now "neutral" in his attitude toward CPUSA issues.[44] So confident did he become that matters were proceeding smoothly in the CPUSA that he greatly reduced the length and frequency of the "Dear Comrades" letters that he had been sending. Lovestone even chided his friend for this: "It's been so long since you have written that I sometimes wonder whether you want to hear from me at all."[45]

Of course, Pepper was always prepared to respond to requests for help from Ruthenberg or Lovestone. In the summer of 1926 he agreed to serve as acting representative of the Workers' Party to the Comintern in the interval between the departure of Bedacht and arrival of Minor. In the fall he was instrumental in persuading the ECCI to approve the request, which was strongly opposed by Foster and his allies, for the transfer of WP headquarters from Chicago to New York. And whenever an American delegation was preparing to travel to Moscow for a plenum or congress, Pepper made sure to offer detailed advice about what tactics and arguments were likely to be efficacious when dealing with the ECCI.[46]

All of this changed in early 1927 in the aftermath of Pepper's dismissal from the chairmanship of the English Secretariat and his failure to win election to the ECCI Presidium. In his disappointment and disillusionment he began to think more seriously of finding a way to return to the United States and recapture the glory of his earlier successes.[47] Before long, of course, he took on other responsibilities in the Comintern and was sent on missions to Norway and, toward the end of 1927, to Korea. But at some point early in the year he must have signaled to Lovestone that he was eager to rejoin his comrades in New York. Lovestone did not have to be convinced of the desirability of Pepper's return. As early as February 1926, he had privately made this clear: "I stand for Pepper's immediate return as a full-fledged citizen. More that that, I am going to fight for it, no matter on whose toes I have to step."[48] When he learned of Pepper's difficulties in finding a new position in the Comintern apparatus, he wrote, perhaps

44 "Bill" (William Dunne) to Lovestone, April 11, 1926, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

45 Lovestone to Pepper, July 30, 1926, Lovestone Papers, Box 384. In September Lovestone again complained that "it's months now that we have not heard from you." September 8, 1926, RCPUSA, 515/1/692/70–72, reel 49.

46 See, for example, Pepper's eleven-page memorandum to Ruthenberg dated December 27, 1926, RCPUSA, 515/1/692/175–86, reel 49.

47 In March he told Robert Minor, the American representative to the Comintern, that he had been pessimistic about things recently, but the idea of a return to America and "the prospect of the fight" cheered him up. "Duncan" (Minor) to Lovestone, March 25, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/946/44, reel 70.

48 Lovestone to Pepper, February 20, 1926, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

only partly in jest, that the best solution would be that Pepper "make life so miserable" for his Comintern bosses that "in order to get rid of him they send him here. We can use him, if they can't in Moscow."[49] Lovestone realized, however, that there would be strong opposition to Pepper's return from Foster, especially since he and his allies had been emboldened to renew their public attacks on Pepper early in 1927 when they learned of his apparent political demise in Moscow.[50]

As a first step in the process of bringing Pepper back as a full-time member and leader of the party, Lovestone pondered the idea of making him the official representative to the Comintern of the Workers' Party, which in late 1926 had been renamed the Workers' (Communist) Party, or W(C)P. An opportunity for this arose in June 1927, when the PolCom of the W(C)P decided that Minor, who had served as the American representative in Moscow for over a year, should be recalled for urgent work at home. Lovestone's proposal that Pepper should be named to the post was thereupon approved by a 4–3 vote.[51] Lovestone had thought that Cannon, who over the past year had shown some willingness to cooperate with the majority faction, would not oppose this move, but he was mistaken.[52] At a session of the American Commission in Moscow, Cannon expressed his irritation that the "Pepper question" was once more being raised in the form of an "artificially added problem":

> We have noted that at several periods in the party when the groups were approaching towards unity, we have received some letter from comrade Pepper to the party; some new maneuver, some new scheme whereby the factional fires were intensified, and we turn to the comrades of the Executive Committee of the Communist International with a very direct request in the interests of the normal, natural, and

49 Lovestone to "Bill" (Kruse), April 20, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/992/8, reel 73.

50 Lovestone complained to Foster about these attacks, which violated Comintern injunctions against such personal invective. He declared: "When you attack Pepper, you are attacking ... Ruthenberg, Lovestone, and others, via Pepper." Report on conference of February 19, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/1001/11–12, reel 74.

51 Lovestone announced the change in a letter to the ECCI Presidium of July 7, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/929, 82, reel 68. Lovestone was being less than truthful when he assured the Presidium that the members of minority group had agreed to this. The appointment of Pepper was also announced in the *Daily Worker*, July 20, 1927, 1.

52 Only six months earlier Lovestone had conveyed to Pepper his impression that "Jim [Cannon] is quite sympathetic to your coming back though he is opposed to making a Party issue of it." Lovestone to Pepper, December 28, 1926, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

> for healthy development of the American party to relieve our party of this unnecessary difficulty, and let us contend with those difficulties which the objective circumstances in America make necessary.[53]

Although some members of the ECCI doubtless shared Cannon's view of the "Pepper question," they were overruled by Bukharin and Pepper's appointment was approved.

Meanwhile, in the United States Foster and his allies were expressing outrage against Lovestone's action. They began to circulate a memorandum entitled "Pepper Document" to alert party members to Lovestone's "desperate efforts to inject Comrade Pepper actively into the American situation." The appointment of Pepper as W(C)P representative to the Comintern was described as "a clear declaration of uncompromising war against all oppositional groups."[54] Realizing that his initiative was serving to unify the Foster and Cannon groups, at least with respect to the "Pepper question," in August Lovestone offered a compromise that temporarily calmed the situation: Pepper's tenure as representative to the Comintern would last only until a permanent successor to Minor had been selected and arrived in Moscow.[55]

Even though he had unleashed a firestorm of protest by his attempts to pave the way for Pepper's return to the United States, Lovestone was prepared to take a further step in that direction at the national convention in early September. The conditions must have seemed to him propitious. His group had won a solid majority of votes for delegates to the convention. The ECCI, under Bukharin's guidance and with Stalin's apparent approval, had given its stamp of approval to the Lovestone faction.[56] Arthur Ewart, the Comintern agent sent to oversee the W(C)P convention, barely concealed his favoritism for Lovestone's group, which he found "not only politically sound but personally highly organized."[57] Knowing that he was dealing from a strong hand, Lovestone appears to have employed

53 Cannon, *James P. Cannon*, 461–70.

54 "Pepper Document," Lovestone Papers, Box 197.

55 This was contained in point 7 of a joint statement agreed on by the majority and minority factions in preparation for the national convention. Pepper was one of the signatories of this agreement. RCPUSA, 515/1/992/6–7, reel 73. Pepper's tenure lasted from July to late September, when Louis Engdahl took over as the CPUSA representative in Moscow. See also Zumoff, "Communist Party," 214.

56 Draper, *American Communism*, 258.

57 Hornstein, *Arthur Ewart*, 79. Ewart "indiscreetly permitted himself to be totally captured by the Lovestonites," even joining in their "nightly carousels." Ibid, 81. See also Draper, *American Communism*, 262–65.

a clever strategy. He had Pepper's name placed on the list of nominees for the PolCom, knowing that this maximum demand would be totally unacceptable to his opponents. When Foster predictably declared that he and his allies would vote for the entire slate of candidates except for Pepper, Lovestone offered a compromise: Pepper should be elected instead to the CEC and no proposal would be made for Pepper's return to America, since "only the ECCI has the power to deal with this." Fearing that if he refused to compromise, the convention might proceed to support Lovestone's maximum program and vote to bring Pepper back immediately, Foster agreed to Lovestone's proposal. He may have felt that electing Pepper to the CEC was less dangerous than to the PolCom, since the latter was a "working" committee that logically would require the physical presence of its members, whereas membership on the CEC might be regarded as more honorary in nature. But even in supporting Lovestone's motion, Foster insisted that "we are opposed to Comrade Pepper's return generally."[58]

When apprised of what had happened at the W(C)P national convention, Pepper was apparently miffed that his friends had not pushed harder to gain approval of his return to the United States. In several letters to Americans in Moscow Lovestone insisted that his position had not changed: "I am categorically committed to John's return." But his friend had to realize that there were serious obstacles that still had to be overcome. Even getting him on the CEC had required a "bitter struggle." There was even greater resistance to Pepper's return, and "neither a party nor an individual (not even John!) can function properly with a 30% opposition." Furthermore, many of the supporters of the Lovestone faction were relative newcomers to the party who "have never seen nor heard of Pepper." Lovestone set forth his proposed plan of action. Pepper should write more articles and pamphlets on American topics so his name could become better known to new party members. In time he, Lovestone, would write to Stalin, Bukharin, and Kuusinen and explain why the return of Pepper would be beneficial to the CPUSA. It was important to gain their support, since his return was "primarily in the hands of the CI" At the very latest, Pepper would be back in the United States in the fall of 1928 for the party

58 Minutes of national convention, September 6, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/954/116–17, reel 71. Lovestone admitted privately that "for us to have put him [Pepper] on the PolCom would be to make a laughing stock out of ourselves when the PolCom is supposed to be an everyday working committee." Lovestone to Bedacht, November 4, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/992/37–38, reel 71.

convention, since members of the CEC would naturally be expected to be in attendance. Once he arrived, he could stay on because the convention would "adopt a resolution drafting him for work in the country."[59]

Pepper was apparently mollified by Lovestone's explanations and he did take his friend's advice about writing some new articles on American topics.[60] But in the last three months of 1927 he could devote little attention to American issues, since the preparations for, and carrying out of, his Korean mission demanded all his time. In February 1928, when serious questions were raised about the report he made about his Asian trip, Pepper was desperate to devise some plan that would permit him to return to America and avoid the severe repercussions should it be discovered that he had told several egregious lies in his report on the Korean mission. But how could he persuade the ECCI that he was needed for party work in the United States? Pepper's only hope was that Bukharin, who had replaced Zinoviev as his benefactor, would be sympathetic to his plan.

There is no surviving evidence of what arguments Pepper used to sway Bukharin. Perhaps he suggested that the "Korean affair" was just a misunderstanding and that if he were allowed to travel to the United States the matter would be resolved in his absence. It may be that Bukharin was influenced by a letter from Lovestone explaining why Pepper's services were needed in America. Whatever his reasons, Bukharin proved willing to assist Pepper and overrule anyone on the ECCI who objected to this solution.[61] The formal decision to allow Pepper to return to America was made on February 28. At first it was stipulated that the CPUSA would be responsible for Pepper's salary and travel expenses, but Pepper objected to this and the ECCI agreed to absorb these costs.[62] No Comintern leader seemed to regret losing the services of John Pepper. Perhaps the general feeling in Moscow was similar to that prevalent in 1922 when József Pogány was given his first mission in America: let our American comrades handle this troublemaker.

59 Lovestone to Bedacht, November 4, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/992/37–38, reel 71; Lovestone to "Bill" (Kruse), November 27, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/992/40–41, reel 71; Lovestone to Engdahl, November 27, 1927, RCPUSA, 515/1/1000, reel 74.

60 The most notable was "Analysis and Lessons of the International Sacco and Vanzetti Campaign," *Communist International*, October 15, 1927, 290–93.

61 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 548. In June 1927, Kuusinen had strongly objected to the idea that Pepper could again do useful work in the United States. In addition, he suggested that Pepper stop writing factional letters to the United States. "Dear Comrade" letter, June 26, 1927, Theodore Draper Papers, Box 28.

62 Letter to PolCom, March 6, 1928, RCPUSA, 515/1/1253/43, reel 94.

On March 2, 1928, the executive committee of the ECCI Secretariat thus approved two measures affecting Pepper: a special commission on Korea was established to determine, in effect, if his report on his mission was to be trusted, and Pepper's proposed budget for his travel to America was approved. He was to receive travel expenses and 60 percent of his normal salary, the remainder to be paid as a living allowance to his family in Moscow.[63] Within days of this decision Pepper was on his way to the United States. He had assured his wife that she and their daughters would in time follow him to the United States, once he had made suitable preparations. In any case, he promised he would be back in Moscow in the summer to attend the Sixth World Congress, which was scheduled to begin in July 1928.[64] Things had proceeded so quickly that Pepper had had no time to coordinate his return with the W(C)P leadership in New York. The only indication they had of what was happening was a message from "Gussie," Bill Kruse's wife, who advised Lovestone to expect a "surprise in the form of a certain comrade visiting you." The decision had been made "on very short notice" and caused considerable excitement in the American community in Moscow. The "visitor" realizes, "Gussie" reported, that if his return strengthened the factional fight, "the whole blame will be put on his shoulders." She ended with a personal observation that must have been shared by many American Communists on both sides of the Atlantic: "I will say that I am... in doubt as to whether his present visit is, or rather will be, a good one for our party."[65]

63 Minutes of Executive Committee of Secretariat, March 2, 1928, RGASPI, 495/6/11/51.

64 The living allowance to Pepper's family was authorized to be paid up to August, 1928. Ibid. See also Czóbel Memoir, 73.

65 "Gussie" (Kruse) to Lovestone, March 7, 1928, Lovestone Papers, Box 198.

CHAPTER 9
Return to the New World

Whereas Comrade Pepper previously lost his bearings in European affairs, today, as you have been able to convince yourselves from his speech here, he is all at sea in American affairs. He could truly be named the muddler of the two hemispheres.
SOLOMON LOSOVSKY AT SIXTH WORLD CONGRESS, JULY 28, 1928

It was in mid-March that Pepper arrived in New York unannounced, to the delight of Lovestone and his other friends and to the consternation of the Fosterites. Toward the latter, Pepper was uncharacteristically gracious and conciliatory. He requested private meetings with Foster and Bittelman, at which he apparently promised to refrain from name-calling and other divisive activities that would exacerbate the factional struggle. His rivals soon realized they had been out-maneuvered. Unlike his first stay in the United States, when he never actually showed anyone the Comintern letter that spelled out the nature of his mission, this time Pepper passed around a copy of the ECCI's decision to send him back to the New World. It noted that the W(C)P, at its 1927 national convention, had left the decision on Pepper's return to the Comintern. Accordingly, the ECCI had now decided that "it is possible for Comrade Pepper to return to America and to take up his work as a member of the CC."[1] Foster must have realized the futility of attempting to overturn the ECCI's decision. Pepper's return was a fait accompli and he and his allies would have to make the best of it.

Lovestone lost no time in reintegrating Pepper into the policy-making apparatus of the party. He invited Pepper, who during this stay in the United States used the name "Swift" for internal party purposes,[2] to the next meeting of the PolCom, nominated him as a member, and was gratified when all present, including Foster and Cannon, voted in favor.[3] Pepper thereupon made a statement in which he reaffirmed the assurances

1 ECCI to PolCom of W(C)P, March 6, 1928, RCPUSA, 515/1/1228/12, reel 91.

2 He continued to sign his articles as "Pepper," the fiction being that Pepper was still in the Soviet Union. Thus the *Daily Worker* reported in May that Pepper, "who is now in Moscow," sent his comradely greetings to American Communists as they assembled for a convention. "Pepper Greets Big Party Meet," *Daily Worker*, May 28, 1928, 1.

3 Lovestone immediately reported to the ECCI that Pepper had been unanimously elected to the PolCom, letter of March 22, 1928, RCPUSA, 515/1/1243/9, reel 93.

he had been giving privately to members of the opposition: "If I have come back now it will not, on my part, mean a continuation of any factional fight, just the opposite. I do not feel myself as a member of any group of the American party. All the old differences have been liquidated and the party now needs real team work."[4] In the following months Pepper did make an effort to avoid any deliberate or inadvertent provocation of his opponents. During meetings of the CEC and PolCom he was careful to adopt an apparently nonpartisan stance. On certain issues, mostly minor in nature, he even broke with Lovestone and voted with the Foster group. During several trips around the country he lectured local units about the need to restore harmony in the party.[5] In his publications he refrained from the personal invective and sarcasm that in the past had flowed so easily from his pen, and took pains on occasion to praise his former opponents.[6]

In one respect, however, Pepper's mode of operation and political style in his political reincarnation remained unchanged. As during his first stint in the United States from 1922 to 1924, he proved to be very dynamic and creative in the formulation and application of party policy. Minutes of PolCom and CEC meetings in the spring and summer of 1928 show that Pepper was deeply involved in almost all policy initiatives. Once an idea or operation had been approved, it seemed that he was always prepared to rattle off a long list of steps the party needed to take in order to launch the program and ensure its proper implementation. Just as had been the case in the past, he assumed it was his right and responsibility to make contributions to party publications in which he offered sweeping analyses of the problems confronting the Communist movement and detailed programs of actions.[7] This was the Pepper of old, a bit pushy and supercilious in displaying his knowledge and organizational genius. His public persona had also not changed over the years. Among newcomers to the CPUSA there was naturally a good deal of curiosity about the now almost legendary Pepper. Depending on one's source of information, he was said to be either a respected founding father or a malevolent troublemaker from the

4 Minutes of PolCom meeting, March 19, 1928, RCPUSA, 515/1/1295/35, reel 98.

5 American military intelligence learned that Pepper was back in the country and in April was in Detroit, where he sought to "pacify various factions." National Archives, RG165, Military Intelligence Division, 10110-pp-92–5.

6 In one article Pepper referred to recent publications by Foster that "give a clear and thorough-going analysis of the present crisis in the American labor movement." Pepper, "Certain Basic Questions of our Perspective," *Communist*, 7, no. 5 (May 1928): 297.

7 See, for example, Pepper, "Program of Action for America," *Communist* 7, no. 6 (June 1928): 327–39.

time when the Communist movement first appeared as a legal political party. The reaction of one new party member, Whittaker Chambers, may have reflected that of many of his contemporaries. Encountering Pepper for the first time, he found him to be "a short, arrogant figure" who "strutted down the center aisle of the meeting, staring haughtily to the right and left, but seeing no one – a small man swollen with pride of place and power."[8]

In his now regular contributions to the *Daily Worker*, *The Communist*, and other Party publications Pepper tried to avoid topics that previously had been flash points in the factional struggle. Every Communist agreed on the malevolence of the Socialists, so Pepper was happy to renew his attacks on what he deemed to be their misguided and absurd policies.[9] But to gratify his sense of importance as a leading party theorist, Pepper always seemed to feel the need to have several grand theories or programs for which he could pose as the champion. Two such themes emerged in Pepper's publications and speeches during 1928. The most important, which would in time greatly aggravate the factional struggle in the CPUSA and eventually lead to the political demise of the Lovestonites, was known as American exceptionalism. This theory, which was widely discussed and debated on the American Left in the 1920s, posited that the political, economic, and social institutions in the United States differed in certain fundamental ways from those in Europe. In particular, the development of American capitalism was, as Lovestone stated it in 1927, still "positively and definitely upward."[10] In 1928, Pepper joined Lovestone and together they became the chief Communist proponents of this theory of American exceptionalism.

