Battle for the American Perception of Organized Labor

Bolshevism, The Great Steel Strike, and Protestant Establishment in the Years Following World War I

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Contents

Introduction

In the latter half of 1918, two entirely separate organizations which would come to fundamentally shape the events of the post-war years of the United States were founded. Both institutions were built on the belief that, in the tumultuous atmosphere of the years that followed, they would affect real change upon both their own communities and the nation as a whole. The first of these organizations, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, sought to achieve the complete organization of the nation's most infamously anti-union industry. The second organization, the Interchurch World Movement of North America, was created with the intention of uniting American Protestants across denominational lines to establish an ambitious new worldwide Protestant mission. Within the next several years, both groups would face bitter, devastating defeat in their attempts to achieve these goals. The Steel Workers Organizing Committee would organize one of the single largest failed strikes in American history, and the Interfaith World Movement would inevitably collapse into the very denominational bickering and isolationism that it had sought to overcome. Despite these facts, I will argue that both organizations, although formally failures, reveal through their historical interaction how one of the greatest successes in United States labor history came to be.

While the history of American labor in the early 20th century is often defined by analysis of the perceived "successes" and "failures" of the many movements, strikes, and political organizations which arose throughout the United States, this binary lens does not sufficiently

capture how the story of American labor extends beyond a series of individual contests between labor organizers and company bosses. Organized labor became involved in vastly different aspects of American society outside of direct organizing, and often, I will argue, the success of labor operations was more dependent upon *public perception* of organized labor activity rather than organizing strength or membership numbers. This claim can be most clearly demonstrated through analysis of the role that religion and religious organizations played in shaping public perception of labor organizing throughout the years following World War I.

The moment of post-World War I America was, all at once, transitional, exceptional, empowering, and terrifying. In many ways, the unique set of social, economic, and political circumstances in which the nation found itself sets the post-war years apart from any other moment in American history. The American public was facing a rapidly changing economy as urbanization and industrialization coincided with a period of demobilization. The rise of America as a true blooded international powerhouse had reshaped the political landscape, and the very meaning of what it meant to be American was evolving. American Protestantism, reinvigorated in the wake of church involvement with the wartime effort, felt uniquely empowered to reestablish its role in the American project. At the same time, labor organizers were able to find success in industries they had been barred out of for decades. This was a moment of chaos, uncertainty, and opportunity. This whirlwind of an era and the terror and confusion it rained upon the American people holds numerous insights into the structures of American institutions, how attempts to carry out national reform can live or die, and the role of the American public in shaping the nation's future.

Over the course of American economic history, the role of labor politics has varied widely. At some times, organized labor and labor demonstrations were essentially nonexistent while during other periods labor politics dominated nearly every aspect of the political sphere. The early 20th century, and in particular the year 1919, is one of those periods in which labor took an especially prominent role in the United States. In the first two decades of the century alone, economic uncertainty, declines in material conditions, immigration policies, and shifts in American industries led to vast strikes and organizing across the nation.

As I will demonstrate by evaluating the Great Steel Strike of 1919, one of the largest labor demonstrations in American history, there was no force which posed a greater threat to American labor in the years following World War I than the accusation that labor had become a front for radical forces, particularly Bolshevik radical forces. As the war ended, the United States entered its first major "Red Scare," and the nation became consumed with terror over radical infiltration of American institutions. Such accusations did immense harm to the public's perception of labor demonstrations and undermined countless attempts at organization and mobilization of industrial workers.

Accusations of radical infiltration crushed public support for widespread labor activities and contributed to the downfall of many prominent labor demonstrations in the post-war years. It was in this vacuum of fear and struggle for legitimacy in the eyes of the American public that labor found an unexpected, and immensely influential, ally: American Protestant churches. While explicit political involvement of churches in social and economic movements had largely declined over the course of the war, Protestant churches and their religious leaders still held a uniquely powerful position within the American psyche, and despite the

organizational chaos of churches around this time, their authority and legitimacy within American society remained strong. It was in this unique set of circumstances that supporters of labor organizing and union politics, lacking in legitimacy and facing a fearful American public, and progressively minded Protestant church leaders, seeking a way to further establish Protestantism as a dominant force in American political and economic matters, became intertwined in the battle to improve the conditions of American steel workers.

I will argue that religion and religious organizations during this time were uniquely positioned to assist labor due to their ability to reject accusations of Bolshevik radicalism, an ideology perceived by the American public to be inherently atheistic, and provide legitimacy to workers' claims. In this thesis, I will provide a historical account of the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920 that takes into special consideration the role that these Protestant churches and organizations, specifically the Interchurch World Movement of North America, played both in shaping public perception of the strike and in the long-term achievement of the strike's goals by providing legitimacy and authority to the event that the workers themselves were unable to claim. The Interchurch World Movement was chosen for its direct relationship to the Great Steel Strike of 1919, but it also serves as an exemplary representation of American Protestantism on the broadest possible level as a coalition organization of several dozen denominations. This research seeks to emphasize the Interchurch World Movement's power and influence not just as an organized, ideological force, but as uniquely situated to benefit the strike due to its religious affiliations and ability to counter accusations of radical Bolshevik infiltration.

The first necessary step in understanding both the Great Steel Strike and the Interchurch World Movement is in evaluation of the specific moment in American history in which they arose. As World War I fundamentally altered the political, economic, and social landscape of much of the Western world, so too did the Great War mark a massive shift in the economic organization of American industry. Most immediately pertinent to the topic at hand is the effects the war had upon the American steel industry.

World War I, the American Steel Industry, and the Rise of Steel Unions

In the years leading up to World War I, the steel industry, which had become the cornerstone of mass production in the United States, had grown exponentially in a very short time. At the heart of this industry stood the United States Steel Corporation, by far the largest single producer of steel and a titan regarded as the "strongest bulwark of antiunionism in the country."[1] It had been immensely successful at preventing widespread unionization among their workers.[2] Despite the degraded conditions which existed for workers in the industry around the pre-war period, management had largely succeeded at preventing the steel industry, which, at the time was largely made up of uneducated, newly immigrated workers, from achieving any organizational power. Many workers were living in homes described as being little more than "shacks without running water or plumbing" and over half were paid

[1] Soule, George Henry. 1947a. *Prosperity Decade: From War to Depression: 1917-1929*: *The Economic History of the United States.* New York: Rinehart. 192.
[2] David Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1965), 42.

wages below one-third the level considered to be of "minimum sustenance."[3] Conditions drastically shifted as the first World War broke out.