Pepper had dabbled with the idea as early as 1922, when in his pamphlet, *For a Labor Party,* he emphasized certain unique features of American society, such as the absence of a European-style peasantry. In the mid-1920s he frequently chided his Comintern colleagues for their faulty understanding of American problems because of their failure to recognize important differences between the economic, social, and political institutions of America and Europe. Early in 1928, even before his return to America, Pepper began to promote himself as the champion of the theory of American exceptionalism. He saw no political danger in this, since inthe recent past the ECCI had given its approval to the idea that the United

8 Chambers, *Witness*, 247.

9 See, for example, "Transformation of the Socialist Party," *Daily Worker*, April 13, 1928, 1, 6. The article also appeared in *Inprecorr*, May 3, 1928, 484.

10 Lovestone, "Perspectives," 308–9. For an overview of American exceptionalism as propounded by American Communists, see Klehr, "Leninism and Lovestonism," 39–53.

States was the only country in which capitalism was still expanding. Furthermore, a number of influential Comintern figures, including Bukharin and the respected Hungarian economist Jenő Varga, had recently spoken or written in similar terms.[11]

In a memorandum to the PolCom of the W(C)P early in 1928, Pepper elaborated on the theory of American exceptionalism and offered an explanation of why the Communist movement had as yet made little progress in the United States.[12] His argument differed starkly from those he had made in 1923–24, when he predicted the imminent coming of a "third revolution" in America in which the Communist Party would play a leading role. Now he suggested more soberly that the Communist movement had in fact made little progress in the United States. The reasons for this were many, but above all, it was the unique nature of American capitalism, which, in contrast to conditions in Europe, was "still on an upward trend." One unfortunate result of this was that "the bulk of the workers still have faith in the old capitalist parties." For this reason no mass party of the workers, comparable to the Labor Party in Great Britain, had arisen, and the CP, despite its great efforts and many achievements, had not succeeded in attracting "broad masses of the working class for its program and its policies."

Pepper expressed these views in a series of articles he published in the spring of 1928. Where he went beyond what others like Lovestone had written about American exceptionalism was in his willingness to argue openly that because American capitalism had unique characteristics, certain Comintern policies that were well suited to European conditions might not work in the United States. By early 1928 there were definite signs that the Comintern, at the instigation of Stalin, was moving toward a "left turn" that would involve an abandonment of the united front "line" and independent action by Communist parties to take the lead in what Stalin called an imminent "revolutionary upsurge." Soon Stalin's supporters in the Comintern were speaking of the end of the era of "capitalist stabilization." Pepper was fully aware of these developments, and in an article in April he reported that there was "a marked general tendency to the left" by the Comintern. He offered full support for this change in "line" as it applied to Europe, for there the "objective conditions" fully justified it. Capitalism was on the "downgrade" in Europe and the crisis of capitalism there, especially in Great Britain, was acute. But, he argued, the new

11 Klehr, "Leninism and Lovestonism," 41–42.

12 Pepper to PolCom, January, 1928, RCPUSA, 515/1/1253/15–22, reel 94.

"line" could and should not be applied in the United States, for there the "objective conditions" were quite different. In terms of practical policies, whereas the Labor Party had lost its usefulness to the CP in Great Britain, in America Communists should continue to seek to affiliate with such a broad-based mass party of workers. Pepper concluded his article with a strong warning to those who did not take into account the unique features of American society: "Not to see them would amount to political blindness; to be afraid to face them would amount to political cowardice."[13]

Pepper was astute enough to know that no good could come from a direct challenge to Stalin. Yet he could not resist the temptation to lash out at some of Stalin's more vociferous and, in his mind, ignorant allies. Perhaps he felt safe in doing so because Bukharin, though increasingly equivocal, continued to state publically his belief that conditions in the United States were not yet ripe for the kind of "revolutionary upsurge" Stalin was predicting. The Soviet official with whom Pepper chose to embark on a long-distance sparring match was Solomon Losovsky, general secretary of the Profintern (Red International of Labor Unions), who for some time had been hostile to the Lovestone faction in the CPUSA and had in March 1928, made particularly disparaging remarks about the wrongheaded policies of the American CP in general, and about Pepper's numerous errors in particular. Lovestone and his colleagues found such criticisms repugnant, coming as they did from a Soviet official whom they regarded as ill-informed and malevolent. Pepper, for one, was not about to allow Losovsky's criticisms to go unchallenged. His response came in an article in *The Communist* in May, where he accused the Soviet official of very superficial analysis.[14] In fact, Pepper claimed, Losovsky's "serious accusations" could only have been made by someone with "a certain lack of knowledge of the facts of the American labor movement and a certain lack of clarity as to the tactical line of the Communist International on the trade union field."

This war of words between Losovsky and Pepper and his allies was to have no resolution for several months. That would come only at the Sixth World Congress, which was to be held in Moscow during the summer of 1928. In the meantime, Pepper turned his attention to a second issue that was also to be intensely debated at the upcoming World Congress. For some years Comintern officials had been urging American Communists to

13 "America and the Tactics of the Communist International," *Communist* 7, no. 4 (April 1928): 219–27. See also Pedersen, *Communist Party in Maryland*, 40.

14 "Certain Basic Questions of our Perspective," *Communist* 7, no. 5 (May 1928): 297–306.

focus more of their efforts on proselytizing among African-Americans. Some effort had been made along these lines in the mid-1920s, but the results were meager. African-Americans represented only a miniscule part of the membership of the W(C)P and only a handful of black Communists were to be found at the higher levels of the party leadership. Although he had no special expertise in the subject, Pepper managed, as was often the case, to assume a prominent role in the formulation of policy.

When the "Negro question" was debated at the Fifth World Congress in 1924, some delegates, most of them Europeans with little knowledge of conditions in America, suggested that the rallying cry should be self-determination for black Americans. Pepper thought this thoroughly misguided, since in the United States the races were so intermingled that it was impossible to separate them. In any case, he asked, why would American blacks want the right of self-determination, since it was clear that "they do not want to establish any separate state within the United States." Pepper suggested that the propaganda slogan should be "complete equality in every respect," which was based on the traditional Socialist view that racial problems were best dealt with as part of the overall proletarian struggle.[15] No one disputed Pepper's argument, which was shared by all of the American delegates at the World Congress.

When early in 1925 the Comintern established a Negro Commission, Pepper was named its chair. In that capacity he helped set up the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC), which was designed to be a front organization aimed at recruiting black Americans to the WP. On several occasions over the following two years he found it necessary to argue against proposals made by Comintern functionaries, some of whom saw the ANLC as the possible nucleus for a global Communist organization, a "Negrotern."[16] But when, to promote this idea, the suggestion was made that the ANLC should be more closely associated with appropriate Comintern committees and departments, Pepper voiced his opposition, pointing out that such steps would only highlight the Communist role in the ANLC and strengthen the view of those Americans who already saw it as a Communist front. In September 1925, officials of the Farmers International, a Comintern subsidiary, proposed that the ANLC hold mass meetings of black farmers in the South. Pepper dismissed the idea, which, he

15 Communist International. *Protokoll. Fünfter Weltkongress der Kommunistischen Internationale*, vol. 2, 699; Berland, "Emergence of the Communist Perspective," 425; Draper, *American Communism*, 329.

16 Solomon, *Cry Was Unity*, 49.

suggested, could only have come from an organization that was "totally unacquainted with the world, and particularly with America." Those who organized and attended a mass meeting of black workers in the South would, he asserted, face an almost certain "death sentence."[17]

When he returned to the United States in 1928, Pepper discovered that little headway had been made in attracting black Americans to the W(C)P. The ANLC had a very small membership, based mostly in Chicago, and had little or no presence in trade unions.[18] Other Communist initiatives to win over blacks had been equally unsuccessful, and the Comintern was pressing for an entirely new approach. Accordingly, the PolCom established a committee to work out a new policy. Pepper chaired the committee and wrote the final report.[19] In it he emphasized that the party's "main line" should be that "the Negro question is a *race question*, and it is the task of the Communist Party to fight for the Negroes as an oppressed race." In addition it was imperative that the party fulfill its duty as "the champion and organizer of the Negro working class elements." The report established a number of guidelines, the most important of which was that whenever possible the party would seek to establish one trade union for each industry that would welcome both whites and blacks. All Negro unions would be tolerated only in certain exceptional circumstances. Pepper's report was accepted unanimously, although later the minority faction was to criticize it for neglecting work "among the Negro peasantry in the South" and omitting any mention of the need for a campaign against "white chauvinism."[20]

During the first three months after his return to America, Pepper's efforts to mitigate the factional struggle seemed to have a modicum of success. Subsequent events would show, however, that Pepper's most vociferous opponents were merely biding their time, hoping and waiting for political developments in Moscow that would favor their cause. At a CEC plenum held in June an uneasy political armistice prevailed. Perhaps because they believed that their control of the party and support from the districts was secure, Pepper and Lovestone could afford to pose as conciliators. In his opening remarks Pepper observed that he and Bittelman

17 Pepper's reports to Secretariat, January 12, 1925, RGASPI, 495/155/33/2; September 14, 1925, 495/155/33/8–11; September 16, 1925, RGASPI, 495/18/398/17–19.

18 Solomon, *Cry Was Unity*, 48–49.

19 J. Swift (Pepper), "Policies on Negro Work," May 30, 1928, RCPUSA, 515/1/1295/207–10, reel 98.

20 Draper, *American Communism*, 341–42.

seemed to be of one mind in believing that important discussions could be held without any factional fight. Both he and Lovestone were particularly gracious toward Foster, whom they apparently hoped to win over as an ally against Losovsky. For some in the minority faction this "slobbering over Foster was positively disgusting."[21] Pepper dominated the proceedings with another long exposition of American exceptionalism, which he presented in almost an apologetic way: "American capitalism is still on the upward grade – a basic fact. I don't like it. I am not an advocate of that policy of American capitalism, but I am not able to change that policy."[22] Bittelman and Cannon made it clear that they still had major differences with the policies of the majority, which they deemed to be a deviation of the "line" established by the Comintern and Profintern. Foster also disputed Pepper on various points, but generally in a cordial and nonpolemical way.

All of this was to change dramatically during the Sixth World Congress. The members of the large American delegation, which arrived in Moscow early in July, quickly sensed that a seismic change was underway, for the corridors of the Comintern were abuzz with rumors that Bukharin was doomed and that those who defended him were inviting ridicule and ostracism. Stalin was employing the same slow but sure methods he had used earlier with great success against Zinoviev and Trotsky. In private conversations early in the Congress he craftily posed as something of a neutral observer of events, dropping only occasional hints of his true intentions. At the Congress sessions it was the Soviet leader's acolytes who led the charge. Apparently on instructions from Stalin, they at first attacked Bukharin only obliquely, but his supporters showed no restraint in condemning several allies of the Comintern leader, whom they criticized as "right deviationists" or "right opportunists" who refused to commit themselves to the "left turn" that Stalin was promoting. Stalin pretended to stand aloof from these attacks, claiming the individuals spoke only for themselves.[23] The chief target was Pepper, whose open and persistent advocacy of American exceptionalism made him vulnerable to the accusation that he lacked a commitment to the kind of militant, leftist program that the world situation supposedly demanded. Stalin had no trouble in

21 Unsigned letter to "Albert," June, 1928, RCPUSA, 515/1/1241/51–52, reel 92.

22 Undated minutes of May Plenum, RCPUSA, 515/1/1265/2–40, reel 95.

23 In a conversation with members of the minority faction of the C(W)P, Stalin stated that the most caustic critic of Pepper, Vissarion Lominadze, "spoke only for himself." "Dear Comrade" letter, August 6, 1928, RCPUSA, 515/1/1248/117–21, reel 93.

recruiting Comintern members who were willing to join in the open vilification of Pepper, who had become notorious for his abrasive style and superciliousness.

One of the first signs the Lovestone group had of impending disaster was the revived spirits of their party opponents, who realized that their time had finally come. Over the past two years Foster, Cannon, and Bittelman had failed in their attempts to choose the "correct" or winning side in the ongoing power struggles in the Comintern and the CPSU. Lovestone and Pepper had always managed to outfox them. As recently as April 1927, they had attacked the Lovestone faction as "a leftist group, divorced from the mass struggle of the American working class."[24] Now, however, they were confident that they could regain control of the party by attacking the Lovestonites for their alleged right-wing tendencies and failure to embrace Stalin's "left turn." They were greatly encouraged when, through friendly intermediaries, Foster and his colleagues were granted an exclusive interview with Stalin. The Soviet leader, as was his practice, was cautious and apparently offered no firm commitments, but he did make clear his disdain for the current leadership of the W(C)P, saying "no good could come out of the Lovestone group." In the same vein, he suggested that "American imperialism looked stronger from the outside than it really was." At the mention of Pepper's name, however, he was noncommittal, saying merely that he was "an able fellow and has much knowledge." Foster, Bittelman, and Cannon nonetheless left the meeting confident that Stalin "was decidedly against the Lovestone group and in favor of us," although they did not expect the Soviet leader to offer his active support until later, once they had demonstrated they were a "fighting group."[25]

Thus emboldened, the minority group proceeded in effect to detach themselves from the CPUSA delegation and act as an independent group at the Congress. In various sessions they not only voiced their disagreement with Lovestone and Pepper, but went so far as to submit a memorandum to the American Commission in which they accused the majority faction of right-wing deviations that greatly weakened the W(C)P's struggle to build a Communist vanguard. Employing terms of abuse they were hearing Stalin's supporters use in their private denunciations of the "Bukharinites," they depicted Lovestone and Pepper as "conciliators with

24 RCPUSA, 515/1/974/29, reel 72.

25 Draper, *American Communism*, 311–12; Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 243. An account of the meeting with Stalin is contained in an unsigned "Dear Comrade" letter, August 6, 1928, RCPUSA, 515/1/1248/104–08, reel 93.

the Right danger" who overestimated the reserve powers of American capitalism and who failed to take advantage of the increasingly militant mood of the workers.[26] Bittelman and Cannon took every opportunity to make public attacks on Pepper. Even Foster, who over the past few months had refrained from bitter factional activity, now realized that one of the best ways to demonstrate support for the Stalinist "line" was by attacking Pepper. Thus, after a long speech by Pepper in which he desperately tried to defend himself and switch the blame for any rightist errors in the W(C)P to the minority group, Foster noted sardonically that his colleague had "spent 50 minutes fighting the Left and 2 minutes fighting the Right." This, he argued, was characteristic of the majority faction, which "made no fight against the Right" because their "whole conception is that the danger is from the Left."[27]

Although Lovestone and Pepper had been previously aware of Stalin's push for a "left turn" in Communist strategy, they had not realized the dangers that this change could pose to their leadership of the CPUSA. The events that unfolded in the first days of the World Congress placed them in a quandary. In previous skirmishes in the Soviet power struggle Pepper had always chosen correctly by siding with Stalin, whose manipulative skills and political shrewdness he must have greatly admired. Now, however, he faced a real dilemma. As the consummate opportunist, he had always before found a way to switch his political allegiance or make dramatic changes in his ideological views without serious damage to his standing in the Communist movement. But he and Lovestone were so closely identified with the concept of American exceptionalism that any attempt on their part to jettison that theory might well be interpreted by their rivals as a confession that they had indeed been flirting with right-wing deviationism. Furthermore, although it was clear that Stalin and Bukharin had become rivals, the latter retained his position as head of the Comintern and there were as yet no direct, public attacks on him. During the course of the World Congress Bukharin did find it necessary to make increasingly favorable comments about Stalin's call for a "left turn," but on one point he remained adamant: there was no "revolutionary situation" in the United States, where capitalism was still in its ascendancy and growing

26 The memorandum, entitled "Right Danger in the American Party," was drafted by Bittelman and signed by seven members of the opposition. RCPUSA, 515/1/1246/53–75, reel 93. See also Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 320; Draper, *American Communism*, 306; Morgan, *Covert Life*, 72.

27 Foster at session on July 28, 1928, RCPUSA, 515/1/1245/28, reel 93.

stronger.[28] This was reassuring to Lovestone and Pepper, for when attacked for holding such views they could point to Bukharin and argue that their views were consistent with the current Comintern "line."

What no doubt surprised the leaders of the W(C)P majority even more than the precarious position of Bukharin were the personal attacks on Pepper, which were both frequent and unrestrained. Lovestone learned something of what was afoot from a chance encounter with Heinz Neumann, a German Communist closely allied with Stalin. On his own initiative Neumann referred to Lovestone's colleague as follows: "Comrade Pepper must be destroyed. He is an adventurer. He is petty bourgeois. He is not a revolutionist. People call him 'Der Tripper' [the carrier of gonorrhea]." Astonished by this outburst, Lovestone asked Neumann to justify his bitter attack. But Neumann had no time to respond because, as he explained, he had to rush off to hear a speech by Bukharin, the "Russian Tripper" and the "Pepper of the Russian Party."[29]

Lovestone's conversation with Neumann offered a hint of what was to come. Stalin had been cautious in talking about Pepper with American Communists, but it seems certain that he instructed his trusted supporters to spread the word that strong personal attacks on Pepper were not only permissible but desirable. Anyone who bore a grudge against him was now apparently free to retaliate for Pepper's past snubs and intemperate remarks. As the minutes of the Congress sessions indicate, many audience members must have been aware that Stalin approved of these orchestrated attacks on Pepper, for they reacted as if on cue: "laughter" when insulting jokes were told at Pepper's expense, and "applause" or even "vigorous applause" when particularly biting criticisms were made. Of course, Pepper was no stranger to vituperative exchanges, and it may be that in the past he had welcomed them because he was confident that he could best his opponents with creative and sarcastic responses. But in this case so many individuals joined the onslaught and so few spoke in his defense that Pepper in time was overwhelmed. He could perhaps brush off the attacks from Foster, Bittelman, and Cannon, for he had heard them all before and in any case their remarks were relatively mild compared to those made by European Communists who took the opportunity to lash out against their obnoxious Hungarian comrade.