Demand for steel skyrocketed as the American industry rapidly shifted towards a wartime manufacturing model. As the national government had a vested interest in ensuring the supply of steel remain flowing without major hindrance, the National War Labor Board (NWLB) directly involved itself in the industry. Believing that it would ultimately be more efficient to retain workers in essential processes rather than having to worry about workers rotating out in search of better conditions, the NWLB took to work improving industry conditions. In short order the agency began guaranteeing workers' right to organize, forcing management to negotiate higher wages, a six-day work week, and a shorter working day[4]. The period of oversight during the war led to a notable increase in union membership within an industry that had previously been untapped, and soon the raw growth in the number of steel workers grew exponentially, with particularly high growth throughout Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and upstate New York. In addition to the stability offered to workers, federal involvement brought on a new level of efficiency. With the overview of the War Industries Board, several small, but impactful, decisions made across the industry had lowered the cost and resources necessary to maintain steel production, providing the wartime effort with a more efficient machine which translated into even greater profit margins for the steel companies.[5]

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[3] See: Murray, Robert K. 1951. "Communism and the Great Steel Strike of 1919." The Mississippi Valley Historical Review 445; Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*, 25.
[4] Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 42.
[5] Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*, 12-17.

As the war came to a sudden end in late 1918, however, economic improvements in the industry came to a grinding halt. Government oversight of the industry disappeared almost overnight, and the Steel Trust cracked down on unionization efforts with the same fervor they had in the pre-war years.[6] With no government oversight to demand maintenance of working conditions, companies sought once again to maximize control over worker's lives in the interest of profit. Within a short window of time, the improvements of the industry dissipated. Despite the rapid rise of the cost of living, steel wages stagnated completely, the average workday extended back to over twelve hours, and the seven-day work week returned.[7]

The backtracking of conditions in the post-war months laid the groundwork for the National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers, an organization founded in August 1918 at a conference of twenty-four labor unions in Chicago, to achieve remarkable success in unionizing workers across the steel industry.[8] Despite, "bitter resistance from the steel interests" who had begun cracking down on union meetings and firing union men,[9] the National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers had succeeded at establishing "a steel union in every important mill town"[10] by the summer of 1919. The most prominent organizing had taken place in Western Pennsylvania, the heart of the steel industry, where steel companies, United States Steel Corporation in particular, had a particularly strong grip over the political and

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Commons, John Rogers. *History of Labour In the United States With an Introductory Note by Henry W. Farnam*. New York: A.M. Kelley, 1966, 56.
[9] Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 45.
[10] Adamic, Louis. 1931. *Dynamite. The Story of Class Violence in America*. New York Viking Press, 1931, 83.

economic function of the region. Political machines with close ties to employers in the region had largely locked out any attempt by workers to achieve governmental reform, leaving workers to turn increasingly towards unionization as a main catalyst for change.[11]

Although the rate of union membership had seen massive gains, the labor movement struggled to make material gains over steel companies. The industry was represented by several dozen different unions, each claiming authority over different occupations within the industry. As a result of this division, the AFL, now officially representing the effort to unionize the industry, passed a resolution in 1918 to form the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. This committee, led by the various union presidents across the industry, was able to coalesce the splintered organized workforce into a single operating force.

While the structure and organizing of labor within the industry had seen massive success in the most war months, trends within the social fabric of the nation threatened to undermine those successes and any attempts to capitalize upon them. Most prominently, the American media and public's turn towards anti-Bolshevik fervor, which had arisen out of the conditions in the post-war years, posed a great threat the union's future success.

The Red Threat and Labor's Bolshevik Problem

The months and years following the end of World War I were filled with economic turmoil and uncertainty, and many Americans were wary at the violently changing structure of the nation's systems. The economic shift to a wartime economy had caused disruptions in

[11] Soule, *The Economic History of the United States,* 192-193.

civilian economic activity, and those disruptions brought dire consequences in the post-war months. Certain industries which had thrived on wartime needs saw demand plummet during peacetime, resulting in an uncertain future for the roughly nine million workers involved in wartime industries. The return of millions of men from the armed services also posed questions for the logistics of demobilization. Although the nation was miraculously able to avoid an economic catastrophe or mass unemployment,[12] prices on key items skyrocketed and the nation soon faced a severe housing shortage. The cost of living rose rapidly while wages remained largely stagnant. The economic success in the early months of demobilization proved to be short-lived as a post-war depression sneaked in around midyear 1919.

On the social side of the equation, the nation was undergoing a reshaping of America's place in the world. Previously dominant isolationist pressures had been harshly challenged by the war, and America's continued involvement abroad brought an era of uncertainty among many of the masses.[13] With the social and economic fabric of the nation rapidly shifting in such a short time, a general sense of undirected unease and fear began to eat away at the minds of press, government, and the public.