Losovsky, who had a score to settle with Pepper, led the charge in a speech on July 28. Earlier in the session Pepper had offered yet another

28 Morgan, *Covert Life*, 73.

29 Lovestone later reported this conversation to Bukharin, September 2, 1928, Lovestone Papers, Box 384.

exhaustive defense of the concept of American exceptionalism, but Losovsky disdained to discuss Pepper's "theory with its nine points," which he claimed were not worth bothering about because the "nine points" were designed merely to "befuddle the question" and "to divert the Party from the immediate problem that faces us today." He concluded by observing that "whereas Comrade Pepper previously frequently lost his bearings in European affairs, today, as you have been able to convince yourselves from his speech here, he is all at sea in American affairs. He could truly be named: the muddler of the two hemispheres."[30]

Even more caustic language was directed at Pepper by Vissarion Lominadze, a Stalin loyalist with whom Pepper had previously skirmished over the interpretation of the Canton revolt. Unlike Losovsky, Lominadze was willing to address Pepper's "theory with nine points." He found them to be permeated by right-wing deviations that added up to a "pernicious policy" that was "utterly wrong and rotten." Indeed, parts of Pepper's theory amounted to "an advertisement for the power of American imperialism." If they were published in an American newspaper, readers might assume they were part of a "speech of any of the candidates of the Republican and Democratic parties." Lominadze went on to cast aspersions on Pepper's political methods, which were based on "opportunism, lack of principle, and narrow political sectarianism." He was a "capable and experienced man," but given to "petty intrigues and quarrelsomeness." Lominadze even hinted darkly that some of Pepper's tactics resembled those formerly used by the Mensheviks. It was not surprising, he concluded, that "tens of delegates" at the Congress had spoken out against Pepper, for "the enormous majority of the Congress" did not regard him as a "serious politician" and felt forced into "the very unpleasant occupation" of engaging in polemics with him.[31]

So numerous were the attacks on Pepper that, in the restricted amount of time allotted to him on the floor, he could not respond to all of his critics and detractors.[32] So he focused on the two who had made the most scath-

30 *Inprecorr,* August 18, 1928, 914. In a similar vein, Cannon had earlier remarked on Pepper's tendency "in his usual style and method to confuse and muddle the discussion." *Inprecorr*, August 13, 1928, 845.

31 Communist International. *Protokoll. Sechster Weltkongress*, vol. 1, 419–20; 424; 509–11. vol. 3, 420–21.

32 Among them were Wal Hannington, who criticized Pepper for neglecting the problem of the unemployed, and Tschen Kuang, who lambasted Pepper for "his superficial and false views on the development of the Chinese revolution." Communist International. *Protokoll. Sechster Weltkongress*, vol. 1, 173–74, 498.

ing remarks. Losovsky, he thundered, had spoken not simply untruths, but "monstrous untruths." As for Lominadze, he had a mere "guest-role" at the World Congress yet wanted to pose as "the arbiter of all five continents and all 50 sections of the Comintern." It was characteristic, Pepper added, that Lominadze was silent about the fact that his views about China had been condemned as having Trotskyite tendencies.[33] The only Congress delegate who rose in defense of Pepper was Lovestone, but he limited himself to a sarcastic remark about Losovsky, who, he suggested, had no right to describe another comrade as the "muddler of two continents." In fact, the Profintern was in its current weak state precisely because of the leadership of Losovsky, "who had been making a muddle of everything he touched."[34]

The only World Congress venue at which Pepper was not subjected to vicious attacks was the Negro Commission, which was established to set guidelines for a new campaign to win over American blacks to the Communist movement. As a member of a three-person subcommittee working on a draft proposal, Pepper was alarmed to discover that the concept of self-determination for American blacks had been gaining significant support in the Comintern, especially among European delegates who were accustomed to thinking of oppressed groups as subject nations, like the Irish, or as colonies of the imperialists. Along with virtually all other American delegates at the World Congress, both whites and blacks, Pepper believed that these concepts did not apply in the United States, where the black population desired not self-determination but "equal rights for all nationalities and races." Pepper tried to manage the debate in the subcommittee through a variety of proposed amendments, some of which were accepted. But his more important suggestion that the idea of "national self-determination" be used more as a "propaganda slogan" than an actual program of action was soundly rejected.[35]

Pepper now faced a real dilemma: should he make an effort in the full committee to argue against what he had long viewed as a totally misguided policy? If he did so, he would no doubt be speaking for the vast majority of American Communists. But if, as now seemed likely, the proposal on the "Negro question" was approved and became Comintern policy, would his critics not cite his opposition as additional proof of his obstructive tactics and "rightist deviationism"? Pepper weighed the possibilities and

33 Ibid., vol. 1, 508–9.

34 Ibid., 440.

35 Solomon, *Cry Was Unity*, 74–77; Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 52; Hutchinson, *Blacks and Reds*, 43.

finally decided that, as so often in the past, his best course was to abandon his previous position and endorse the new policy as if he had long favored it. What is more, he would blunt the attacks on him as a "rightist" by not simply embracing the concept of "national self-determination" for black Americans but interpreting it in a radical way. At the full session of the committee he thus not only supported the call for self-determination in the "Black belt" (the "4–5 states [where] Negroes are in the majority"), but proposed that the objective be the creation of what he dubbed a "Negro soviet republic."[36] This concept was totally new to the committee members and was not well received, for most felt it was too precipitous a move and skipped over an intermediate stage that was needed to prepare and mobilize the black masses. As a result, the proposal approved by the committee made no mention of the possibility of creating a "Negro soviet republic."[3]

Even Pepper's friends, who were accustomed to his opportunistic approach to policy issues, were astonished by his complete turnabout on the Negro question. Gitlow later asked how he could justify support for "national self-determination" and even a Negro soviet republic, which could never be implemented in the American South and which would likely provoke civil war and the massacre of thousands of blacks. Pepper expressed understanding for Gitlow's concerns, and calmly explained: "Comrade Gitlow, there is much truth in what you say; but we could not help ourselves in Moscow. The Russians on the Commission could only see the American Negro question in the light of the minorities question which existed in Russia before the Revolution. Had we not fallen in line, we would have been severely condemned as deviators and khvostists [laggards, obstructers] who neglect work among the Negro masses."[38]

Although he had become a supporter of the Negro Commission's proposal only at the last moment, Pepper saw no reason why he should not leap into print and pose as the champion of this new Comintern policy on the Negro question. His article on the subject, which appeared in early September in the authoritative *International Press Correspondence*, was the first to reveal and interpret the new Comintern policy.[39] Pepper presented a reasonably accurate summary of the new policy, but he could not resist the temptation to emphasize his idea of a Negro soviet republic as if

36 Solomon, *Cry was Unity*, 74–78. Theodore Draper termed the "Negro Soviet Republic" a "typical Pepperism." *American Communism*, 347.

37 Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 266–67.

38 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 508–9.

39 "Amerikanische Negerprobleme," *Die Kommunistiche Internationale*, September 5, 1928, 2245–52.

it were now something approved by the Comintern. Because of this article, and other related publications later in English, the impression was created in the Communist world that Pepper was an authoritative spokesman for the new policy and that the idea of a Negro soviet republic was now official Comintern policy. This greatly angered those who knew Pepper's true role on the Negro Commission. Harry Haywood, the one black American Communist who favored the idea of "national self-determination," complained bitterly that Pepper had presented a "vulgar caricature" of the true thesis.[40]

As the World Congress came to an end in early September, Lovestone and his supporters could feel confident that despite the open attacks on Pepper and rumblings about a split between Stalin and Bukharin, the Comintern planned no initiatives to undermine the position of the majority faction of the CPUSA. This confidence was based in large part on a conversation that Lovestone had managed to arrange with Stalin earlier in August. Pepper did not tag along, which was probably a wise choice. The Soviet leader seemed to be in a friendly mood and spoke about various problems as if he were an impartial observer. He wondered why the two factions in the CPUSA could not stop the infighting: after all, there were no real policy differences between them. He suggested, disingenuously, that the Americans should "drop this game of left and right" and "get down to work." Lovestone got the impression that Stalin generally approved "our economic analysis." He agreed that American capitalism was "developing upward but there are situations giving us opportunities to work, such as unemployment." Nothing Stalin said gave any indication that he and Bukharin were engaged in a power struggle. In fact, he insisted that in all matters relating to the CPUSA Bukharin was "in full charge."[41]

In this crafty way Stalin lulled Lovestone and Pepper into a false sense of security. It seemed to give Pepper the hope that the vituperative attacks against him had not in fact been condoned by Stalin, and that once he was back in the United States the animosity against him in Moscow would slowly dissipate. There was no need for him to return in the immediate future to Russia, so he could continue his work in the much friendlier milieu of the American Communist movement. As he made his plans to leave Moscow, Pepper once again persuaded his wife to remain behind.[42]

40 Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 268.

41 Lovestone's account, August 6, 1928, RCPUSA 515/1/1248/138–41, reel 93.

42 Pepper again promised his wife that once in New York he would make preparations to bring her and their daughters to America. Czóbel Memoir, 72.

No doubt she deeply resented this, but was willing to endure the long and frequent absences of her husband because she considered him a brilliant organizer who was indispensable to the Communist movement wherever he was sent. Their two daughters, now eight and ten years old, bore their father's name, Pogány, but they did not seem to have a particularly warm relationship with him since his contribution to their upbringing was sporadic at best. An American Communist who frequently visited the family in their apartment at the Hotel Lux later recalled that the daughters were "young, vivacious, and full of the devil" but "steered clear of Pepper, who dominated his household."[43]

Pepper must have felt a real sense of relief once he was back in New York. True, in America he was an illegal alien and had constantly to worry about being discovered by the police or the FBI. But at least he was far removed from the political atmosphere in Moscow that had become so poisonous to him. Furthermore, shortly before he left Moscow, he had been asked to serve in the United States as the chief correspondent for *Pravda*, which would give him a reason for making his stay a long one.[44] In late September there arrived a cable from the Comintern that confirmed the optimistic conclusions that he and Lovestone had drawn in the last days of the World Congress. The ECCI, clearly still under the control of Bukharin, declared once again that factionalism in the CPUSA must come to an end. At the same time, however, the message took a clear stand in that factional struggle by stating that the charge that the W(C)P leadership was pursuing a rightist policy was "unfounded."[45] This was heartening news, but it was balanced by a message from the ECCI sent directly to Pepper that struck like a thunderbolt: he was instructed to return immediately to Moscow.[46]

In this message apparently no explanation was given for requiring Pepper's presence in Moscow only three weeks after he had left the Soviet Union. To Pepper it could only mean one thing: his duplicity in connection with his Korean mission must finally have been discovered. This in fact seems to have been the case. In March 1928, the ECCI had ordered an investigation into Pepper's Asian trip, but Bukharin seems to have used his influence to make sure that the matter received a low priority. Only in June did those conducting the investigation finally get around to interviewing the

43 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 426.

44 Czóbel Memoir, 72.

45 Morgan, *Covert Life*, 76–77.

46 Although no copy of this message has survived, it was referred to numerous times in later communications between Comintern officials and various American Communists.

secretary who had accompanied Pepper on his trip. She testified that she had traveled with Pepper to Shanghai and to several Japanese cities, but neither of them had gone to Seoul, Korea. This was conclusive evidence that Pepper had not only lied in his official report, but, in what may have been an even more serious offense to Comintern officials, had made fraudulent claims for travel expenses.[47] Bukharin apparently was able to continue his protection of Pepper during the World Congress, but once it was over in early September his ability and perhaps even willingness to cover up Pepper's transgressions had come to an end.

When he had recovered from the initial shock caused by this unexpected message from the ECCI, Pepper pondered his options. If he returned to Moscow to argue his case, he would almost surely be unsuccessful and would probably incur a severe penalty, possibly even expulsion from the Comintern. But would there not be a similar result if he defied an explicit order from the Comintern and remained in the United States? He thus decided that the best course was to give the ECCI vague assurances that he would in time comply with their request, but argue for a longer stay in the United States because of various CP projects for which his participation was critical. He must have responded along these lines in a letter or cable to the ECCI. When for the duration of 1928 nothing more was heard of the matter from Moscow, Pepper may have concluded that he had somehow weathered the storm. In the meantime, he told only Lovestone and a few other trusted comrades about the Comintern's demand that he return to Moscow. He knew that if word of this spread, the minority faction would stir up a controversy by asking publically why Pepper had not yet left the country.[48]

Perhaps to prove his assertion that the CPUSA could not manage without his services, Pepper immersed himself in party work at an even more furious pace and tried to play an active role in numerous projects and activities. Above all, he wanted to further enhance his growing reputation as the W(C)P's authoritative voice on racial problems. In December 1928, the Comintern sent the W(C)P the final text of the resolution on the Negro question in the United States, with instructions to begin promulgating it

47 Affidavit of Anna Zinnert, June 25, 1928, marked "strictly confidential," RGASPI, 495/261/3392/192. The decision to recall Pepper was made at an ECCI session on September 21. RGASPI, 495/3/98/37.

48 Members of the minority faction did not learn of the Comintern's demand for the return of Pepper until late November. Until that point they deliberately refrained "from raising the question of Comrade Swift in the Party." Note by Earl Browder, November 24, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/628/110, reel 125.

widely among party members.[49] An English-language version of the article Pepper had published in Moscow had in fact already appeared in October as "American Negro Problems."[50] During the campaigning for the November presidential election, a pamphlet with the same title and content was published. In the forward Pepper pointed out that the two major capitalist parties had always observed an unwritten "gentlemen's agreement" to "keep a deathly silence on the Negro question." The W(C)P, he declared, was the only American party with the courage to "fight for the full social and political equality of the Negro race."[51] These publications did achieve their purpose: they acquainted the W(C)P membership with the basic thrust of the new Comintern line and made it clear that the party regarded the elimination of racism and "white chauvinism" as one of its highest priorities.

Many W(C)P members reacted to the drastic change in the "line" on the Negro question with puzzlement, unsure how such an apparently wrongheaded policy could be implemented. Only one party leader, Bittelman, seems to have realized that Pepper was giving his own personal "twist" to what the Comintern had decided. He criticized Pepper for adding his own idea about a Negro soviet republic, thereby "making it more difficult to accept the correct line of the CI." But few party members seemed to appreciate the distinction Bittelman was making, and the notion soon took strong hold that Pepper was indeed the authentic voice of the Comintern on this issue.[52] As a result his pamphlet was to have a long afterlife and even decades later was still being cited as one of the more significant CPUSA publications of the 1920s. Some historians, to be sure, disputed this by emphasizing how Pepper had distorted the Comintern "line."[53] But in fact Pepper's idea of a Negro soviet republic was not completely incompatible with the final Comintern resolution on the Negro question, which appeared in 1930. It declared that American blacks "in the entire territory

49 ECCI to W(C)P, December 1, 1928, RCPUSA, 515/1/1232/136–42, reel 91.

50 "American Negro Problems," *Communist* 7, no. 10 (October 1928): 628–38.

51 *American Negro Problems*. Pepper was probably also the author of an important editorial in the *Daily Worker*, "Communists are for a Black Republic!' *Daily Worker*, November 12, 1928, 6.

52 Bittelman at CEC plenum, December 1928, RCPUSA, 515/1/1275/195, reel 96. When Stalin was shown a copy of Pepper's pamphlet, he expressed scorn for Lovestone for selecting Pepper to be the spokesman for the "Negro thesis." Letter of Joseph Zackfelder to Theodore Draper, April 18, 1958, Theodore Draper Papers, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

53 Draper, *American Communism*, 347–48; Record, *Negro and the Communist Party*, 58–59.

of the Black Belt" should be accorded complete self-determination, which included such radical concepts as the right to negotiate treaties with the American government and even to secede.[54]

In the fall of 1928 Pepper also published articles on a variety of other topics, including American imperialism in Latin America and Europe, decolonization, and the implications of the massive Republican victory in the presidential election. Pepper was largely responsible for drafting the platform on which the Communist candidates (Foster and Gitlow) ran in the November election. The W(C)P fared poorly in the national election, but this did not much concern Pepper and Lovestone, for their faction was making a strong showing in local party elections for delegates to the December national convention.[55] However, the euphoria over these successes quickly dissipated when on November 21, a puzzling and disquieting cable arrived from Moscow. Unlike the message received in September, this one from the ECCI was critical of Lovestone, who was reprimanded for having "too much self-praise and too little self-criticism." Furthermore, the W(C)P leadership was warned that it was a mistake to assume that it had the confidence of the Comintern and thus could proceed without support from other groups in the party. In fact, the ECCI wanted to make it clear that it would "defend the minority from any organizational measures directed against it." Finally, the party was instructed to put off its national convention until February.[56]

To the Lovestonites it seemed unlikely that Bukharin could have approved this latest message from the ECCI, which meant that he had likely lost out in the power struggle with Stalin and was no longer in control of the Comintern. Lovestone quickly dispatched a memorandum to Moscow in which he requested an explanation of the conflicting content of the ECCI messages sent to the W(C)P in September and November. Why, he asked, were his opponents permitted to continue their attacks on the majority for allegedly following a "right-wing line," when in September the Comintern had officially declared the accusation to be false. Tacked on to the end of a list of points that needed clarification was a request that the Comintern "reverse the decision on Pepper," that is, allow him to continue his work for the W(C)P as it prepared for the national convention.[57]

54 Hutchinson, *Blacks and Reds*, 52–53.

55 Wolfe, *Breaking with Communism*, 438–39.

56 ECCI to CEC of W(C)P, November 21, 1928, RCPUSA, 515/1/1228/133–34, reel 91. See also Draper, *American Communism*, 385; Morgan, *Covert Life*, 77.

57 Lovestone, "Situation Facing the Party in the United States," November 26, 1928 RCPUSA, 515/1/1232/116–19, reel 91.

The nature of this latest ECCI communication was made known to Foster and his allies at a meeting of the CEC in late November. At the same time Lovestone admitted, when pressed for information by Foster, that in September, Pepper had been instructed by the ECCI to return to Moscow. All of this was a boon to the opponents of Lovestone and Pepper, who sensed that now, finally, the planets were coming into proper alignment in Moscow. With luck, their two nemeses, Bukharin and Pepper, would no longer be able to exert influence on the CPUSA. At this point probably the only thing that prevented an immediate eruption of a full-scale factional fight was yet another unexpected development. Cannon, who over the past two years had become increasingly disgusted with the interminable factional fights and the need to accommodate to the changing whims of Soviet leaders, announced in October that he had decided to become a supporter of Trotsky. This caused an uproar in the W(C)P as both factions tried to outdo the other in their furious attacks on Cannon. Pepper found this to be a highly advantageous situation, since it diverted attention from his failure to obey the summons from the ECCI. In addition, he argued that since he was widely recognized as one of Trotsky's earliest and most bitter enemies, he was uniquely qualified to take the lead in ridding the CPUSA of Cannon and any others who had given their support to Trotsky.

At the plenum of the CEC in December, Pepper seemed to relish the opportunity once again to play a dominant role as he had in his days of glory in 1923. The most important political resolution presented by the CEC majority was signed by Lovestone, Pepper, and Gitlow, but it was Pepper who spoke longest and most passionately in its defense. Apparently fearing that any softening of his and Lovestone's position on American exceptionalism would merely embolden their opponents, Pepper declared that "it is ignorant to say that American imperialism has no reserve power anymore." In addition he reiterated his admiration and support for Bukharin. Pepper expounded his position on the Negro question and was also the author and presenter of another important Plenum resolution, "The Right Danger and Trotskyism." Here he heaped scorn on Cannon and on those who were following him into "the depths of counterrevolution," and warned that though Trotskyism had been defeated in Europe, in America it remained "an actual menace." Hoping to throw party dissidents on the defensive and shift attention away from his failure to comply with the Comintern's directive, Pepper also posed the question of whether it was merely an accident that the main American Trotskyites,

including Lore and Cannon, had all been active supporters of the Foster faction.[58]

In general Pepper was in rare form at the December Plenum. He cracked several jokes and even read verses of poetry. He was not greatly perturbed by the occasional insults shouted out from the audience, as when Alfred Wagenknecht, one of his bitterest enemies, called out: "Hire out to a burlesque theater. You make burlesque speeches."[59] Pepper could afford to brush such remarks aside, for, unlike the situation at the World Congress in Moscow, his audience was overwhelmingly friendly. This perhaps also explains why none of Pepper's opponents ventured to ask openly why he was ignoring the Comintern's demand that he return to Moscow. The most severe criticism of Pepper came from Cannon in a speech at the time of the Plenum. He stated that the selection of Pepper to direct the proceedings against him was an admission of the party that its case was so unprincipled that it had to use the "vilest instruments." Pepper, he declared, was the "bearer in the Communist movement of all that is most corrupt and most detestable to revolutionaries." Those whom he was attacking did not need to mount a defense, since "the calumny of Pepper is only a mark of distinction and a badge of honor."[60]

Pepper could afford to be smug and confident in the face of such invective, for at the time the Lovestone faction was building massive majorities at the local level in preparation for the annual convention, now scheduled for February. Some members of the minority hoped to throw the majority leaders off-balance by spreading rumors of a rift between Lovestone and Pepper. In response the two leaders published a long statement in the *Daily Worker* in which they affirmed that since 1922 "they had always been working together very closely" and "shared the same views."[61] Events would soon demonstrate that tying his political fortunes so closely to Pepper was a fatal miscalculation on Lovestone's part. What neither he nor his collaborator of long-standing imagined at the time was that the December Plenum would be the last CP meeting, whether in the United States or elsewhere, that Pepper would ever attend.

58 Minutes of CEC Plenum, December 15–18, 1928, 515/1/1275/1–50, 198, reel 96.

59 Draper, *American Communism*, 391.

60 Text of Cannon's speech on December 17, 1928, http://search.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/1928/12/1217-cannon-ourappeal.pdf, accessed on May 5, 2011.

61 "Only One Line in the CEC Majority. Statement by Comrades Lovestone and Pepper," *Daily Worker*, December 28, 1928, 3.

An indication of the serious trouble that was brewing in Moscow came early in 1928 in the first reports of Bertram Wolfe, who had been sent to Russia by Lovestone to determine the significance of the puzzling Comintern message of November 21. Wolfe quickly discovered that Bukharin had been ousted and that Kuusinen and Ossip Piatnitzky now wielded the power in the ECCI, with the backing of Stalin. Wolfe sensed a hostility toward the Lovestone faction in everyone with whom he spoke, particularly in relationship to Pepper: "You say that you are the ones who fight to build the prestige of the Comintern in America, and that you always execute its decisions so loyally. Why have you not sent Bradley [Pepper] back?" It was clear, Wolfe added, that Pepper's failure to comply with the ECCI command "hurts us very seriously." By the end of January, Wolfe was in despair: "The situation here is desperate... due to the attitude of Stalin toward us, especially Pepper and Lovestone, we stand on the brink of a precipice."[62]

If Pepper needed any further proof that his situation was dire, it came in the form of an urgent message from the ECCI in late January in which the demand for his return was repeated in a peremptory way. In addition, he was forbidden to attend the W(C)P convention. Having clung to the hope that his procrastination would result in some sort of last minute reprieve, Pepper was devastated by this latest summons. He became "panicky and depressed," and confessed to the two comrades whom he most trusted, Lovestone and Gitlow, that he dreaded the return to Moscow.[63] Perhaps he even revealed to them his fear that the Comintern would punish him severely for his duplicitous actions in connection with his mission to Korea. In his desperation he implored his friends to find some way that he could avoid this fate.

The plan that Pepper, Lovestone, and Gitlow eventually agreed on was breathtaking in its audacity and recklessness. As a first step, a telegram was sent to Bertram Wolfe with messages from Lovestone and Pepper that were to be delivered to the ECCI. Lovestone gave assurances that the W(C)P Secretariat had discussed the status of Pepper and had instructed him to leave for Moscow as soon as possible. Pepper provided specific information about his departure: he would travel by the first available fast

62 Wolfe to Lovestone, January 9, 1929, Lovestone Papers, Box 198; Morgan, *Covert Life*, 79. In December 1928 the ECCI had rejected Lovestone's appeal of Pepper's recall and reaffirmed its September 1928 decision. Session of December 10, 1928, RGASPI, 495/3/98/3.

63 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 512.

ocean liner, which sailed on February 13, and would be in Moscow by February 23 or 24.[64] In fact, the "Pepper question" had been brought to the Secretariat by Lovestone, but the decision differed in certain important ways from the report that had been sent to the Comintern. Lovestone apparently explained to the members of the Secretariat that Pepper would have to return to the Soviet Union, but there were dangers if he did so in the usual way by boat from New York. Pepper's many enemies, now including Cannon and other American Trotskyites, bore such malice toward Pepper that if they discovered his plan to sail from New York, they would tip off the FBI and have him arrested. Thus, Pepper would have to travel by train to Mexico and find a suitable sea passage there. Intent on finally getting rid of Pepper, Foster gave his approval to this plan, although he preferred that, in order to preserve the secret, Lovestone be authorized to handle such details as the precise date of Pepper's departure for Mexico.[65]

Until the middle of February Pepper continued to participate as usual in party work. Then he disappeared from sight and a report began circulating among party leaders that he was indeed on his way to Soviet Russia, via Mexico. In fact, however, Pepper never left New York. With the connivance of Lovestone and Gitlow he went into hiding in a hotel in Bronxville, a suburb of New York City. What motivated Pepper's friends to agree to such a risky scheme? Apparently they felt that only with the aid of Pepper could they deal with the challenges the majority faction would almost surely face at the upcoming annual convention. Of course Pepper would not be able to attend the convention, but he could be a guiding spirit from afar, drafting proposals, offering advice, and plotting strategy.[66] The question of Pepper's status after the national convention was apparently never addressed. Perhaps he thought that at that point he might well travel to Mexico, with the intent of staying on there indefinitely. Or perhaps some way could be found for him to continue an underground existence in New York that would allow him to remain undetected by the Comintern, the FBI, and his enemies in the CP. On one thing he now seemed determined: he would never return to Russia.

64 "Concerning the Return of Pepper," February 1, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/1569/53, reel 119.

65 Pepper later insisted that his preference would have been to depart from a Canadian port, but on Foster's suggestion it was decided that Mexico would be safer, presumably because the police there were less vigilant. "Statement of John Swift," PolCom meeting of April 6, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/1630/43–50, reel 125.

66 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 512–13.

CHAPTER 10
End of the Odyssey

> *I have in mind Comrade Pepper's affair. All of you are more or less familiar with the history of that affair. The Comintern twice demanded Comrade Pepper's recall to Moscow. The CEC of the American Party resisted and essentially infringed upon a series of ECCI decisions concerning Pepper. The Majority of the American Party has, by doing so, demonstrated its kinship with Pepper whose opportunist waverings everybody knows.*
> JOSEPH STALIN, AMERICAN COMMISSION, MAY 6, 1929

On February 20, 1929, Pepper checked into the Hotel Granaton in Bronxville, New York, under the name "John Rogers." There he was to remain for more than a month, only occasionally making his way surreptitiously to his regular apartment on 104th Street in New York, where he planned his strategy with Lovestone and Jack Stachel, the only party leaders who knew his true whereabouts. Two party stenographers were also in on the secret. One or the other reported to him daily in his hotel room and typed up the various theses and proposals that Pepper produced for the annual convention. He seemed to have plenty of money, not only the funds provided by the party for his fictitious trip to Mexico and ocean journey to Europe, but apparently other amounts he had accumulated over the past several months. During his free time, of which he had a good deal, he pondered various schemes for escaping the predicament in which he found himself. He could not remain in hiding in Bronxville for the long term. Perhaps he should make his way to Mexico after all, or even better Canada, where he could pose as an American tourist or businessman. Above all, he wished to avoid a return to Moscow. In plotting his future he apparently had no qualms about abandoning his wife and family, to whom he had not written for many months.[1]

By the time the national convention began in early March, Pepper had composed and transmitted to Lovestone elaborate theses on social reformism and on the Negro question. But such topics were immediately overshadowed by the proposals brought from Moscow by the two designated Comintern representatives. They informed the convention, which had an

1 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 550.

overwhelming majority for the Lovestone faction, that Lovestone and Bittelman, the two individuals deemed most responsible for the pervasive factionalism in the CPUSA, must be sent to Russia and placed at the disposal of the Comintern. The new general secretary of the CEC would be Foster. And Pepper, whom they assumed was on his way to Moscow or had already arrived, was not to be reelected to the CEC.[2] When he was apprised of these startling demands from the ECCI, Pepper was outraged and recommended resistance. Lovestone, who naturally did not relish the prospect of undertaking Comintern missions to far-flung and desolate corners of the globe, was also inclined to defy the Comintern representatives. He denounced the proposals as "the result of a running sore in the Comintern apparatus." At his instigation the convention voted to request that the ECCI reverse its decision prohibiting Pepper's election to the CEC. In a similar vein, the convention refused to accept Foster as general secretary, voting instead to place Gitlow in that position.[3]

As the convention proceeded, however, Lovestone and Pepper began to diverge on what course to take. Pepper was inclined toward complete defiance, even to the point of breaking with the Comintern, expelling the Fosterites, and continuing as an independent Communist party.[4] Gitlow seemed prepared to support Pepper's position, but Lovestone was more circumspect, hopeful that when informed of the overwhelming support that the majority faction enjoyed at the convention, Stalin would relent and agree to a compromise. Sensing that some concession on his part was needed to appease the Soviet leader, Lovestone gave his support to an anti-Bukharin resolution, which passed overwhelmingly on the last day of the convention. Pepper argued strongly against Lovestone's strategy. In the past, of course, he would have tried to lead the pack in attacking anyone he had identified as Stalin's next victim. In this case, however, he sensed that his own fate was so tightly bound together with Bukharin's that no good would come from the latter's humiliation and fall from power. Pepper tried, without success, to persuade Lovestone and Gitlow that it was impossible to negotiate with the crafty and devious Stalin, who, he insisted, clearly intended to turn the CPUSA over to the minority faction.[5] Yet Lovestone's overture to Stalin did seem to work. The Soviet leader agreed that members of the CPUSA had a right to elect their own leaders, and thus Foster would not be imposed on them. Furthermore, he expressed

2 Draper, *American Communism*, 399.

3 Morgan, *Covert Life*, 80–81; Draper, *American Communism*, 399–400.

4 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 518.

5 Statement of Jack Stachel, June 17, 1929, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/206–08.

willingness to meet with Lovestone and with a group of his supporters, ordinary "proletarians," if they came to Moscow at once. He did insist on two things: Lovestone and Bittelman were to place themselves at the disposal of the ECCI, and Pepper must return immediately.[6]

Lovestone set sail from New York on March 23 with a delegation that included a sampling of his loyal proletarians and several party leaders, including Gitlow, Bittelman, and Foster. Before they departed, Lovestone and Gitlow had one last consultation with Pepper, who repeated his warning that they were "playing into Stalin's hand." All three feared the possibility that, under Stalin's influence, the Comintern might render a decision in which the opposition minority was given control of the party and leaders of the Lovestone group were either disciplined (Pepper) or sent on Comintern missions to countries distant from the United States. As a preventative measure a plan was thus drawn up in which loyal Lovestonites who remained in New York would, on a signal from Lovestone in Moscow, move rapidly to seize control of the property and bank accounts of the party. This would allow the Lovestone group to retain control of the CPUSA, which would operate independently of the Comintern until some sort of mutually agreeable arrangement was made with a future Soviet leadership.[7] For Pepper such a development might offer a way out of his dilemma, since he would be able to stay in the United States, continue to play a leading role in the CP, and escape the drastic punishment that was surely awaiting him if he in fact returned to Moscow.

When the American Communists arrived in Moscow on April 7, those not in on the secret were astonished to learn that Pepper had not yet arrived. Every Soviet official they met posed the same urgent question: "Where is Pepper?" Lovestone and Gitlow could hardly answer this question truthfully without incriminating themselves. They also felt constrained to withhold the truth when Pepper's wife, Irén, sought them out and tearfully inquired about her husband, who had not written to her in many months. She suspected that another woman was involved, which, perhaps because she was used to Pepper's philandering, she was willing to forgive: "When a man is away from his wife for such a long time, it is unreasonable for his wife to expect him not to have affairs with other women." But she was bitter over his failure to write and his inexplicable conduct: "Oh, the stupid fool! What has he done to himself? Why did he not obey the Comintern and return to Moscow? Doesn't he know that he

6 Morgan, *Covert Life*, 81; Gitlow, *I Confess*, 518–19.

7 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 521; Morgan, *Covert Life*, 84; Draper, *American Communism*, 405–6.

has killed himself? Oh, what can he now do to save himself?" Lovestone and Gitlow tried to assure her that everything would turn out all right, but they could think of no way to tell her that her suspicions were correct: another woman was in fact involved.[8]

In late February and early March, even as his political future was in increasing jeopardy, Pepper succumbed to the kind of licentiousness that had characterized his conduct at his Lake Balaton military headquarters in the waning days of the Hungarian Communist government in 1919. He managed to seduce and make promises of marriage, in turn, to both of the stenographers who had been assigned to assist him during his period of hiding in Bronxville.[9] The first, Elsie Newman, was a loyal Lovestonite who was given the assignment because it was felt that she could be trusted not to tell anyone that Pepper was hiding in the New York area. After just a few days of working with Pepper, however, she became enamored of this seemingly influential and world-renowned Communist and, as she later explained, became "decidedly intimate" with him. But this did not last long, for after a week the second stenographer, Lillian Gannes, showed up to share some of the work. Pepper abruptly switched his amatory attention to Gannes, whose youth (she was only nineteen years old) and attractive dark features seemed to captivate him. Soon she was spending nights with Pepper in the Hotel Granaton, and he declared that he no longer needed the stenographic services of Elsie.

Jealous of the newcomer, Newman complained bitterly to Lovestone. She insisted that Pepper had made "definite promises" to her, and if she was not reinstated as his stenographer, she would reveal Pepper's whereabouts to other party members. Only after emotional appeals to her loyalty as a Lovestonite and a Communist, which occurred during an hour-long taxicab ride through the streets of New York, were Lovestone and Gitlow able to persuade Newman to remain silent and to abandon her effort, at least for a time, to hold on to Pepper's affections.[10] Meanwhile, Pepper was professing his undying love to Gannes and exciting her imagination with assurances that they would soon flee from New York and live together in Mexico or Canada. One potential problem was Newman's boyfriend, Gil Green, with whom she was sharing an apartment. Because of her fre

8 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 550.

9 The following is based, except where noted, on witness depositions and other materials collected by the CCC of the CPUSA, which dealt with accusations that Lovestone and other party leaders knew of, and facilitated, Pepper's defiance of the Comintern. The CCC met on numerous occasions in April and May of 1929. RCPUSA, 515/1/1696–7, reel 130.

10 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 515–16.

quent and prolonged absences, which she explained as confidential party assignments, Green began to suspect she was secretly meeting another man. Finding a train schedule in her purse that suggested departures from an uptown station to the suburbs, Green staked out the station on March 6, thinking he would find Gannes either departing or arriving. To his astonishment he instead saw Pepper emerge from the station and proceed to his apartment. Shortly thereafter, while staking out the apartment, he saw two men enter. He would later identify them as Lovestone and Stachel.[11]

The next day Green confronted Gannes and demanded an explanation. After futile efforts to prevaricate, she admitted that Pepper had not gone to Mexico, that she had been assigned by Lovestone to work with him, and that she had developed an intimate relationship with him. For that reason she intended now to move out of their apartment to live with Pepper. She thereupon moved into the apartment on 104th Street, and was soon joined by Pepper, who perhaps could no longer afford the expense of staying at the hotel in Bronxville. For the next few weeks Green was in a quandary. He had been a loyal supporter of the Lovestone faction and thus hesitated to inform party leaders of what he had discovered: that Pepper not only was hiding in New York, but that Lovestone was aware of this and actually conniving to support Pepper in his defiance of the Comintern. If leaders of the minority faction learned of this, the results could be devastating for the current party leadership. Green thus kept quiet for a time, though he doubtless harbored a good deal of resentment for Pepper, who had seduced his naive girlfriend.

As the days passed in the last weeks of March, Pepper was under intense pressure to take some sort of decisive action. Not only might Green divulge what he knew at any time, but two Lovestonites who were in on his secret, Stachel and Minor, were losing patience and at a meeting with him in late March strongly urged him to leave for Moscow.[12] Clearly, Pepper's options were rapidly dwindling. Either he would have to flee New York with Gannes, or "reappear" before party leaders and offer some plausible explanation of where he had been over the past month and why he had not in fact gone to Russia. He chose the latter option and in his conversation

11 The most in-depth version of Green's account can be found at RCPUSA, 515/1/1696/32–33, reel 130. When, at a later date, Pepper made what amounted to a full confession, he conceded that he had spoken on the phone frequently with Lovestone and Stachel while he was in hiding, but insisted that they had never visited him in his apartment. Stachel also would later insist that he had not met with Pepper as alleged by Green. Statement of Jack Stachel, June 17, 1929, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/241–43.