While the wartime churning of anti-German social sentiment had provided an outlet for American press and public to scapegoat hardship,[14] the post-war American public rapidly shifted to a new "spectacular phenomenon of… hysterical and paranoiac fear"[15] over a new enemy: Bolshevism. While the American public's initial impression of the Bolshevik Revolution

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[12] Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*, 82-83.
[13] Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*, 25, 60-64.
[14] Murray, *Communism and the Great Steel Strike of 1919*, 445.
[15] Murray, *Communism and the Great Steel Strike of 1919*, 446.

in 1917 had been one of immediate distrust, relations between the United States and Russia (at the time the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) had especially soured by the end of the war. Russian Revolutionary ideology, much like German culture during the Great War, had been defined in the US by sensational media coverage and misinformation. Ongoing socialist revolution in Germany, brief control of the Hungarian government by Bolsheviks, and continued coverage of supposed Bolshevik infiltration in South America further amplified the fears that revolution could be imminent.[16]

To be labeled "Bolshevik" came with heavy consequences. By 1919, the ideology grew to represent the ultimate bogeyman in the eye of the American public, and anything associated with Bolshevism was representative of "the very essence of lawlessness, brutality, and crime."[17] Perhaps the most important trait by which Bolshevik was rendered "Unamerican" however, was its status as an atheistic ideology. Throughout the years following the Bolshevik Revolution, religious authorities throughout the United States had denounced the movement as immoral and atheistic, descriptors which would continue to loom large as the "Red fear" spread through the American public. Soon, the charges of atheism and Bolshevism became inseparable, with each being perceived as equally dangerous.

Within a matter of months, the post-war United States' public fear of communist takeover had exploded. The press frequently exaggerated the presence and activities of Bolshevik sympathizers; sensational articles were published claiming, often with little evidence,

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[16] Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*, 188; *New York Times* "GENERAL ASSUMES POWER AS DICTATOR OVER ARGENTINA" January 11, 1919, 1.
[17] Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*, 188.

that millions of domestic communists were rising up, planning to infiltrate all aspects of American life.[18] The reality at the time was that the United States had no notable revolutionary movement.[19] Much of the radical leftist movements within the United States had seen considerable splintering throughout the years before World War I, and the remnants of radical political organizing that remained either lost elements of their radicalism or split into smaller factions following disagreements regarding the Russian Revolution. The American Communist Party, even at its height in post-war years, peaked at only around 70,000 members.[20] This public fear of an imminent Bolshevik revolution, then, likely should not have taken such a strong hold over the American population, or at least it would not have under normal economic or social circumstances.

While radical elements were to be recognized and labeled as potentially dangerous, there would not have been such a severe fear of Bolshevik takeover were it not for "a series of highly suspicious and spectacular events" throughout 1919 which "so focused public attention on the issue of radicalism" that public attention quickly escalated into full blown hysteria.[21] Bolshevism came to be the new scapegoat for all ills of the American state, and as economic

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[18] "What Is Back of the Bombs?" *Literary Digest* (New York), LXI (June 14, 1919), 9-11. *New York Times*, May 2, 1919, 1; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 2, 1919, 1.
[19] Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*, 189.
[20] See: Murray, Robert K. 1964. *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920*. McGraw-Hill Paperbacks. New York: McGraw-Hill.56*;* Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*, 119. While membership numbers alone do not reflect the totality of communist or otherwise revolutionary political engagement, it is generally accepted that little serious organizing or political power was conducted outside of the structure of these party organizations, even if the attitudes of non-members nationwide towards communist ideals cannot be accurately detailed in this exact time.
[21] Murray, *Red* Scare, 57.

and social unrest grew nationwide, fear of the "Red Threat" only grew stronger. While most labor organizations themselves had not directly advocated for or attached themselves to the Bolshevik label or identity, the general chaos of labor activity in 1919 was enough to link labor and Bolshevik ideology in the eyes of the public.

1919 proved to be an exceptionally tumultuous year for the stability of the nation, in no small part due to staggering disruptions in labor. The switch to a wartime economy had resulted in a previously unfathomable boost to industrial manufacturing. From 1915 to 1918 alone, expenditures for new industrial manufacturing plants and equipment grew by over 400%.[22] Such a massive explosion in industrial workforce set the United States up for a series of labor standoffs previously not thought possible. Demographic shifts in the nation, massive influxes of workers into sectors which had little to no prominent organizing effort, and the decline of working conditions in the return to a civilian economy all contributed to a massive boost in union membership in key industries. Major labor organizations, most notably the AFL, which had previously not poured extensive resources into industrial and manufacturing labor causes, began to support industrial unionization efforts nationwide. Before long, the stage was set for a series of labor conflicts which would fundamentally shape the social fabric of America.

In early 1919, 110 prominent unions in the Seattle area successfully ground the functions of the city to a halt with a general strike, an exceptionally uncommon phenomenon in America. Press coverage of the strike immediately caused widespread panic across the nation. Focusing quickly on the more radical beliefs of individual organizers, local and national

[22] Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*, 60.

newspapers declared the strike to be a "test chance for revolution," "Marxian," and "a Bolshevik-sired nightmare."[23] Government officials and industry leaders quickly condemned the strike as a Russian plot, and the mayor of the city, Ole Hanson, was praised as a "patriotic hero" by press all across the nation after threatening the strikers with a violent breakup by federal troops.[24] The Seattle strike signaled the first major test of Bolshevik accusations against labor activity with astounding results. Public support for the strike collapsed almost overnight and the American public had been shown supposed evidence that Bolshevik revolution might truly be imminent.

Throughout this period of unrest and sensational coverage, industrial labor strikes which were inspired by the Seattle strike had seen a phenomenal resurgence across the nation. In March there were 175 strikes and in April, 248. From June to August there were over 300 strikes per month, and May of 1919 alone saw 388 major strikes carried out.[25] Although nearly all of these strikes were supported by more conservative labor organizations and were centered almost exclusively around wages, hours, and collective bargaining, press identified these strikes with the more radical violent episodes of the year.[26] The unease generated by the Seattle general strike coverage continued to dominate public perception of industry strikes nationwide, and attempts to emphasize the nonradical nature of many of these strikes largely fell flat.