12 Statement of Jack Stachel, June 17, 1929, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/241–43.

with Stachel and Minor, who must have known of Lovestone's contingency plan for seizing control of the CP in defiance of the Comintern, broadly hinted that he was considering staying in the United States and helping to run a more independent CP.[13] On March 31, Pepper sent two letters to the CEC that kept open this possibility. In this final attempt to extricate himself from his dilemma, Pepper was like a desperate gambler who hopes to recoup all his losses by doubling down or by playing *va banque.*

In the first message Pepper declared that "the plans regarding my return trip to Moscow had to be modified."[14] He alluded to certain "technical obstacles," but gave as the main reason he was now back in New York, the "return of my old malaria illness, causing serious heart trouble also." His doctors were advising medical treatment so he was forced to discontinue his journey for a few weeks. Naturally, as soon as his health permitted, he intended to "carry out the instructions of the Political Secretariat of the ECCI" and "immediately return to Moscow." Since there is no evidence that Pepper was in fact suffering from any medical problems at this time, the excuse he provided was apparently designed only to allow him to procrastinate for a few more weeks. More telling is the second communication Pepper made to the CEC. Here he insisted that it was his duty as a member of the CEC and as one of the elected delegates to the national convention to express opposition to a motion that the convention had passed, namely the condemnation of Bukharin as a dangerous "rightist" and the call for his removal from a leadership role in the Comintern. Pepper pointed out that as recently as February, Lovestone and the CEC had acknowledged that Bukharin "represents the Communist line" and was the acknowledged leader of the Comintern. He, Pepper, was unaware of any recent information from Moscow that was inconsistent with this judgment, which he continued to hold. Thus, he wanted to express his "thorough disagreement" with the anti-Bukharin resolution and asked that his statement be forwarded to the ECCI in Moscow.[15]

Although Stalin's name was not mentioned in Pepper's protest letter, it is clear that he intended it to be read as a direct, open challenge to the Soviet leader. Pepper certainly knew by this time that pragmatic Communists would no more dare to voice public support for Bukharin than they would

13 In a later recounting of this conversation, Stachel made no mention of the Lovestone plan. Instead, he asserted that at that point he and Minor began to suspect that Pepper intended to become a "renegade" and openly defy the Comintern. Ibid.

14 Pepper to Secretariat of CEC, March 31, 1929, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/206.

15 Pepper to Secretariat of CEC and to the ECCI, March 31, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/1569/132–35, reel 119.

for Trotsky. By doing so in such a demonstrative way he seemed to be positioning himself favorably should there be a complete rupture between the Lovestone delegation in Moscow and the Comintern. If Lovestone sent word that the previously agreed upon emergency plan was to be implemented, Pepper, as the most prominent of the Lovestonites on the scene, would be able to take charge of the newly independent CP. If this was indeed Pepper's strategy, it failed miserably, for he soon discovered that, with Lovestone and Gitlow in Moscow, the remaining Lovestoneites on the CEC lacked the authority, or perhaps by now even the inclination, to defend him. Some now suspected he was involved in an "anti-Comintern adventure" and perhaps was even in league with European Communists who were planning a break with Moscow.[16] Once word spread among party members that Pepper had "returned," Gil Green decided finally to reveal that he had sighted Pepper in New York on March 3. He drew up an account and delivered it to Earl Browder on April 1 "the one party official he felt would take his accusations seriously."[17] In this assumption he was certainly correct, for Browder immediately seized the opportunity to have a final reckoning with Pepper, whom he had viewed with hostility since early 1923.

When the CP Secretariat met on April 1 to discuss the two letters of Pepper that had been delivered the previous day, Browder brought forward the additional information provided by Green.[18] All present agreed that Pepper must be "sharply denounced" for his "conduct inconsistent with the integrity of a party member." His explanations of why his return to Moscow had been delayed were branded as "childish excuses," and his anti-Bukharin statement was deemed to be the result of "cowardly unwillingness to perform his duty of presenting himself to the Comintern." At the instigation of Browder, who wanted to focus on Pepper's political errors as a way of besmirching the Lovestone faction, the Secretariat concluded that Pepper's actions were a reflection of his desire to promote a political program in opposition to that approved by the Comintern, a "logical conclusion of a whole series of steps both in the development of his political platform and defiance of Comintern discipline in opposition to the line of the Comintern and the CEC." The Secretariat agreed unanimously to inform the ECCI of this latest development and to instruct the PolCom to take up the "Pepper case" with the view of expelling him from the CPUSA.

16 Minor later spoke in these terms at a session of the CCC, May 14, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/1697/59–60.

17 Green's report of April 9, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/1696/32–33, reel 130.

18 Decision of Secretariat, April 1, RCPUSA, 515/1/1691/59–61. The decision was forwarded to the Comintern on April 2, Lovestone Papers, Box 198.

On April 4, the PolCom, by a unanimous vote, proceeded to recommend the expulsion of Pepper from the party, employing essentially the same language and reasons put forward by the Secretariat. That same day the full CEC confirmed Pepper's expulsion and declared that he had forfeited his membership not just in the CPUSA but in the Comintern as well.[19] In a review of his actions over the past several years the CEC now discovered that he had taken incorrect positions on numerous issues, including the situation in China and "American exceptionalism." He had actively sought to sabotage the Comintern "line" on the Negro question by introducing his own concept of a Negro soviet republic, which was described as "a typical example of Pepper's unprincipled methods and double bookkeeping." In short, Pepper had joined forces with "incorrigible opportunist elements" and was "preparing to join openly the Social Democracy," in order to "fight outside the Party against the Comintern." Instructions were now given that all publications by Pepper then in circulation were to be withdrawn. The only party leader who showed any hesitation about condemning Pepper was Stachel, who of course had much to lose if others were to discover that he had known of, and abetted, Pepper's subterfuge.[20] But he would not go so far as to oppose Pepper's expulsion, so the vote was unanimous. Stachel must have realized that the fall of Pepper would almost surely bring on the collapse of the Lovestone majority, since as recently as December 1928, Lovestone had publically affirmed his loyalty to, and ideological sympathy with, Pepper.

Pepper was not informed that his case was being discussed by the PolCom and by the CEC, and thus was shocked when he learned of his expulsion. Clearly his strategy had backfired. He had hoped that his very demonstrative support for Bukharin would somehow result in a prolongation of his stay in the United States. He had apparently not imagined that instead it would contribute significantly to the demise of the Lovestone faction and his expulsion from the CPUSA. At this point a Communist less strong-willed and arrogant than Pepper might have conceded defeat and,

19 "Resolution for the Expulsion of John Pepper from the CPUSA," April 4, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/1630/35, reel 125. There may have been a few Lovestonites on the CEC and PolCom who were unsure whether it was wise to proceed so severely against Pepper, but any hesitation was overcome when Wolfe reported from Moscow that he and "various comrades here" had no objection to the "severest measures" being taken against "Bradley" (Pepper). Wolfe to CEC, April 4, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/1550/41, reel 117.

20 Stachel voted for Pepper's expulsion, but not for withdrawing his publications. He also seems to have helped prepare Lillian Gannes in her false testimony to the CCC. Meeting of CCC, May 14, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/1697/28.

applying rigorous Bolshevik self-criticism, confessed his errors and begged for merciful treatment. But this was not Pepper's style. On only one point was he now willing to give in: he informed party leaders that, despite what would likely be "very serious consequences to my health," he would sail on the first available ship and make his return to Moscow.[21] This suggests that Pepper had finally concluded that, especially in the absence of Lovestone, he had almost no support in the CPUSA and thus any solution to his problems predicated on his remaining in the United States or traveling to Mexico was now impossible. He would have to make the best case he could in the Comintern, but in order to do so he would have to try to overturn the decisions of the PolCom and CEC, which if left in force would strongly prejudice his case in Moscow.

After checking with Gannes and Newman to make sure that they would continue to lie on his behalf, Pepper launched a vigorous counter-attack aimed at overturning his expulsion. In a long memorandum to the PolCom he expressed outrage over the way he had been treated.[22] He, "a member of the Communist International since its inception," had not been informed of the discussion of his case by party committees and had not been given the opportunity to defend himself. He expressed deep resentment of the language used to criticize him. The reason he gave for putting off the return to Russia was said to be "childish," yet in what way could a recurrence of malaria be considered a "childish" matter? And how dare his American comrades describe his conduct as "cowardly?" Far more than any of them he had carried out extremely dangerous missions for the Comintern in countries: "You know very well that I am illegal in every country outside of Soviet Russia. And you know very well that I took the chances of illegal life in almost every country. And that I am living this sort of life for ten years since the downfall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. I am illegal here. There is a warrant against me... If the Department of Justice would get me here, it would mean not only arrest and possibilities of deportation, but probably extradition to Hungary. And you know very well that my extradition to Hungary means not only immediate execution but what is worse, humiliation and torture."

Although it might have been more advantageous for Pepper to leave unmentioned the question of his whereabouts over the past month, he felt the need not simply to repeat the claim that he had traveled to Mexico but to offer an elaborate, and totally mendacious, account of that trip. He

21 Pepper's letter to the CEC, April 7, 1929, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/204–05.

22 "Statement of Comrade John Swift," April 8, 1929, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/247–58.

claimed that he had left New York on February 20 and arrived several days later in Mexico. But the steamer he planned to take, which departed on February 28, would have taken over a month to reach Europe. Instead, he decided to take a faster one that departed on March 12. In the meantime, however, a "so-called revolution, or rather counterrevolution," broke out and all the ports were closed indefinitely. His situation was then complicated by a return attack of malaria. When the ports reopened, he discovered that the fastest steamer to Europe was to depart only late in April. There seemed no reason to wait in Mexico, especially since his money was running out, he needed to see a reliable doctor to treat his malaria, and there was less danger associated with his departure from New York now that the "noise" of the annual convention had subsided. Once he was again in New York, he had contacted the party leadership and informed them of his presence and of his intention of departing for Russia once he was well enough to travel.[23]

On April 8, Pepper was permitted to present his statement and appear before the PolCom to answer questions, at which time he repeated his promise to leave for Moscow as soon as possible "by the first steamer which will leave New York." In fact, the PolCom thereupon decided to rescind the expulsion of Pepper, but this had nothing to do with his impassioned pleas and arguments. Instead, the majority reasoned that since Pepper "had flagrantly violated the discipline of the Comintern," the decision for expulsion should not be taken by the CPUSA but by the International Control Commission in Moscow, since it now seemed certain that Pepper would immediately depart for Russia.[24] Nonetheless, the decision may have given Pepper a glimmer of hope. In the last days before his departure for Russia, he continued to live with, and walk openly in the streets with, Gannes, to the dismay of many party members.[25] It seems that

23 Pepper followed up this statement with another one two days later in which he argued that it was absurd to accuse him of a long history of opposition to Comintern policy. How could that be when the policies he promoted were always approved by the CEC and all his publications were approved by the PolCom? Pepper to CEC, April 10, 1929, RGASPI, 495/261/3392.

24 Browder argued strongly against readmitting Pepper. Minutes of PolCom meeting, April 8, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/1641/60, reel 126. Some members of the ECCI were also recommending that Pepper's expulsion be handled by the Comintern. See "Cable concerning Pepper," Tom Bell, April 3, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/1563/4, reel 118;

25 Benjamin Gitlow's wife, Badana, wrote at the time to her husband that she had seen Pepper walking about "with a nice-looking young dark-eyed," and that this had greatly upset her. Letter of April 12, 1929, Benjamin Gitlow Papers, J. Murray Atkins Library, University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

Pepper tried to persuade Gannes to accompany him to Moscow, where he claimed he would be able to find her a job. She was hesitant about this, and in the end it was decided that he would go alone and, once his political fate had been decided by the Comintern, he would report back to her and they would jointly decide what to do. Pepper apparently did not explain what he intended to do about his wife and children. As evidence of his fervent desire to have Gannes as his companion in Russia, Pepper gave her $100 to be used for her ship and train tickets.[26] Pepper may also have regarded the $100 as hush money, a way of insuring that Gannes would remain faithful and continue to lie when summoned as a witness by the CP Control Commission.

After many months of evasion and procrastination, Pepper finally departed on April 11. Seeing him off at the harbor were Gannes and a representative of the CEC, who was there to make sure that Pepper had no final trick up his sleeve. During the trans-Atlantic voyage he had plenty of time to contemplate his fate and plan his strategy. He knew that the CEC was sending a thick dossier to the Comintern on his misconduct. Nonetheless, he apparently was still confident he could talk his way of his predicament, so long as Gannes remained loyal and continued to lie on his behalf. To keep up her spirits he sent Gannes postcards from aboard ship and London, and then a longer "love letter" from Berlin.[27] Pepper's letter was upbeat and filled with amatory sentiments: "I love you very much and I never have wished anything as much as your being here with me." He claimed to have learned from German comrades that the power struggle in Russia was ending in a compromise that would allow Bukharin and even Trotsky to retain membership in the Presidium of the CPSU party conference. This, Pepper suggested, was a favorable development for him. However, since by this time it was well-known in Germany and elsewhere that Trotsky had been exiled earlier in 1929 and was living in Turkey, Pepper was either grossly misled by his German friends or, more likely, was spinning a tale to assure Gannes that his cause was not lost and was still worth fighting for. From Berlin Pepper also sent Gannes, via American Express, a check for another $100, to be used if and when she decided to travel to Russia.

26 Gannes's testimony at CCC session, April 30, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/1696/130–31, reel 130.

27 Pepper to Gannes, April 25, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/1697/5, reel 130. Pepper was encouraged by the fact that Gannes had sent a telegram to him in Berlin in which she wrote of how lonesome she felt in his absence. Gannes testimony, CCC session of May 14, 1929, 515/1/1698/13. reel 130.

Whatever hopes Pepper had that the power struggle in Russia might be resolved in a way that would favor him quickly dissipated once he arrived in Moscow on April 30. From his American colleagues Pepper soon learned that the situation in fact was extremely bleak. Bukharin had been banished from the Comintern and Stalin and his minions now dominated the ECCI and the American Commission that had been established to enforce Comintern and Stalinist discipline on the CPUSA. Pepper was banned from attendance at sessions of the American Commission, which extended from late April to mid-May. But he learned that during the sessions of the American Commission he was the focus of scathing criticism expressed by Stalin, Molotov, and Kuusinen. Pepper was accused of "opportunistic tendencies" and "rightist deviations" that had poisoned the CPUSA. The fact that Lovestone championed the "Pepperian theory of American exceptionalism" was clear evidence of the "ideological kinship of the Majority leaders with Pepper." The Soviet leaders ridiculed Pepper's explanations for his delay in responding to the Comintern summons and condemned Lovestone and other party leaders as accomplices in Pepper's opportunistic and defiant conduct.[28]

In a letter to Gannes on May 2, in which he used a prearranged set of code words, Pepper reported that he was not as optimistic as he had been in Berlin. The marriage of Henry (Stalin) and Magda (Bukharin) was heading for divorce. Henry (Stalin), who was acting in a "brutal" and "ill-tempered" manner, was "very angry with me too," and has publically been "calling me terrible names." As a result, he and George (Lovestone) were in danger of becoming sick with the flu (being expelled). Pepper ended with a renewal of his love for Gannes: "Everything I do is permeated with the only thought, how can I see you again, and how can we live together." He expressed his determination to find the "ways and means" to carry out their plan to meet in the near future.[29]

Although he had not been permitted to attend sessions of the full American Commission, Pepper was called to a meeting of a subcommittee, at which he was asked to account for the seven-month delay between the date the Comintern had instructed him to return to Moscow and his actual arrival. Pepper's explanations, in which he repeated the lies he had told the PolCom of the CPUSA, were met with disbelief and sarcasm. Kuusinen

28 House of Representatives, Special Committee on Un-American Activities, *Appendix – Part 1*, 876–898; Wolfe, *Breaking with Communism,* 495–505, 525; Draper, *American Communism,* 410–12.

29 Pepper to Gannes, May 2, 1929, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/59–60.

declared that Pepper's actions represented a clear and determined sabotage of the Comintern. Losovsky, delighted to have another opportunity to vilify Pepper, observed in a mocking tone that his journey from New York to Moscow seemed to have been the longest on record. Having found Pepper's responses to be inadequate, the ECCI turned his case over to the Comintern's disciplinary body, the International Control Commission (ICC), which was to commence its deliberations on May 20.[30]

Pepper realized that his only hope at this point would be if he could gain the sympathy of at least some members of the ICC and thereby avoid the worst penalty of all, expulsion from the Comintern. A full confession on his part would at this point gain him no mercy. He would have to continue to lie about his trip to Mexico, and hope that Gannes's testimony on his behalf, which would be contained in the material sent to the ICC by the CPUSA, would be seen as a confirmation of his account of his whereabouts in February and March. By this time Pepper could not count on any support from his comrades in the Lovestone faction, who were being removed from leadership of the party and were mostly concerned with the problem of how to escape from Moscow without being forced to undertake unpalatable Comintern assignments in Russia or such unpromising places as Korea or Latin America. In any case, they were fed up with Pepper, as Gitlow related in a letter to his wife: "The relations between John Pepper and us have been definitely and finally ended. We will have absolutely nothing to do with him. His activity in our Party, his subjectiveness, his individual selfishness of purpose have cost us very dearly. The biggest mistake we made was to welcome him back into our midst."[31]

The only American willing even to meet with Pepper was Bertram Wolfe, whom Pepper sought out in his room at the Hotel Lux. Pepper admitted that he had not told the truth to the PolCom or to the CEC in New York, and implored Wolfe, who had spent considerable time in Mexico, to help him prepare for his ICC hearing. What he needed was information about "the appearance of Mexico City, what its main streets were and how they looked, what notable sights a hasty tour might have taken in." Wolfe,

30 House of Representatives, Special Committee on Un-American Activities, *Appendix – Part 1*, 888–94; Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 295, 299. Pepper was called to a preliminary meeting with the ICC on May 20. The formal hearing began on May 25. RGASPI, 495/261/3392/193–94. The transcript of Pepper's hearing is not available because ICC records in general are not open to researchers.

31 Gitlow to Badana, April 30, 1929, Benjamin Gitlow Papers, J. Murray Atkins Library, University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

who by this time was thoroughly disgusted with the Comintern and the Soviet leadership, was apparently willing to do Pepper this one last favor.[32]

Only days before his hearing before the ICC was to begin, Pepper was informed by Gitlow that he had learned from a telegram from Stachel and Minor that Gannes had repudiated her former testimony before the CCC and was now implicating both Pepper and Lovestone. Pepper nearly collapsed on hearing this devastating news.[33] Clinging to the hope that the report from America was garbled or mistaken, he immediately sent off a telegram to Gannes: "CAN NOT BELIEVE DISPATCH ABOUT YOUR CHANGING YOUR TRUE TESTIMONY... EXPLAIN WIRING INSTANTLY."[34] Gannes never responded to this message, the last he would ever send to her. Because of the relentless investigation conducted by the CCC, Gannes had found it impossible to continue to lie about her relationship with Pepper. There were too many discrepancies in her testimony. Furthermore, she had resumed a friendly relationship with her former boyfriend, Gil Green, who was able to convince her that it was her duty, as a loyal party member, to make a full confession.[35] Yet even as Gannes was capitulating, Newman and Stachel continued to lie in order to protect Lovestone and Pepper. This led to a confrontation at a session of the CCC in which Gannes called Stachel a liar and he in return denounced her as a prostitute.[36]

Pepper, of course, was unaware of the twists and turns in the deliberations of the CCC. Not having received a reply from Gannes, he had to begin his defense before the ICC in Moscow without a clear understanding of what the situation was in New York. He decided that he would cling to his former explanations and lies, in the hope that the situation would remain sufficiently muddled that a firm decision against him would not be made. Before the ICC he thus repeated and elaborated on the story of how he had traveled to Mexico, where he had become ill and had been frustrated in his attempts to find a suitable steamer bound for Europe. Relying on the information he had received from Wolfe, he even provided the names of the hotels he had stayed in and the doctor he had consulted.[37] He continued

32 Wolfe, *Breaking with Communism*, 534–35.

33 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 554. Gannes's repudiation of her former testimony was given at the April 30, 1929 meeting of the CCC, RCPUSA, 515/1/1696/130–33.