In the months following the Seattle general strike, a series of alleged bomb threats across the nation were covered extensively by national press, and several actual bomb attacks

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[23] Murray, *Red Scare*, 65.
[24] Murray, *Red Scare*, 58-64.
[25] Murray, *Red Scare*, 111.
[26] Louis. *Dynamite. The Story of Class Violence in America*, 48.

on government officials in Chicago and Washington D.C. re-emphasized the dangers of domestic terror.[27] Bombing coverage reached its peak when an alleged anarchist plot to bomb thirty-six prominent political figures through the mail was discovered. Perhaps the most damning event in the early part of the year came during the May Day riots in Cleveland. What had begun as a display of worker solidarity quickly turned violent, and coverage of the riots was uniquely harsh in its characterization of those who took part.[28]

The guilt of the labor movement writ-large was amplified by the period of rampant, and increasingly successful, antiunion propaganda throughout the nation.[29] Company leaders quickly realized the efficacy of labeling strikers as radicals, and the tactic became commonplace.[30] The sentiment had developed among American politicians, press, and business interests that, should a Bolshevik uprising come from any source, it would first have to succeed among the laboring class. Soon the press and public alike kept a sharp eye trained on labor, viewing labor activity, "as a barometer of the real extent of radicalism in the nation."[31] Organized labor's susceptibility to these kinds of accusations was amplified by the demographics of union membership in key industries. The American steel industry's saturation with recent immigrants from dozens of ethnic backgrounds[32] not only posed logistical problems

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[27] See: Louis. *Dynamite. The Story of Class Violence in America*, 50; Murray, *Red* Scare, 75-80.
[28] Commons, *History of Labour in the United States*, 65-68.
[29] Murray, *Red Scare*, 106.
[30] Murray, *Red Scare*, 115.
[31] Ibid.
[32] The composition of the industry was especially diverse compared to most American industries at the time with the largest immigrant communities coming from Eastern and Central Europe, especially notable here for the perceived affiliation between Bolshevism and Eastern European nations. Most often, coverage cited the presence of "The Slav, Pole, Serb, Croat, Russian, Greek,

for spreading a united message among workers who spoke dozens of languages, but it allowed for anti-immigrant sentiment to chip away at what little credibility workers held. Nativist rhetoric further labeled strikes as "disloyal" and "un-American," fueled in no small part by the association of Bolshevism with "foreignness."[33] These demographic challenges allowed for accusations of radicalism to be charged without much room for credible response in the eyes of the public, and, as the events of 1919 unfolded, radicalism became entrenched in the public perception of labor. This understanding of labor organizing as the true bed of the radical activity would reorient the entire public perception of future strikes. Instead of being concerned with more isolated conditions within industries, the outcomes of strikes had become far more consequential, where each strike represented a disruption to the nation's public and social stability.

The running coverage of bombings and riots alongside otherwise peaceful, traditional labor demonstrations allowed for a blurring of the line between radicalism and non-revolutionary labor agitation. As Bolshevism was cemented in the American imagination as the primary cause of social and economic unrest, any form of unrest became more "Bolshevik" in the eyes of the public, with labor disputes being held up as the prime example of unrest across America, Bolshevism became the natural explanation for the monumental rise of labor demonstrations. In other words, for the American public, the rapid organization and mobilization of the labor interests, which had been largely dormant during the war, had only

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Magyar, Jew, Romanian or Turk." See: Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 135-140.

[33] Murray, *Red* Scare, 143.

emphasized the idea that the nation was facing rapid devolution; since this sense of unsettlement had been blamed squarely on atheistic Bolshevism's rise, the increase in labor activity, whether revolutionary or not became identified with Bolshevism by association.

Many institutions in organized labor tried for their part to distance themselves as much as possible from Bolshevik philosophy. The American Federation of Labor (AFL), for example, was avowedly anti-revolution; it also had a reputation for being highly conservative and openly advocated for working inside of, rather than overthrowing, the capitalist order. This self-identification was "essentially true" in its presentation of organizational values and methods. Radical factions, however, continued to trouble the various labor movements of the post-war years. The spectacular series of labor events that occurred throughout 1919 gave an outsized view of those radical elements.

The most devastating event to organized labor's attempts to distance themselves from radicalism came in September of 1919 when Boston's police department went on strike demanding higher wages and lower hours. On September 9, over seventy percent of Boston's police force walked out from their posts; within a matter of hours the city descended into chaos.[34] Fueled in part by intense press coverage of the possible strike, the evening of the 9th saw a massive rise in criminal activity and small riots throughout various neighborhoods in Boston. Downtown Boston saw widespread looting of window displays and the destruction of business stands. In Boston Common, illegal gambling rings began popping up, and police officers who remained on duty in South Boston and Roxbury were targeted with mud and

[34] See: Louis. *Dynamite. The Story of Class Violence in America*, 82; Murray, *Red* Scare, 127.

bottles.[35] With the city seemingly descending into anarchy, every major Boston newspaper quoted prominent leaders in government and business referring to the strikers as "deserters," "agents of Lenin," and "Bolsheviks."[36] The national press quickly followed suit and soon the Boston police strike had lent credibility to news claims that "Bolshevism in the United States is no longer a specter"[37] — "Lenin and Trotsky are on their way."[38] Although the strike had not been founded upon radical principles, the results of the strike alone offered damning evidence that labor activity indeed was leading to the destruction of the nation. Public support for the strike was nearly non-existent outside of certain union circles, and, as strike funds rapidly ran out among police union members, citizens across the nation raised a fund of over $500,000 to support overtime pay for members of the state guard who took over policing duties in the city.[39] The strike ultimately collapsed with the public believing radical elements had been intimately involved.

Thus, one historian described it, "such events as the Seattle general strike of February and the Boston police strike of September, together with the May Day riots and bombings, appeared to many citizens as final proof that American labor was indeed becoming 'bolshevized.'"[40] Soon, every labor demonstration, violent incident, and disruption to the social norms of the nation was explained by domestic Bolshevik activity.[41] The explosion of more

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[35] Murray, *Red Scare*, 126.
[36] Murray, *Red Scare*, 126.
[37] *Philadelphia Public-Ledger*, September 13, 1919, 1.
[38] *Wall Street Journal*, September 13, 1919, 1.
[39] Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*, 189.
[40] Murray, *Communism and the Great Steel Strike of 1919*, 447.
[41] Murray, *Communism and the Great Steel Strike of 1919*, 446.

chaotic, and oftentimes more violent, labor activity that had manifested in the post-war economic fervor served only as evidence in promoting the public perception that labor organizing more generally was being infiltrated by Bolshevik forces pushing for revolution.

The association of the violence with strikes and Bolshevism in 1919 left labor organizers and workers susceptible to significant disruptions to their authority or legitimacy. This situation overwhelmingly favored the interests of the companies that sought to exploit the public's fears. For companies whose profits had run high in the war-time years, the new strategy against labor demonstrations was to ride out the storm until public support for workers and strike funds inevitably dried up.

Great Steel Strike Begins

Against the social backdrop of 1919, the initial public response to the Great Steel Strike of the same year was not especially surprising. Facing United States Steel's management, which refused to recognize the Steel Workers Organizing Committee's authority and ignored all calls to negotiate contracts, and receiving official backing from the AFL as well as other key labor groups, steel union leaders circulated strike ballots among local steel unions, all of which certified a desire to strike by August 20th.[42] Despite the authorization vote, United States Steel once again rejected requests for arbitration, stating, "The officers of the corporation respectfully decline to discuss with you, as representatives of a labor union, any matters relating to employees."[43] Despite the vast successes of the unions in organizing and the severity

[42] Murray, *Communism and the Great Steel Strike of 1919*, 449.
[43] *Senate Reports*, No. 289.

of the strike threat, the company felt confident in its ability to weather the strike, in no small part due to the public responses to strikes earlier in 1919, which had quickly soured once U.S. Steel publicly accused workers of Bolshevism and radicalism. The efficacy of these accusations cannot be understated, and the issuing of the labels of radicalism without even a shred of evidence had been effective at eviscerating any legitimacy or authority many of these movements were able to establish. The company chairman, Judge Elbert H. Gary, refused to recognize any collective bargaining and left no response to the unions' demands for increased wages and reduced work hours.[44] Coverage of the prospective strike in the press was immediately hostile. The *New York Times* declared on its front page, September 19, that "So far as the public is informed, the threatened strike in the steel trade is simply and solely to bring the steel workers under labor union control. It is a strike for power." If the workers should follow through with the strike, the article contents, "They declare war not merely on the United States Steel Corporation but on the whole country." News coverage consistently shifted between rhetoric of this kind, insisting that workers had no material reason to strike, and claims that the strike was unlikely to occur at all.[45] One poll of workers, conducted entirely by company foremen, supposedly claimed that 82% of steel workers had no desire to strike and such an unverified report received widespread distribution by press with absolutely no scrutiny.[46]

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[44] Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*, 193.
[45] See: *New York World*, "Break in Great Steel Strike" September 19, 1919, 1; *New York Times*, "LESS FEAR OF STEEL STRIKE; Trade Papers Agree That the Labor Situation Is Clearing" September 4, 1, for some examples of such coverage in prominent national media.
[46] *The Evening World*, "GREAT STEEL STRIKE IS IMMINENT" September 17, 1919, 1; *New York Times, "*82% OPPOSE STRIKE, SAY GARY OFFICIALS" September 19, 1919, 1-2.

Despite the harsh reception from both company and press, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee set the date of the strike for September 22. On that date, not many days after the Boston police strike rattled the nation, an unprecedented 250,000-300,000 workers, roughly half the industry's workforce at the time, walked out of their workplaces. Over the next several weeks, that number drastically rose as somewhere between 50,000 and 150,000 additional steel workers joined the strike.[47] The response from the local Pittsburgh press alone set up the striking workers for immediate failure. Despite near constant coverage of the strike daily for its first two months of activity, an analysis of 400 issues from the city's seven largest newspapers in the years that followed showed that, "No Pittsburgh paper gave, or pretended to give, any account of the beginning of the steel strike. There were no general stories detailing the companies and mills in the industry, the numbers or characteristics of the workmen, their hours of labor, their wages, their living conditions… no detailed lists of strikers' demands."[48] Local coverage was devoid of any attempt to accurately cover the activities of the strikers, and within days, Pittsburgh newspapers, with national press following, had started reporting mass numbers of strikers "flocking back" to the mills despite no such activity taking place. [49]

This initial coverage, speculated to have been attempts to break up the strike early and demoralize workers, saw little practical effect in the first several weeks of the strike. Attempts

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[47] Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 58.
[48] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 93.
[49] *The Evening World*, "21,000 STEEL WORKERS GO BACK" September 23, 1919, 1; Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 94.

to include cartoons of Uncle Sam demanding strikers return to work and expanding linguistic coverage of anti-union sentiments seemed to pose little threat to the strike's ability to hold.[50] On a local level, support for the strike had remained relatively strong, especially among the working class and immigrant communities. While local and state government officials had issued quick condemnation, the proximity of local populations to actual demonstrations and worker's living conditions had created a buffer of sympathy. Having witnessed the false coverage of the strike's supposed collapse in early weeks firsthand, the non-striking public of steel country, especially in Western Pennsylvania, remained "at least somewhat supportive of the strike and its aims."[51]

After the initial press coverage attempting to downplay the severity of the strike, coverage quickly shifted primarily to covering the supposed "radical" elements within the strike's ranks. As early as October 5, full page advertisements appeared in major newspapers accusing strikers of Bolshevism and anarchy.[52] Newspapers warned that negotiations with unions would lead to union rule over the entire nation.[53] One of the nation's most widely distributed newspapers, the *New York World*, called for a "DEPORTATION OF ALL RADICALS" on

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[50] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 97-98.
[51] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 124.
[52] *Pittsburgh Leader*, October 5 & October 6, 1919, 2; *Pittsburgh Chronicle-Telegraph*, October 6, 1919, 3.
[53] *New York World* October 1, 1919, 1.

November 8, and nativist slogans were employed claiming that non-American born foreigners had come to remove liberty from the nation as had been done in Europe.