34 Telegram of May 9, 1929, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/660.

35 Not long after this incident, Green and Gannes not only reconciled but got married. They remained together until Gannes's death in 1962.

36 Session of CCC, May 16, 1929, RCPUSA, 515/1/1697/85.

37 On June 6, 1929, the ICC wired the Mexican Communist Party to seek confirmation of the information Pepper had given. RGASPI, 495/261/3392/130.

continued boldly to assert his innocence as his hearing dragged on into the summer. Only in early July did he finally recognize the hopelessness of his case. The members of the ICC clearly were receiving a constant stream of material on the "Pepper case" from the CPUSA, including word that Stachel had finally admitted his role in concealing Pepper's presence in New York and was now turning against the Lovestone faction.[38] Furthermore, Lovestone, Gitlow, and Wolfe, the only former comrades on whom he might count for some sympathy and support, had been disgraced and had made their way back to the United States, where they were expelled from the CP. In the circumstances Pepper saw no alternative but capitulation.

In a letter to the ICC dated July 11, Pepper thus made a confession, but it was by no means a full or honest one.[39] He admitted that he had never gone to Mexico and had remained in the New York area in late February and March, but claimed he did so only because of "fractional loyalty and discipline." He had wanted to confess everything to the party, but Lovestone and Stachel had urged him to remain silent and stay in hiding because to do otherwise would result in a "great catastrophe" for the majority faction. Now, however, he had learned that Stachel had admitted his role in the "Pepper affair" and Lovestone had been expelled from the party, and thus there was no longer a need for him to "protect" those comrades. One finds in Pepper's letter a deep resentment of Green and of his former lover, Gannes. Their testimony, he asserted, for the most part "did not correspond to the truth" and was motivated by "an excessive factional zeal." But Pepper apparently sensed that although these excuses might help mitigate his punishment, he could hardly argue that others were responsible for his conduct. In the end he thus admitted that his decision to remain in New York and to remain silent about that fact had represented a "great political mistake" and "a gross breach of discipline."

In a desperate move to avoid the punishment he most feared, expulsion from the Comintern, Pepper at this point proposed to the ECCI that he be sent on a mission to do illegal work in China. He promised that if he were given such an assignment, he would "unconditionally and with absolute loyalty adhere to the line of the Comintern."[40] But this idea was summarily

38 Stachel's "confession" can be found in his statement of June 17, 1929, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/241–43. Other Lovestonites who had decided to submit themselves to Comintern discipline and to back Stalin were Minor and Bedacht. Zumoff, "Communist Party," 253–54.

39 Pepper to ICC, July 11, 1929, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/686.

40 Pepper later referred to this in a letter to Lazar Kaganovich, June 9, 1930, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/175–79.

dismissed by Comintern leaders, who had learned from experience that Pepper seemed to get into trouble no matter what country he was sent to. After another month of deliberations the ICC finally rendered its decision on August 19. The report contained a detailed listing of Pepper's various transgressions.[41] He had neglected to carry out the directives of the ECCI, had lied about his alleged trips to Mexico and Korea, and had engaged in persistent fractional, opportunist, and rightist activities. Because of these serious infractions Pepper was expelled from the Comintern, with the stipulation that at least a year would have to pass before he could apply for reinstatement.

As word spread in the Communist world about the fate of Pepper, his critics and enemies seemed to relish the opportunity to add to his humiliation by offering their final judgments on his character. Living in exile in Turkey, Trotsky pronounced Pepper to be "the consummate type of the man who knows how to adapt himself, a political parasite."[42] An unsigned report, in the form of a mock obituary, in *The Militant,* branded him an "adventurer of three continents, demagogue of the meanest type, careerist and charlatan, man without character or principle, self-seeker and alien element in the body of the working class."[43] Minor, once Pepper's factional ally, felt constrained to add his voice to the anti-Pepper campaign. Minor accused him of being "an agent of the international right wing" who had deceived his American comrades and attempted to lead the fight against Leninism in the Comintern.[44] Even some who had had little direct personal contact with Pepper bemoaned his baleful influence, as did a Yugoslav Communist who privately observed that the Italian CP, which had tried to cling to a "certain independence of ideas," had, in 1929, succumbed to a rapid "pepperization."[45]

There is considerable irony in the fact that by the end of the summer of 1929 the only person in whom Pepper could truly confide and from whom he could seek solace was his wife. He had treated her abominably over the years, and only a month earlier had sought to escape a severe punishment

41 The report was published in *Inprecorr*, September 13, 1929, 1067.

42 Trotsky, "Who is Leading the Comintern Today?" *Militant*, August 15, 1929, 4.

43 "Good By [sic] Pepper! The Passing of an Adventurer," *Militant*, October 1, 1929, 8. The author may have been Cannon, who had made similar comments about Pepper in earlier issues of *Militant.*

44 Minor's speech at the Tenth Plenum of the ECCI, July 11, 1929, *Protokoll. 10. Plenum des Executivekomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 565.

45 V. Vokovic to Jules Humbert-Droz, March 15, 1929, in Bahne, *Les Partis communistes*, 159, 699.

from the ICC by volunteering to undertake a dangerous mission to China, which would once again have involved leaving his family to fend for themselves in Moscow. Yet Irén, as one of Pepper's friends later astutely observed, "worshiped her husband and was ready for any kind of sacrifice on his behalf."[46] Perhaps she also hoped that her husband's public humiliation would temper his arrogance and lead him to pay more attention to his duties as a husband and father. In any case, she apparently accepted, without hesitation, the misleading explanation Pepper gave her for his clash with Soviet leaders and his expulsion from the Comintern. Naturally he made no mention of his sexual escapades in New York or his lies about Korea and Mexico. Instead, he described the problem as one of differences over major theoretical issues. Once back in Moscow he had supposedly sat down with Stalin and Molotov and tried to explain to them his idea of how to win over the unions in the United States by following the British example. But the Soviet leaders insisted this was an error, and Molotov even threatened violence if Pepper did not repudiate his ideas. When he stuck to his principles, the Comintern proceeded to expel him.[47]

Pepper had feared expulsion from the Comintern for he knew that it would have severe political and material consequences. It would be impossible for him to play any significant role in party affairs. None of the newspapers or periodicals that had regularly published his work would welcome his submissions. He could not serve on commissions, engage in debates, or go on missions to foreign countries. He was destined to be a political pariah, wasting his talents as a cog in the vast Soviet bureaucracy. There were economic consequences as well. All the "perks" Pepper had enjoyed as a high-level Comintern functionary were now lost. He no longer had access to secretaries to whom he could dictate his letters and articles. His family was forced to move out of the relatively spacious apartment in the Hotel Lux to a less desirable room. However, Pepper was not entirely without employment, for Comintern officials recognized that a foreign Communist, no matter how disgraced, must be given some means of livelihood. In July 1929, Pepper was assigned to work in the foreign trade department of Gosplan, the Soviet planning agency. But he did not report for duty at his new workplace for some time, since the physical and psychological strain of his ordeal over the past several months had taken its toll and he had a breakdown that required medical treatment. The doctors who examined him must have been convinced that his condition was serious, since he was

46 Gitlow, *I Confess*, 426.

47 This was the explanation Czóbel gave thirty-five years later. Czóbel Memoir, 28.

granted two months of vacation and recuperation in a health resort outside of Moscow in order to "restore his nerves."[48]

When he finally commenced work at Gosplan in November he wanted to make an impression as a model worker whose devotion to the Communist movement was exemplary. He declared that he was unconditionally willing to accept any work assignment.[49] In the remainder of 1929 and all through 1930 his efforts were fixated on one objective: to prove his loyalty and regain admission to the Comintern after the one-year period stipulated by the ICC. Pepper wrote frequently, in fulsome terms, to Comintern and Soviet officials to give updates on his "rehabilitation" and to ask what more he could do to strengthen his case for reinstatement. His letter to the ICC and to the ECCI in January 1930, was typical. Here he called attention to recent statements he had made in which he denounced the "right opposition" of Bukharin, wholeheartedly embraced the current Comintern line, and recognized "without reservations" the correctness of the condemnation by the ICC and the ECCI of his "political mistakes and factional breaches of discipline."[50] When news reached Moscow that Lovestone and others who had been his close party allies had broken with the CPUSA and formed an independent Communist party, Pepper saw another opportunity of demonstrating his loyalty to the Soviet leadership. He proposed that he compose a denunciation of the Lovestone party that could be published as an open letter in various CP publications. This idea proved to be acceptable, and after several revisions to sharpen the language, Pepper's letter appeared in the *Daily Worker* in June 1930. Here Pepper condemned his former friend and comrade in words that echoed those of Stalin. Lovestone, he declared, claimed that he retained the support of the majority of American workers, but this was certainly not the case, for the American proletariat was "naturally on the side of the Comintern." Pepper's letter contained not only a sharp attack on Lovestone but also an abject confession of his errors and misdeeds while in the United States.[51]

On the basis of his anti-Lovestone letter and his repeated expressions of contrition and loyalty to the Communist movement, Pepper hoped to

48 Ibid., 75.

49 Pepper to Partyburo of Gosplan, November 18, 1929, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/757.

50 Pepper to ICC and ECCI, January 28, 1930, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/76–80.

51 Pepper's letter appeared in the *Daily Worker* on June 4, 1930. The new leadership of the CPUSA hoped that publication of the letter would contribute to the disintegration of the "counterrevolutionary Lovestone group." Minutes of CCC meeting of April 3–4, 1930, RCPUSA, 515/1/1903/3.

accelerate his readmission to the Comintern, but Soviet and Comintern leaders were not receptive to this idea. In fact, some were ignorant of Pepper's current status, as was shown in an article in *Pravda* in June, in which he was lumped together with Lovestone as "renegades" in New York who continued to defy the Comintern. Pepper immediately protested against this "calumny" and patiently explained, in letters to the editor of *Pravda* and to Molotov, that he had completely disassociated himself from Lovestone and was in any case in Moscow, not New York.[52] However, his request that a correction be printed in *Pravda* went unheeded. Pepper's only success in this period came when he received permission to publish articles in one of the daily trade newspapers connected to his work in Gosplan, the *Kooperativnaia Zhizn* (Cooperative Life). In 1930, he wrote over forty such articles, either anonymously or under the pen name "Victorov." In these articles, which dealt not only with trade issues but also with various international and domestic political problems, Pepper took pains to exhibit his loyalty to the current Comintern "line."[53]

In October 1930, thirteen months after his expulsion, Pepper made a formal application for reinstatement in the Comintern. His letter was filled with declarations of party loyalty and Bolshevik self-criticism.[54] He pointed to his anti-Lovestone letter in the *Daily Worker* as a sincere attempt to repair some of the damage he had done to the CPUSA, and expressed regret this his championing of the concept of American exceptionalism had given such a boost to rightist opportunists. Pepper tried to portray his case in terms that any true Communist could sympathize with: "One cannot stand outside the Comintern, if one wants to be a Communist." But the ECCI was in no hurry to reinstate Pepper. They asked for additional supporting material and the process dragged on for many months. In its decision in May 1931, the ECCI acknowledged that Pepper "had begun the path towards correcting his mistakes," but decided that an immediate reinstatement of Pepper would be "premature." Instead, a continuing "exchange of opinions" would be sufficient for the time being.[55] Though disappointed, Pepper continued his campaign through the remainder of 1931 and into 1932. Finally, in May 1932, his application for reinstatement, wich

52 Letters to Lazar Kaganovitch and Molotov, June 9, 1930, RGASPI, 495/261/3392/86–89, 175–79.

53 Pepper's letter to the ICC, October 27, 1930, RGASPI, 495/261/3392 (II)/108–10.

54 Ibid.

55 Minutes of meeting of Political Secretariat, May 27, 1931, RGASPI, 495/4/111/3; decision of ICC, May 18, 1931, RGASPI, 495/261/3392–II/1321.

was bolstered by a "positive assessment" from his party unit in Gosplan, was approved. He was to be readmitted to the Comintern on "the standard appropriate terms."[56]

Pepper and his wife were ecstatic about this development, believing that his career as a prominent international Communist could now be relaunched. After all, he was only fifty-six years old, still young enough to achieve great things. But it soon became clear that Pepper could not expect to resume his work in the Comintern apparatus. Instead, Soviet officials seem to have made it clear that he was to remain in the employment of Gosplan. There his skills as a writer and his knowledge of how to convey information to the public were soon recognized and by 1936 he had risen to the position of head of the Bureau of Publicity of the People's Commissariat of the Food Industry. This apparently left him enough spare time to engage in a variety of journalistic and intellectual activities. The editor of *Pravda* enlisted him to edit English and German materials for the journal *Bolshevik*, and he was invited to give lectures in a variety of venues, including the prestigious Institute of the Red Professoriate. In the mid-1930s, he published numerous articles, mostly dealing with economic issues, in *Pravda* and in other newspapers and journals. For these he continued to use the pen name "Victorov," although in time he ventured to identify himself again as John Pepper.[57] His most important assignment in this period was the editing and translating into English of a major study of the first Five Year Plan. Of the two editors of the volume, one was identified as John Swift, a pseudonym Pepper had used in the United States in 1928–29.[58] Perhaps this was a way of signaling to some of his former American comrades that he was once again active as a Communist writer.

By the mid-1930s, Pepper's increased earnings improved his family's standard of living, which had fallen precipitously after his expulsion from the Comintern in 1929. He and his wife were able to move into a better apartment,[59] which by 1937 they occupied mostly by themselves, for their older daughter Vera had married and the younger, Mária, had become a university student. During this relatively tranquil period in Pepper's life he had unexpected encounters with two of his former party enemies in the CPUSA. In late 1932 or early 1933 Foster was on a visit to Russia to recu-

56 Pepper's letter to the ICC, May 5, 1932, RGASPI, 495/261/3392 (II)/3–5.

57 The ECCI gave permission for Pepper to write articles for *Pravda*, but not under his real name. Minutes of Secretariat meeting of June 3, 1934, RGASPI, 495/4/293/4.

58 Czóbel Memoir, 42–43, 76.

59 In 1937 they lived in apartment 20, Building 11/13, Second Shipkovsky Passage. Shvetsova, *Rasstrel'nye spiski*, 316.

perate from the rigors of the election campaign of 1932, when he was the Communist Party candidate for president. After a chance meeting in the streets of Moscow, Foster invited Pepper to dinner and they spent a convivial evening reminiscing about the old days.[60] Neither seemed to bear a grudge against the other, perhaps because both had failed in their lofty ambitions. Foster had, on several occasions, been close to becoming leader of the CPUSA, but in the end had always been passed over. A year or two later Browder, who had succeeded where Foster had failed, was in Moscow and during a visit to the Gosplan office he bumped into Pepper. The latter, who had mellowed considerably since the two men had had their final clash in 1929, was magnanimous in his welcome. He even arranged for Gosplan to set up a lavish banquet to honor the distinguished American Communist.[61]

In his conversations with his former American rivals, Pepper probably spoke of a project he had in mind that would represent the capstone of his career as a Communist. He had been given the assignment to write a multivolume history of the workers' movement in all the capitalist countries.[62] But even as he began his preliminary research, there were some ominous hints of an approaching wave of terror in Russia. Ever since 1922, when the ECCI prohibited Pepper from any further involvement in the affairs of the Hungarian CP, he had had little contact with most of the large contingent of Hungarian Communists who resided in the Soviet Union. In any case, after his political disgrace in 1930 Kun and most of the Hungarian émigrés in Russia shunned him. He did, however, remain on friendly terms with a few, including Magyar and Varga.[63] Pepper could not help noticing the heightened political tension and calls for increased party discipline after the murder of Sergei Kirov, a potential political rival of Stalin, on December 1, 1934. But he must have been truly shocked when later that month Magyar was expelled from the CP, arrested, convicted of oppositional activity in league with Zinoviev, and sentenced to a ten-year prison term.[64] Soon thereafter Magyar's wife, who had tried her best to dissociate herself from her "traitorous" husband, was also arrested and imprisoned.

In 1935, the hunt for "oppositionists" supposedly in league with Zinoviev and/or Trotsky intensified, with suspicions focused particularly on the

60 Czóbel Memoir, 76.

61 Draper, *American Communism*, 436.

62 Czóbel Memoir, 78.

63 Ibid., 75.

64 On Magyar as one of the first victims of the developing campaign of terror and as a "logical scapegoat" for frightened Comintern officials, see Chase, *Enemies*, 52–53.

large number of political émigrés who had taken up residence in Soviet Russia. Soviet leaders and officials of the Narodny Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (the Soviet secret police organization) were becoming convinced that many of these foreign Communists were not "real Bolsheviks," and that certain groups, notably the Poles and Hungarians, harbored deviationists and counterrevolutionaries.[65] Pepper was certainly aware of this development, since at some point he, like other émigrés, had to supply information to the police as part of a "verification" program. In addition, he noticed that newspapers and journals that had been publishing his work were no longer interested in his submissions.[66] But at first he seems to have felt that he was not in any imminent danger. Perhaps he reasoned that his credentials as one of the earliest and most vociferous critics of Zinoviev and Trotsky were so well-known in Comintern circles that no one would think of accusing him of having been involved in their oppositionist activity. This would explain why Pepper apparently took the risk of paying frequent visits to Magyar in prison. In a time of heightened vigilance such a demonstration of friendship toward a convicted "oppositionist" was likely to be viewed by the police as suspicious behavior.[67]

In late 1936, there were other ominous developments. In the aftermath of the trial of Zinoviev and his "accomplices" in August, the Comintern Cadre Department compiled a list of approximately three thousand Comintern members who were suspected of being potential spies, provocateurs, "wreckers," or "oppositionists." The list, on which Germans, Poles, and Hungarians predominated, was forwarded to the NKVD.[68] It is quite possible, though not certain, that Pepper's name was on this list. Early in 1937, the secret police began to arrest individuals on this list and others who had been denounced by Comintern or Soviet officials who feared for their own safety and thought that the best way to demonstrate their vigilance was to accuse others, often comrades they had worked with for many years. In the ECCI this phenomenon led to the selection of Kun as a kind of "sacrificial lamb." In September 1936, he was expelled from the Comintern on the grounds of his factionalism in the Hungarian CP and his opposition to the new "line" of the Popular Front, which had been announced in 1935.[69]

65 Ibid., 13, 99.

66 For example, the editor of the journal *Bolshevik* informed Pepper that his services were no longer needed. Czóbel Memoir, 78.