While the strike held in initial weeks, press and politicians around the nation decried the strike as another sign of social radicalism taking over the nation. Despite striking workers' attempts to refocus coverage around the working conditions of the industry, press and political focus was instead honed in on William Z. Foster, secretary-treasurer of the National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers and a key organizer of the strike.[54] Foster's affiliation with the IWW and identification with anti-capitalist ideology in previous years had made him an easy target for accusations of radicalism, and, because of association with him, the entire strike was quickly accused of being an attempt at a nationwide revolution. Within short order newspapers stopped referring to the strikers as such at all, instead labelling them only as "Reds," "Radicals," or "IWW."[55]

One key aspect of local coverage was calls for divine intervention and discernment on the part of the workers. On October 31, one particularly famous editorial was published in the *Pittsburgh Leader* putting the strike into terms of a divine battle. The editorial identified the strike and its revolutionary aims as un-American, but also as a "POWER OF EVIL", the likes of which there would be "no man or men big enough in this land to stay the rising tide of

[54] Ernst, Eldon G. 1970. "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920." *Church History*, 215.
[55] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 106.

disaster."[56] Such statements connected the economic dynamics of the strike with the religious. Not only did public opinion and "common sense" stand against the strikers, but God did as well. Local and national preachers who stood against the strike were covered heavily in their condemnation of the atheistic Bolshevik threat as work of the devil seeking to bring down a healthy Christian nation.

Coverage of the strike in the religious press, however, was far more measured. Although only a handful of Protestant newspapers had any widespread readership, two of the most prominent periodicals covered the steel strike in the weeks following its start. The *Outlook*, one of these periodicals, approached the strike with a more neutral tone and was one of few publications to provide the full list of demands published by the National Committee.[57] Another prominent paper, the *Independent*, placed blame for the strike on both the company and union leaders for not having worked harder to find a compromise, but recognized strikers' claims that the national nonreligious press was biased against them.[58] Although neither paper covered the strike in-depth, the difference in coverage between them and the secular press is notable.

Public support for the strikers in the nonreligious media was crushed upon the discovery and widespread coverage of an ideological pamphlet, *Syndicalism*, written by William Z. Foster in 1913. *Syndicalism* first came to the attention through a house speech by Ohio Congressman John G Cooper, who held up the pamphlet as evidence that the Great Steel Strike was nothing

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[56] See: *Pittsburgh Leader*, October 31, 1919, p. 1, Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 105-106, for more details on the editorials publishing.
[57] *Outlook*, "THE OUTLOOK FACES A STRIKE" October 1, 1919, 1.
[58] *Independent*, "Striking While the Iron Is Hot" October 4, 1919, 1.

more than Russian agitation.[59] The book itself, as its title would suggest, was a roughly ten-page summary of syndicalist ideology and its strengths and weaknesses. Initially written as to better compare syndicalist and socialist approaches, the pamphlet became the ultimate piece of evidence that the media's claims up to this moment were correct. Syndicalism as an ideology, being anti-state and pro-union power, perfectly fit into the narrative that the steel strike had been nothing but a power grab. *Syndicalism* came to be cited frequently throughout the mainstream press, with more radical claims about capitalism and violence being the most frequently highlighted. Assertions that, "every great strike is accompanied by violence. Every forward pace humanity has taken has been gained at the cost of untold suffering and loss of life,"[60] exemplified the dangerous and violent nature of striking workers. Further, its mention of "revolution" raised the specter of Bolshevism. Characterizations of the syndicalist as a "radical anti-patriot"[61] and calls for a militarization of labor unions[62] played directly into every fear that the press had been promoting for years. For those seeking to break the strike, *Syndicalism* had been the ultimate gift. The booklet itself, especially in the American political sphere, was an immensely radical work and allowing it to speak for itself did immense harm to the strike's chances of success.

While local and national press continued to insist that the strike was on the verge of failure, those who continued to strike were said to have been doing so because of the

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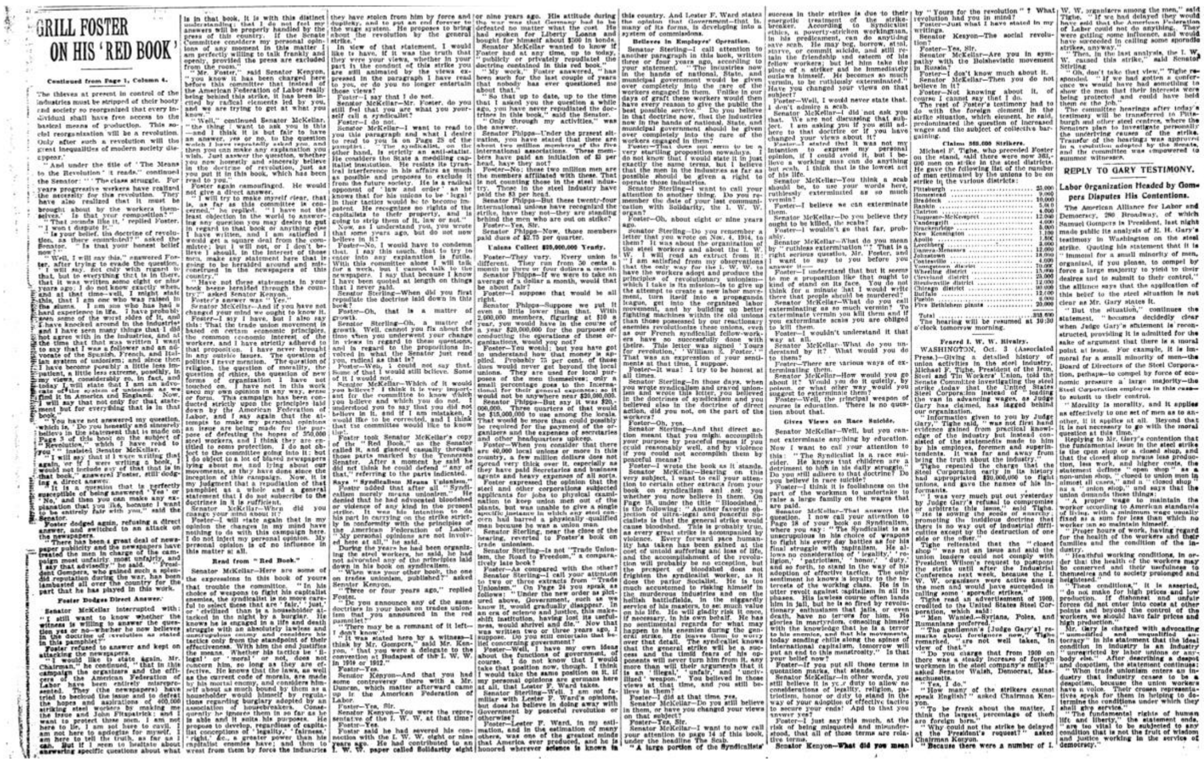
[59] *New York Times* "RADICALS OF UNIONS ASSAILED IN HOUSE" September 24, 1919, 1, 3.
[60] Foster, William Z. 1913. *Syndicalism*, Chapter II.
[61] Foster, *Syndicalism*, Chapter V.
[62] Foster, *Syndicalism*, Chapter IX.

syndicalist views Foster had articulated in the previous decade. Reading the pamphlet, it had been argued by both company officials and the press, had instilled "un-American" and "dis-loyal" values into the laborers, turning them not only against the company, but the entire nation.[63] The pamphlet came to be covered alongside nearly any mention of the strike.[64] The *New York Times* alone dedicated a sub column of all coverage of the strike to stories such as, "Strike Leader Foster, as Late as 1915, Advocated Overthrow of All Government and Law Courts"[65] and "Representative Quotes Foster's Letter Signed 'Yours for the Revolution.'"[66] The main government investigation into the strike, led by the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, became "dominated" by questions surrounding Foster's personal beliefs, possible atheism, and greater nefarious intentions.[67] The senate investigation became a hit among the national press as the drama of each hearing made for popular news. The hearings were said to be "borderline explosive" as senators interrogated key figures in the strike, and newspapers

[63] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 95.
[64] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920" 215.
[65] *New York* Times, September 29, 1919, 1.
[66] *New York* Times, September 28, 1919, 1.
[67] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920" 215.

would often devote daily page upon page providing in-depth coverage of the day's events.[68]


GRILL FOSTER ON HIS 'RED BOOK'

Continued from Page 1, Column 4.

REPLY TO GARY TESTIMONY.

Figure 1. New York Times October 4 coverage of one day of Foster's Senate testimony took up around 200% more space than any other story covered that day.

The senate committee grilled union leaders on their ideological commitments and potential "un-American" attitudes; foreign-born workers faced questions from the committee on their loyalty to the nation and attempts to turn the United States against itself. The senate investigation, following the testimony of several company figures, declared that the reason for the strike remained a mystery, as working conditions and wages in their eyes seemed more than sufficient.[69] Media coverage mirrored similar sentiments, reporting that "it is known that

[68] See: Figure 1.; Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Report on the Steel Strike of 1919*, 96.

[69] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. 1921. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the*

the Steel Corporation pays high wages to its men" and "the assertion that the strike is ordered to enforce the right of collective bargaining does not carry conviction." [70] Nearly every major newspaper in the nation echoed similar sentiments without the need for any hard evidence. Despite efforts by the striking workers, strike leadership, and Foster himself to argue that his past beliefs had little to do with motivations for the strike, both the dominant media narrative and official government report concluded that the strike involved "a considerable element of IWW's, anarchists, revolutionists, and Russian Soviets."[71]

Strikers were labeled by the press as "foreigners striking in support of demands which would enable them to get control of the steel industry." [72] At the same time, calls for deportation of all foreign-born workers became increasingly frequent as October, November, and the strike dragged on.[73] The public was warned by local press and public officials that any gathering of striking men held the intention of fomenting as much violence as possible.[74] Police

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Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 117.

[70] These specific quotes taken from *New York Times*, "THE STEEL STRIKE" in September 1919; for more references of these kinds, see Pittsburgh local papers listed above from dates December 17-31st and *Wall Street Journal* coverage throughout December 1919; Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement* has additional examples of claimed ignorance of the strike's cause.

[71] Murray, *Red* Scare, 151-152.

[72] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 106.

[73] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 107.

[74] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 117.

and local authorities, many of whom had turned to local press coverage as their primary source of intelligence on the strike, responded accordingly. Over the course of the next several months, violence broke out between state or local officials and gathering strikers with the press blaming any and all incidents of violence squarely on the workers.[75] Even in cases of violence where investigation found police to be completely at fault, press coverage consistently placed the blame upon workers.[76] As media narratives became increasingly convinced that strikers had walked out with the explicit intent of creating violence and political instability, they more commonly reframed the strike as a battle between the antagonistic strikers and heroic agents of the state.[77] The *Pittsburgh Press*, for example, had begun reporting extensive details of state troopers' engagements with strikers in almost glorious style. One such report in the first week of the strike described a moment-by-moment engagement between a police sniper and a striking worker supposedly shooting at police, hidden so well as to be "invisible," only able to be found by through the "flame spit from a revolver." After a long fought shootout, the police sniper had supposedly taken out the striking shooter with quick and decisive action.[78] A full investigation would reveal from witnesses that the man shot by the police sniper had in fact

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[75] See: Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 118; Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*, 189.

[76] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 130.

[77] This kind of framing had really picked up in the wake of the Seattle General Strike, during which both press and government officials realized the efficacy of this kind of explanation.

[78] *Pittsburgh Press*, September 30, 1919, p. 2

been "standing peacefully on the corner… not provoking any disorder whatsoever."[79] Apparently chasing a "potentially dangerous" striker, the police had shot a random bystander through the head in confusion. Despite this witness testimony to both police and press, no further information or correction regarding the killing of this bystander was released to the public until well after the strike had ended.[80] Stories of this kind were published almost daily. With press coverage biased to such an extent, even local public support for the strike moved towards universal collapse, and as the American public turned further and further away from the workers, the strike's chances of success looked bleaker and bleaker.