67 Ibid., 36; Studer, *Der stalinistische Parteikader*, 172.

68 Chase, *Enemies*, 162.

69 Ibid.

In 1937, it was becoming clear that those caught up in the reign of terror faced not simply expulsion from the party, but at the minimum a prison sentence and in many cases execution. The arrests seemed to be almost completely arbitrary: "members of the Hungarian colony in Russia were disappearing regardless of their background, age, or factional allegiance."[70] It seemed that no one could feel safe from the late night visit of NKVD agents or the arrival of the "black maria," the official car of the secret police. As one Hungarian Communist dared to point out to Stalin, "each evening foreigners gather their things in anticipation of a possible arrest."[71] Pepper watched with increasing apprehension as one by one comrades he had worked closely with were arrested and imprisoned: Bukharin in February, Walecki in mid-June, and Kun in late June. Kun was charged with "creating a counterrevolutionary organization of Hungarian political émigrés, inspired by the Hungarian espionage organs."[72] Pepper's turn came late on the evening of July 29, when, in the presence of his terrified wife, secret police agents arrested him in their apartment. His wife and daughters would never see him again.

There is no available evidence about how Pepper's name came to the attention of the NKVD. In early July Stalin had ordered additional arrests of "anti-Soviet elements," and in the Soviet leader's mind Pepper certainly must have fallen into this category. But with so many thousands of Communist officials being arrested in this period, it seems unlikely that Stalin would have personally put forward the name of Pepper, even though it was quite probable that he had a good deal of distrust and antipathy for him. More likely Pepper's arrest came about either because his name had appeared on the ECCI list sent to the NKVD in 1936 or as the result of a denunciation. Those Communists who were arrested in this period were invariably subjected to intense physical and psychological torture. Most eventually concluded that their only hope for survival was to cooperate with their interrogators and make a full confession of the crimes they had supposedly committed. One way to placate their tormentors was to name others who had been members of the alleged anti-Soviet organization or plot. It has been noted that the most frequent use of denunciations occurred among Comintern functionaries of the same nationality.[73] Pepper may in fact have been denounced by more than one individual, but

70 Borsányi, *Life*, 432. See also Pastor, "Hungarian Victims," 1–8.
71 Chase, *Enemies*, 298–99.
72 Starkov, "Trial," 1300–1301.
73 Vatlin, "Einwirkungen," 12.

the most likely suspect is Kun, who was arrested on June 28 and began to cooperate with his interrogators on July 1. Kun, whose relationship with most members of the Hungarian community in Moscow had become very acrimonious, proceeded to offer the names of numerous individuals who had allegedly joined the "counterrevolutionary organization of Hungarian political émigrés" he was accused of directing. Pepper's name does not appear in the brief excerpt from Kun's interrogation that has become available, but it seems possible, perhaps even probable, that he was named by Kun at some point during his many months of incarceration.[74]

No records directly relating to Pepper's arrest and imprisonment have become available, but it is known that the general charge against him was "participation in a counterrevolutionary organization."[75] Like most of the other Communists who found themselves in this ghastly predicament, Pepper most likely at first pleaded innocence. At that point he would have been subjected to the same methods of torture that were being used against other prisoners. Kun, for example, was deprived of sleep and forced to stand on one leg during his long interrogations. He broke down and confessed quite quickly, after just three days. Others held out longer, despite the horrible conditions in the cells, near starvation, sleep deprivation, brutal interrogations, and various other forms of psychological and physical torture.[76] In the end almost all of the prisoners confessed, for they came to realize that they were sure to be executed if they failed to do so, and there might be some hope if they cooperated "for the sake of the party." One can only speculate about how Pepper responded to this traumatic experience of arrest, false accusations, and torture. Given his stubbornness and ingrained arrogance, he probably did not break down as quickly as Kun had. For a time he might even have felt confident that he would be able to outmaneuver his dim-witted interrogators. Eventually, though, he must have realized that there was no alternative to confession of his "crimes." Even then he might have tried to employ his creative skills to work out some clever compromise with the secret police that would spare his life. But if indeed he tried such a ploy, it was doomed to failure. On February 8, 1938, a little over six months after his arrest, Pepper was

74 Kun is known to have denounced Béla Szántó and members of his family, Lajos Magyar, Ferenc Münnich, and "others." Bayerlein and Huber, "Protokolle des Terrors," 58. See also Chase, "Microhistory and Mass Repression," 475–77 and Pastor, "Hungarian Victims," 4–6.

75 Shvetsova, *Rasstrel'nye spiski*, 316.

76 Starkov, "Trial," 1300, 1304; Pastor, "Hungarian Victims," 5–6; Chase, *Enemies*, 363–64, 395.

given a short trial before the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR and convicted of counterrevolutionary activity. He was shot later that day, and Pepper's odyssey as a Communist thereupon ended in a nameless grave somewhere in or near Moscow.[77]

During Pepper's imprisonment his wife was not allowed any contact with him. Each month she dutifully handed over fifty rubles to the secret police, the maximum amount that could be given to a prisoner. In February 1938, however, that month's allotment was returned to her with the explanation that Pepper was no longer being held there. When she persisted in demanding to know where her husband was, she too was arrested. After six months in a Moscow prison, she was transferred to a labor camp in Kazakhstan where wives of those arrested for political crimes were incarcerated. When, after a year, she was permitted to correspond with her daughters, she learned that they too had suffered from the opprobrium of having both parents imprisoned for political crimes. The older daughter had been abandoned by her husband, and the younger was impoverished and finding it difficult to continue her university studies. Only in late 1946 was Irén finally released from the labor camp. When the era of de-Stalinization began after the dictator's death in 1952, she and her daughters began the process to petition the Soviet government for Pepper's rehabilitation. Their persistence paid off. On May 30, 1956, the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR reversed its 1938 decision and offered a full rehabilitation to "John Pepper-Pogány." His membership in the CP was reinstated posthumously and his wife was granted a pension of 750 rubles.[78]

77 Shvetsova, *Rasstrel'nye spiski*, 316. Pepper's trial was not likely to have exceeded the twenty minutes it took to convict Kun.

78 Ibid., Czóbel Memoir, 48–51.

Conclusion

As a young man of considerable intellectual ability and educational attainment, József Pogány had many careers open to him in the first decade of the twentieth century. With the exception of government administration and the officer corps, Hungarians of Jewish backgrounds were free to enter any of the professions, and did so in remarkable numbers. Although Jews represented only 5 percent of the population of the Kingdom of Hungary, in this period they constituted 42 percent of all journalists, 49 percent of all medical doctors, 49 percent of all lawyers, and 85 percent of all bankers.[1] During his student days at the University of Budapest, Pogány seems to have determined that the best way to use his talents in the service of the Socialist movement, to which he had given a fervent commitment, was to become a writer. It did not take long for him to forge a successful career as a journalist with a left-wing orientation. His ability to write with fluency and incisiveness was quickly recognized, and by the eve of World War I, he had become an important and influential leading writer for *Népszava*, especially on foreign policy issues. His articles and pamphlets on cultural, social, and economic problems both in Hungary and in other countries, demonstrated the great breadth of his interests. With considerable justification it has been said of Pogány that he was "a significant Marxist thinker in pre-1919 Hungary."[2]

Yet despite his accomplishments as a writer, Pogány did not rise in the leadership of the HSP. Perhaps this was due in part to his own preference to retain his independence and to make his impact as a journalist or publicist, on the model of Franz Mehring, the German Socialist. On the other hand, many of his coworkers and fellow social democrats came to the quick conclusion that he lacked the personal qualities needed in a successful party leader. They regarded him as a "climber" whose superciliousness and tendency toward self-glorification were insufferable. Yet, as was to be the case throughout his career, Pogány was able to attract at least a few influential mentors and supporters who valued his abilities and who were willing to overlook his personal flaws. In this way he managed to maintain

1 Perlman, *Bridging Three Worlds,* 44; Pataki, *Jews of Hungary,* 437–38.

2 Varga, *Pogány József,* 48.

his reputation as an important voice of socialism even though he was disliked and ridiculed by many of his colleagues.

During World War I, Pogány applied his writing skills to produce a series of evocative reports from the Galician and Italian fronts. Had they been available in a West European language, they might well have established him as one of the finest war reporters of his time. However, to Pogány's detractors, his wartime journalism simply revealed another of his negative personal attributes: flagrant opportunism. Right up to August 1914, Pogány had been scathingly critical of Austro-Hungarian imperialism, which, he argued, had been the main cause of the war. But many of the articles he wrote during the Great War strongly supported the war effort and justified Austro-Hungarian war aims, including the retention of Trieste. He made this effort to pose as a patriot, it seems, to help preserve his exemption from combat, to curry favor with the military censors, and to position himself as a prominent public figure when the Habsburg Empire emerged victorious from the war. By 1918, however, he started to realize that the Central Powers would not win the war and that, like the Russian Empire, Austria-Hungary might disintegrate and be ripe for revolution.

As the war came to an end, Pogány once again sought to play a leading role as the revolution developed, although it remains unclear whether he was involved in the planning or carrying out of the murder of Tisza. What is certain is that he soon discovered that he could best make his mark on the revolution by using the knowledge he had gained during the war regarding military affairs and the psychology of ordinary soldiers. Having closely watched and written about the unfolding events of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, Pogány became convinced that a revolution could succeed only if it gained firm control of the armed forces. Thus he devoted his efforts to propagandizing among the returning soldiers and organizing the Soldiers' Council. He had great success in large part because he discovered that he had a gift for oratory. His demagogic speechmaking made him very popular among ordinary soldiers, but at the same time contributed to the collapse of public order and the weakening of the revolutionary government. It soon became clear that Pogány's commitment to the principles of social democracy were quite shallow. Many Hungarian Socialists remained convinced that lasting reforms could come only through the democratic process. By late 1918, Pogány, who had begun to imagine himself as the watchdog and rescuer of the revolution, had come to believe that the power of the masses could be harnessed in other than parliamentary ways or democratic elections. He demonstrated his recklessness and

demagoguery when he organized street demonstrations that threatened to topple two successive ministers of war.

Although in early 1919, Pogány denounced the surging Communist Party and insisted that only the SP was capable of preserving the revolution in Hungary, in certain critical ways he had in fact drawn closer to the Bolshevik mentality. Had he in January or February openly declared his allegiance with Kun's party, he might have secured for himself a solid place in the leadership of the CP. Instead, he continued to mock and deride the Communists in his public speeches. As a result, when he did eventually play a key role in the merger of the SP and the CP, he discovered that many Hungarian Communists regarded him with suspicion if not outright hatred. That Pogány was nonetheless able to play a leading role in the governing of the133-day Soviet republic was due to the support of just a few of the CP's leaders, notably Kun himself. But not even Kun could save him from the wrath of hard-core party leaders who resented his selection as commissar for war. There is considerable irony in the fact that Pogány was toppled from that post through the same kind of street demonstrations that he himself had previously organized.

Pogány reacted to the humiliation of his forced resignation in ways that brought out the worst of his self-aggrandizing and radical impulses. As if to show his detractors that, though a former Socialist, he could be a model Bolshevik, his speeches became increasingly radical and even messianic, especially in reference to the growing counterrevolutionary activity in Hungary. Thus, it was he who first called for arresting prominent members of the former political and social elite and holding them as hostages. In the various positions Pogány subsequently held in the Communist regime, he showed some organizing talent, although his success as a commissar attached to the army on the Romanian front came at the expense of the death of many ordinary factory workers whom he dispatched into combat without proper training or equipment. This was to be the general principle he adhered to in the coming weeks: the Communist government must be defended no matter how bleak the prospects or how great the human sacrifice. On the other hand, Pogány was not willing to set a personal example of self-discipline and sacrifice. In fact, his conduct became increasingly hedonistic and libertine, especially after the premiere of his play about Napoleon at the National Theater. He thereby created the impression among some Hungarians, both Communist and anti-Communist, that he was a power-hungry imitator of Napoleon whose main concern was to take advantage of the material benefits that control of the government made

available.[3] Pogány thus became the prime example that anti-Semitic opponents of the Soviet Republic cited in their contention that control of Hungary had fallen into the hands of depraved and irresponsible Jews who cared nothing for the welfare of the people.

When he fled Hungary with the other leaders of the Soviet Republic in the summer of 1919, Pogány knew that it would be a long time, if ever, before he would be able to return to his native land. Any regime other than a Communist one would almost certainly regard him either as a dangerous criminal or as an unwanted political radical. In any case, he apparently had no personal interest in returning to Hungary. His political radicalism had alienated him from his parents, and the suicide of his father seems not to have had any impact on him. From this point he would be an international revolutionary, and his Communist odyssey would, in the next decade, take him to a dozen countries all across the globe. To be sure, at first he imagined that he would continue to play a leading role in the Hungarian Communist movement. But most Hungarian left-wing émigrés despised him and his project for creating a new Communist party in league with Károlyi garnered no support. Furthermore, although his publications, especially on the white terror, remained influential, Pogány seemed incapable of engaging in everyday CP activity without generating bitter factional struggles.

Pogány's first important mission in the service of the Comintern was his ill-fated participation with Kun in the March Action in Germany. As had been the case during the Hungarian Soviet Republic and its immediate aftermath, Pogány was inspired by the belief that Europe was on the verge of revolution and that it was the duty of workers everywhere to go on the offensive. If they were hesitant to do so, as was the case in Germany in 1921, they must be swept along by fiery rhetoric and by a determined party leadership. Events soon demonstrated that Pogány and Kun had badly misread the situation in Germany, but the failure of the March Action did not seem to raise any doubts in their minds about the soundness of their analysis. Nor did Pogány voice regret about the dozens of workers who lost their lives in the strikes and demonstrations over which he presided in Hamburg. Such sacrifices, he seemed to think, were inevitable and necessary in the ongoing struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

Pogány continued to champion the idea of an imminent revolutionary outbreak for many months after the debacle in Germany. However, when

3 Hajdu has made the interesting suggestion that Pogány more closely resembled Georges Danton, one of the French Revolution's greatest demagogues. Hajdu, *Forradalom,* 89.

he was dispatched by the Comintern to the United States in the summer of 1922, due to his opportunistic habits, he began to promulgate the new Comintern "line," which represented a complete break from his former ideological pronouncements. Now he talked enthusiastically about cooperating with other progressive groups, especially poor farmers, in creating a political movement that would advance its program not through revolutionary methods but through the democratic process. Anyone who knew the Pogány of old, could hardly have imagined that he could put forward with such conviction the program described by Pepper in his pamphlet, *For a Labor Party*. This pamphlet hardly mentioned the Communist Party, avoided any discussion of revolutionary changes, and offered the hope that something like the British Labor Party could be created in the United States. As an historian would later remark, the pamphlet "provided an analysis more interesting historically and more usable politically than any similar work done by an American Communist." Moreover, if American Communists had embraced the concept of a Labor Party as outlined by Pepper, "the history of their movement during the Twenties might not have been quite the disaster it was."[4]

The problem was that neither Pepper nor other Communists who supported his campaign for the creation of a Farmer-Labor Party, viewed cooperation with other progressive parties as other than a temporary, tactical move. Believing implicitly in the Marxist laws of history that predicted the eventual collapse of capitalism and the revolutionary triumph of the proletariat under the leadership of the Communist Party, they were never prepared to cooperate in good faith with other reformist organizations. Indeed, it was considered self-evident that the Comintern call for united fronts did not include cooperation with Socialist parties or moderate trade union organizations, even though in most countries these were the groups that were successful in gaining support among the workers. The leaders of other reformist American parties were quick to realize that the Communists had ulterior motives and were thus not suitable coalition partners. This explains why Pepper's plans ended in dismal failure, and why the Federated Farmer-Labor Party created in 1923, was a shell organization dominated by the WP, which had minimal support among workers and almost none among farmers. It also explains why Pepper's other grand schemes for an alliance with progressive groups, such as La Follette's Progressive Party, had no chance for success, since they were entirely unmoored from political reality.

4 Howe, *American Communist Party,* 117–18.

Pogány's initial success in the United States as John Pepper was due in part to the fact that American Communists knew nothing about his political notoriety in Budapest, Vienna, Moscow, and Berlin. They were dazzled by his persuasive oratory, ideological pronouncements, and provocative theories, and marveled at how quickly he became the "czar and commissar" of the CPUSA. Because of the emphasis he placed on the need to "Americanize" the CP, his admirers felt justified in calling him the "Hungarian Christopher Columbus." This was hyperbole, but Pepper did indeed leave his mark on American Communism in a number of ways. In 1922, it was he who played the leading role in winning over the diehards in the underground party and efficiently presiding over the process that shifted power to the legal wing of the WP. Probably in time the CP would have gotten around to launching a daily newspaper, but it was Pepper who accelerated the process and who was in fact responsible for the appearance of the *Daily Worker* in early 1924. On the other hand, Pepper was also a corrosive factor in party life. Given the lack of success of American Communists in the 1920s and the impossible task of trying to interpret and act on the shifting ideological directives from Moscow, factionalism no doubt would have been rife even without the presence of Pepper. But through his arrogance, tactlessness, and self-glorification, Pepper clearly exacerbated the situation. Even when residing in Moscow after 1924, he proved to be a troublesome factor when he injected the Soviet leadership's power struggles into the affairs of the CPUSA. As one historian has remarked, he was the "archetype of the machinations that were beginning to characterize the Comintern in the mid-1920s."[5]

As a Comintern functionary Pepper was initially able to thrive because he had powerful mentors, adapted quickly to the peculiar political milieu, and was able to hold his own in the often rancorous debates. Moreover, he proved to be ever ready to change his professed views to accord with the constantly changing policy directives, as he did most egregiously with regards to the Negro question. As early as 1924, he began to win the favor of Soviet leaders when he became a vigorous supporter of the "Bolshevization" of all Communist parties, as was seen in his role in dealing with the recalcitrant Swedish CP. In a way he was fortunate in earning the personal enmity of Trotsky beginning in 1921, for it made it all the easier for him to join with enthusiasm in Stalin's later campaign to discredit Trotsky and to remove him as a political opponent. Pepper shrewdly sensed that Stalin would emerge victorious from the power struggles of the 1920s and

5 Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 219.

he drew the appropriate consequences. When Stalin turned against Zinoviev, Pepper showed no hesitation in abandoning his former mentor and shifting his allegiance to Bukharin. In the Comintern there were some who were disgusted by Pepper's devious and corrosive methods, which they termed *pepperization*. Some defined this as reckless opportunism and self-aggrandizement. Others saw it as the process whereby individual Communist parties lost their independence and were forced into a position of servility to the Comintern and Soviet leadership, especially Stalin.

Pepper's heyday in the Comintern came in 1925–26, when he directed key departments (Information and Agit-prop), headed the British Secretariat, and served on numerous other committees and commissions. In this period he had access to all of the prominent Soviet and Comintern leaders, including Zinoviev, Bukharin, and Stalin. His articles appeared in the major Communist journals in both Europe and North America. His pamphlets on the British general strike, the state of European communism, and other topics were translated into several languages and were widely distributed. But by the end of 1926 he had accumulated too many enemies, especially among the British Communists, and, since Zinoviev was forced to resign at this time, Pepper had no one he could call on for protection. By 1927, his status in the Comintern had been considerably reduced, and his prospects for recovery were fatally damaged when he inadvertently annoyed Stalin at a meeting with an American delegation. So far had his star fallen that at the end of that year he was sent on a mission to Korea, the "graveyard of Comintern representatives." Pepper's failure to carry out this unpalatable assignment and his decision to file a mendacious report on his trip were the first fatal steps on his road to disaster.

Early in 1928 Pepper was fortunate enough to gain Comintern approval to undertake a new mission in the United States, but this proved to be only a temporary reprieve from the dangers confronting him in Russia. When he attended the Sixth World Congress in the summer he was subjected to a torrent of abuse from a series of speakers. Amid the mocking laughter of his former colleagues he was abused as "the muddler in two hemispheres" who promoted policies that were "utterly wrong and rotten." No sooner had he returned to what he regarded as the relative safety of the United States, he was commanded to return immediately to Moscow. Facing an unknown but almost certainly perilous fate in Russia, he decided to abandon all of the political strategies that had worked for him throughout his career. The theory of "American exceptionalism," of which he and Lovestone had been enthusiastic proponents, was being attacked in the Comintern as a "rightist deviation." In the past Pepper would have seen which

way the ideological wind was blowing in the Soviet Union and would seek dexterously, to disassociate himself from a theory that Stalin disapproved of. Not so in this case. In fact, Pepper went out of his way to reaffirm his support for the theory of American exceptionalism. Similarly, as an acute observer of Comintern and Soviet power relationships, he could not have failed to notice that by late 1928 Stalin was intent on eliminating Bukharin as a political rival. In similar circumstances, in 1926, Pepper felt no compunction about abandoning and attacking Zinoviev, to whom he owed so much as a mentor and protector. But in 1928–29, he clung stubbornly to Bukharin and declared openly that those who attacked him were making a grave mistake.

Pepper's position by late 1928 was so perilous that probably no strategy would have saved him from Stalin's wrath. His sordid sexual escapades and pathetic tales about a fictional trip to Mexico merely revealed his sense of desperation and hopelessness. In the end there was nothing he could do but return to Soviet Russia, for as an illegal resident in the United States or in any other Western country he could at any moment be arrested and extradited to Hungary, where his likely fate was execution. His status as a stateless Communist had made him an ideal candidate to become an international cadre for the Comintern, but it also meant that the only apparent safe haven for him would be the USSR. Ironically, Pepper's odds for survival might have been better if he had been extradited to his native land. In fact, only a handful of Communists were executed in the years of the Horthy regime, whereas several hundred Hungarian Communists were arrested and executed in Stalin's Russia in the late 1930s.[6]

Determining the specific reason for Pepper's arrest in 1937 is a difficult and perhaps futile task. The fact is that he fit into many of the categories of those arrested: foreign Communists, individuals who had annoyed or insulted Stalin, "right-wing deviationists," and violators of Comintern discipline. Furthermore, he had accumulated so many critics and enemies that he would likely have been denounced even if he had stayed on Stalin's good side and had not become embroiled in the Korean and Mexican fiascoes. One wonders what Pepper would have made of the fact that his fate was shared by a large number of Communists with whom he had associated in his career, both friends and enemies. Many of his Hungarian comrades, such as Kun and Magyar, were arrested and executed, as were Walecki and the three Comintern leaders who had served as his mentors and patrons: Radek, Zinoviev, and Bukharin. Yet many of those who were

6 Sakmyster, *Hungary's Admiral*, 398.

Pepper's most vehement critics also ended up as victims of Stalin's terror: Trotsky (while living in Mexico), Vissarion Lominadze (a suicide), Solomon Lozowsky, and Neumann. The only category of his friends and enemies who were spared were the Americans, who were fortunate both in their geographic remoteness from Russia and their citizenship in a country that, while generally hostile to the Communist movement, did not resort to methods of oppression that were as brutal as those employed by Stalin. Perhaps Pepper sensed this in 1929 when he tried desperately to remain in the United States and resist the Comintern's directive that he return to Moscow.

The historian attempting to assess the career of an international Communist like József Pogány/John Pepper must take into account a variety of factors that help explain his motivations and conduct. Although as an adult he would probably have described himself simply as a committed Communist, the historian must take into account his identity as a Hungarian, a Jew, a partially assimilated American, and a stateless revolutionary residing in Stalin's Russia. When, at the age of seventeen, he abandoned his birth name of Schwarz, Pogány seemed intent on obliterating his Jewish past and assimilating fully into Magyar culture and society. Although he was sharply critical of the Hungarian political and social elite, Pogány seemed genuinely interested in, and in harmony with, Hungarian culture. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on the great nineteenth-century writer Arany, and was captivated by contemporary Hungarian poets, especially Ady. His dedication to Socialist ideals led him to evince an interest in Hungarian workers and their problems. As a journalist during the Great War he made an effort to mix with, and write about, ordinary Hungarian soldiers, whose accents, manners, and lifestyles greatly interested him. During the revolutionary period he could not support the efforts of conservative Hungarians to preserve the territorial integrity of the Kingdom of St. Stephen, but he was not averse to pursuing a similar goal that would create a large and influential Socialist or Communist Hungary.

It was the rise of virulent anti-Semitism during and after World War I that ultimately alienated Pogány and many other Hungarian Jews of his generation. Over the years Pogány had learned to ignore the attacks that his political enemies made on him, but he could not be oblivious to the vicious campaign to blame the Jews for Hungary's loss of the war and the humiliating peace settlement. The counterrevolutionary regime established in 1919 was clearly hostile to Jews, especially those with a left-wing orientation. Pogány's reaction to this seems to have been to abandon any

remaining identification with the Hungarian nation and to reaffirm his commitment as a cosmopolitan Communist. In leaving Hungary for the last time in the summer of 1919 he seems to have decided that if his homeland did not want him, he would sever all ties with it. Of course, for the remainder of his life he continued to converse in Hungarian with his family and colleagues in Vienna, Moscow, New York, and elsewhere, and he certainly enjoyed eating in Hungarian restaurants in New York. But after 1922 he did not involve himself in the affairs of the Hungarian CP in Moscow, and never expressed any interest in returning to his native land, though he might have done so had he survived to see the establishment of a Communist regime in Hungary in the late 1940s.

Had it been possible, in 1929, Pogány would most likely have preferred to remain in the United States indefinitely. Though he had regularly denounced the American government in the most violent terms, he had over the years developed a real attachment to American culture and an appreciation, of which he could not of course speak openly, of the relatively high standard of living that even a Communist functionary could enjoy. Furthermore, his personality and habits seemed peculiarly well attuned to life in America. Pepper's American comrades marveled at how quickly he was able to assimilate. To many his flamboyance and self-assertiveness seemed to fit in well with the American way of life. He was, as Cannon later recalled, "more American than any hustler or corner-cutter" he had ever known. His ability to organize campaigns and to promote his theories also struck observers as an American trait. The speed and thoroughness with which Pepper became "Americanized" suggested to at least one of his friends that had he been able to break with Communism, he would have become "a super American patriot."[7]

When he was instructed to remain in Moscow in 1924, Pogány rejoined the cohort of stateless Communists who could not return to their homeland yet who were unwelcome in any other country except the Soviet Union. He had certain definite advantages as an international cadre of the Comintern. He spoke German fluently and learned other languages remarkably quickly, as he demonstrated in the United States. He moved easily from one pseudonym to the next, and proved adept at adopting various disguises, for example, as a native-born American from San Francisco, a Canadian journalist, or a German industrialist. Pogány also seemed to know almost instinctively how to evade the police, even though, as in New York, he sometimes took great risks by appearing openly in public. In

7 Gitlow, *Whole*, 110.

the international milieu of the Hotel Lux in Moscow and in the halls of the Comintern, he proved to be a master at adaptation and manipulating the rules to serve his own interests. He thus rose rapidly in the Comintern hierarchy and by 1926 was hobnobbing with Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek, and, to an extent, even Stalin. Yet his disgrace and fall from power, which began in early 1927, were equally rapid.

Despite his remarkable talents as a writer and speaker and his notable organizational skills, Pogány never realized his lofty ambitions or fulfilled his wife's hope that he would be the Hungarian Lenin. The reasons why he failed as a political revolutionary and died in such ignominious circumstances are twofold. On the one hand, his personal shortcomings were so egregious that he consistently failed to gain the confidence of those whose support he very much needed. Most successful political figures possess an inflated ego and many no doubt act opportunistically at times, but Pogány's zeal for self-aggrandizement was so powerful and his opportunism so blatant and shameless that he disgusted even those who were initially impressed by his intellectual prowess and reputation as an authentic Bolshevik. During his seventeen-year career as a Communist activist he managed to turn against almost every colleague who had originally been his patron. Kun had shown favoritism towards Pogány during the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, but later in Vienna Pogány privately denounced Kun as a "scoundrel" and tried to establish a new Communist party from which Kun would be excluded. In 1926, Pogány eagerly joined Stalin's campaign to oust Zinoviev, despite the fact that the latter had done much to provide Pogány with a degree of material comfort and to facilitate his rapid rise in the Comintern. Lovestone was Pogány's closest collaborator in the United States and perhaps the only Communist whom he could call a friend, yet as part of his "rehabilitation" in 1930 he agreed to write a vicious attack on Lovestone that could be used in the campaign of the CPUSA to demonize and isolate the former leader of the party.

A second reason why Pogány's public career ended in ignominious failure was that he chose to link his fate with a political movement that made impossible demands on its supporters and by the 1930s was being directed by a totalitarian ruler adept at employing terror to secure his power. The Communist movement forced its members into a kind of intellectual prison that destroyed the individual's personal initiative and independence of thought. To survive and succeed in such a system Communists needed to learn how to adapt to constantly changing directives from Moscow and to avoid becoming too closely identified with any particular policy that might in the future no longer have the imprimatur of Soviet leaders. This,

combined with frustration over Communist setbacks in Hungary and Germany and the general inability of Communist parties worldwide to win over the workers, led to intense internal debates, personal invective, and rampant factionalism.

For most of the 1920s Pogány thrived in such an atmosphere, for he was a skilled debater and was able to quickly and smoothly switch his adherence to whatever theories or "lines" were being promulgated by the Comintern. In fact, with the exception of the very basic Marxist program to which all Communists dedicated themselves, there was only one political idea or theory that Pogány remained committed to throughout his career. During the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 he became convinced that Communism could survive and prosper only if the urban proletariat allied itself with poor farmworkers. He continued to espouse this approach on several occasions after 1919, most notably in the United States with his plan for a Labor party in which farmers would be welcomed. Such a scheme was eminently reasonable and might well have had some success if the CPUSA had made a genuine effort to cooperate with progressive organizations representing poor farmers. But, in fact, most of Pogány's colleagues, both in Hungary and America, rejected this strategy because, like Marx, they suspected that farmers were inherently counterrevolutionary. Even as his political fortunes were in severe decline in the late 1920s, Pogány clung to his faith in the efficacy of a worker-farmer alliance. In part this is why he was so reluctant to abandon his belief in American exceptionalism, for he had convinced himself that one of the ways in which the United States differed from Europe was precisely in the fact that the interests of urban and farmworkers in American society were uniquely intertwined.

In the end Pogány's personal flaws contributed to his downfall in the Communist world in a way that would not have been the case had he remained a Socialist or Progressive of some other sort. Because of his propensity for sponsoring radical and violent measures against anyone he regarded as a counterrevolutionary, in 1919 he was a proponent of such policies as holding innocent citizens as hostages and using terror against recalcitrant farmers. As a result the government that emerged in Hungary in the aftermath of the postwar revolutions regarded him as a vile criminal who would receive his just punishment if he returned to his native land. Pogány thus became a stateless international Communist for whom the Soviet Union represented the only safe haven. He was not welcome in any other country, and thus had to resort to pseudonyms and illegal methods to travel to the United States and elsewhere. Yet before long Pogány

began to sense that Soviet Russia posed certain dangers to him as well. Because of his self-assertiveness and eagerness to promote himself, he irritated Stalin during a meeting in 1927. As a result, he was sent on a dangerous mission to Korea. Desperate to ensure his personal safety, Pogány resorted to duplicitous methods during and after the Korean mission. This was the beginning of his downfall, for he soon became involved in ideological debates he could not possibly win and also became enmeshed in a web of increasingly outlandish lies. In the end, like so many international Communists of his era, he came to the realization that he had no other option open to him other than obeying the Comintern directive that he return to Moscow.

Pogány's egotism, vanity, and self-aggrandizement affected not just his public career but his private life as well. He seemed to feel little responsibility for his family, towards whom he often acted arrogantly and selfishly. Perhaps because they clung to their religious faith, Pogány seemed to have no special attachment to his parents, whom he left behind in Hungary in 1919 to suffer the consequences of his political radicalism. His conduct toward his wife was often callous and demeaning. During the Hungarian Communist regime he agreed to allow his wife to edit a series of his translated works, but insisted that they appear under his name, not hers. He felt justified in abandoning her and their daughters whenever he had missions abroad, and, as a way of justifying his marital infidelity, boasted to his colleagues about how a Communist activist needed to have frequent love affairs to "revive his energies and quicken his impulses." He had little contact with his daughters and seemed unconcerned about their future. That he felt no real responsibility towards his family is shown by his fantastic plan in 1929 to settle in Mexico or Canada with the nineteen-year-old stenographer he had seduced in New York. In human terms Pogány may rightly be called despicable. Yet his wife was so devoted to him and so much in awe of his political abilities that she stood by him when he reached his nadir in 1929, rejoiced with him when he was readmitted to the Comintern in 1933, and provoked her own arrest when she persisted in inquiring about her husband's status as a prisoner of the secret police.

There remains the question of what influence, if any, Pogány's Jewish origins had on his career. Had he been asked such a question, Pogány would surely have denied that his upbringing in a Jewish family shaped his career in any way. He no doubt felt that when, at the age of seventeen, he changed his name from Schwarz to Pogány, he was making a full break from his Jewish past. And if any traces of his Jewishness still remained, he may, like Trotsky, have believed that becoming a Communist was such an

all-encompassing experience that they would be completely obliterated.[8] Certainly as a Communist activist Pogány never spoke of his Jewish past or ruminated, as did a few of his comrades, on the fact that so many CP leaders, whether in Hungary, the United States, or elsewhere, had Jewish family origins. With the exception of a pamphlet he wrote in 1920 during the Russian civil war, he never touched on the problem of anti-Semitism in any of his numerous publications or speeches.

But even though Pogány chose to dismiss his Jewish family origins as insignificant, the historian must examine all possible influences on his life and career. One might argue, for example, that he was affected by the cultural attitudes prevalent in Jewish families in late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century Hungary. Pogány's parents were not well-off, yet they made the necessary sacrifices so that he could attend the Barcsay Gimnázium and the University of Budapest. More so than their Christian counterparts, Jewish parents placed a great emphasis on obtaining the best education for their children, as can be seen in the disproportionately high numbers of Jewish students in the secondary schools and universities in pre-World War I Hungary. Hungarian Jews tended to see education not only as a means to advance the family's fortunes and status, but as a way of overcoming anti-Jewish attitudes. It is also possible that Pogány's early experiences growing up in a Jewish family taught him certain techniques and skills of adaptation that were useful in warding off alienation and dealing with discrimination. Like others of his generation, Pogány was confronted early in life with the dilemma of his own identity. Was he a Jewish Hungarian, a Hungarian Jew, or ultimately simply a Communist? He went through an early name change that reflected this struggle: from Schwarz to Pogány. As a result, the later use of aliases and pen names (Lang, Pepper, Swift, Pichler, and others) no doubt became easier. Pogány's attempts as a young man to assimilate into mainstream Hungarian society may have prepared him for his later service as an international cadre of the Comintern, when an ability to adapt to strange environments was to prove quite useful.

During the Hungarian Soviet Republic and in its aftermath, Pogány's enemies on the Right made it a point to emphasize that he and the great majority of other leading Hungarian Communists were of Jewish origin. Indeed, this phenomenon, which historians have puzzled over ever since, fueled the rise of virulent anti-Semitism in Hungary after World War I, even though most ordinary Hungarian Jews had no interest in, or sympathy for,

8 Service, *Trotsky*, 199–200.

left-wing radicalism. Pogány knew that a large number of his Hungarian comrades had a similar background to his own: they had been raised in Jewish families but had long ago broken all ties with Judaism or Jewish culture. What he almost certainly did not realize was that he, in fact, was part of an even larger cohort of Hungarians of Jewish origin who had grown up in Hungary and benefited from its excellent schools, but had left their native land after World War I and settled in the West, primarily in the United States. Unlike the Hungarian Communists, however, these émigrés typically took no special interest in politics. Instead they forged remarkable careers in science, education, filmmaking, classical music, and other professions and, as one historian has suggested, "changed the world."[9] Many of these émigrés left Hungary because of their revulsion over the emergence of virulent anti-Semitism, but, like Pogány, most preferred to be silent about, or even to deny, their Jewish origins.[10] Had Pogány chosen a different career path, he might well have been a great success in the United States. Given his excellent writing and managerial skills, he could have made his mark as a journalist or newspaper publisher, following in the footsteps of another Hungarian immigrant, Joseph Pulitzer. Or, like the famous director Michael Curtiz (Mihály Kertész), who was born in Budapest the same year as Pogány, he might have become a member of the large Hungarian colony in Hollywood, where his writing skills and vivid imagination would have proved to be a real asset. One can certainly imagine that Pogány would have succeeded in the American business world, particularly in advertising, for which he had a real flair. Instead, he chose to dedicate his life to the advancement of communism and no doubt had many regrets as he pondered his fate during the last days of his life in Lubyanka prison in Moscow.

9 On this cohort of Hungarian-Jewish émigrés see Marton, *Great Escape* and Frank, *Double Exile*.

10 Deák, "Communism's Appeals," 321.

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