The issue of credibility and coverage both marked the demise of the laborers' efforts. Press continued to shy away from covering workers directly, instead covering company spokespeople, public officials, and sensationalistic coverage of Foster and his pamphlet. Even in cases where the press was willing to cover the workers directly, it became clear as the strike went on that workers and organizers themselves lacked much credibility in refuting the accusation that the movement was dominated by atheistic Bolshevik radicals. As a result, strikers' claims about working conditions were assumed to be non-credible.[81]

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[79] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 130.

[80] Specifically, this information was not public knowledge until the Commission of Inquiry, discussed more in depth later, had collected documentation backing up witness testimony and released it in their supplementary report almost two full years later.

[81] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 118.

The degree to which company and other financial interests directly controlled coverage of the strike remained disputed long after the strike took place,[82] but there remained undeniable proof that significant investments had been made by the company to ensure favorable coverage of conditions while blocking off coverage of the workers. In investigations which followed, company agents were found in the highest reaches of press coverage, and several prominent government officials who took part in the senate investigations had close ties to the steel industry.[83]

As with previous strikes, a major labor demonstration had been demolished in the court of public opinion based on the assumption that revolutionary aims were the true, underlying motivations. To gain any legitimacy in the eyes of the public, there was little the movement could do internally. Instead, those who remained more sympathetic to the workers' cause turned towards sources outside of organized labor or the mainstream national press. One of the first groups turned to for involvement were Protestant movements, with one large organization in particular becoming deeply involved in the strike's activity.

The Post-war Protestant Moment and Interchurch World Movement

An important social backdrop necessary for understanding the conditions and responses to labor amidst all the turmoil of the post-war months was the bold transformations taking place

[82] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 119.
[83] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Report on the Steel Strike of 1919*, 120.

within many sectors of American Protestant churches. In the latter half of the 19th century, American Protestantism had established itself as the foremost social institution in the nation, with the final decade of the century marking an especially high point in mainline Protestantism's social power.[84] Protestant churches had successfully helped shaped the institutions of the United States from top-to-bottom, and establishment preachers held immense sway over the social dynamics of the American people.

As the 20th century began, however, several issues began to worry the minds of the nation's great Protestant elite. While mainline Protestants had successfully shaped institutions at home, attempts at more in-depth foreign mission work had faced mixed results.[85] The rapid industrialization and urbanization of the nation had begun to alter the physical and mental landscape of the nation. Across the second half of the 19th century, Protestants had additionally lost control over the sphere of higher education, previously dominated, almost singularly, by church oversight.[86] By 1900, colleges connected to mainline Protestant institutions had seen heavy declines in both attendance and prestige. As the great American research university became the new standard of higher education in the post-Civil War decades, many colleges

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[84] The term "mainline Protestantism" is often undefined by many historians who use the phrase; here the specific denominations referred to follow the list set by William R. Hutchison 1989. *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*. Cambridge Studies in Religion and American Public Life. Cambridge [England], New York: Cambridge University Press. "Protestantism as Establishment," which includes Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and white divisions of the Methodist and Baptist churches in reference to 19th century "mainline." In the early decades of the 20th century, the Disciples of Christ and the United Lutherans can increasingly be included in that category as well.

[85] Hutchison, "Protestantism as Establishment," 5.

[86] Bass, Dorothy C. 1989. "Ministry on the Margin: Protestants and Education." In *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*, 50.

formally disaffiliated from their denominational origins.[87] As the Progressive era had led the charge of pluralism and reform, it had become increasingly popular for the voices of power to express more religiously inclusive, if not secular, rhetoric.[88] The 1916 nomination of Louis Brandeis, a lawyer with an extensive progressive record, to the Supreme Court by President Wilson had triggered a political and religious firestorm because of Brandeis' Jewish heritage. The prospect that other religions could someday rival Protestantism in social and political power began to seem somewhat viable.

Especially important for understanding the role of Protestantism in these years was the decline of the Protestant news media. Reaching its peak in the mid-to-late 19th century, religious periodicals had been widely produced and read throughout the nation. In 1850 alone nearly 200 religious periodicals were regularly published, half of which were newspapers and almost all of which were led by mainline Protestants.[89] The Protestant press had been able to compete on both regional and national levels with the secular press during these decades, but by the dawn of the 20th century, it had been pushed deep into the margins of journalism. The competitive nature of the news industry and the move towards "yellow journalism" in the New York press industry had pushed the media industry into sensationalistic tendencies that left explicitly religious press by the wayside. While religious publishing remained, most periodicals turned towards covering specific causes and events within denominations rather than national, political events. While some Protestant papers continued to hold substantial readership, non-

[87] Bass, "Ministry on the Margin: Protestants in Education," 52-54.
[88] Voskuil, Dennis N. 1989. "Reaching Out: Mainline Protestantism and the Media." In *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*, 72-73.
[89] Voskuil, "Reaching Out: Mainline Protestantism and the Media," 73.

religiously affiliated news had come to dominate.[90] It would be horribly misguided, however, to believe that these issues had rendered Protestantism as anything less than the most powerful social force in the nation. Even within nonreligious papers and journals, the Protestant perspective continued to be provided and defended.[91] While direct access had declined, Protestantism held its power in more subtle ways. Among those who published nonreligious press, religious periodicals remained quite popular,[92] and the overall ideological influence of Protestantism had not collapsed because of the reduced numbers of these published pieces. The same could be said of higher education institutions which, although certainly no longer guided singularly by an explicitly Protestant ethos, were far from separated from the higher education structures which Protestant institutions had set into place.

Despite the rare cracks in the foundations, American Protestant religious leaders remained heavily involved in nearly every aspect of American life and policy. What the declines in religious press and higher education had signaled among many Protestant leaders was a general anxiety that American Protestants needed to act urgently in order not to cede any more ground. The rapidly evolving nation was set to face new, unseen challenges, and it became the mission of many progressively minded Protestant leaders to ensure that American churches did not fail to meet the moment. As America's growing industrial and military strength grew its position as a genuine international player, Protestant leaders doubled down on their desire to shape the American role in the world. In the years leading up to World War I, much of

[90] Voskuil, "Reaching Out: Mainline Protestantism and the Media." 73-74.
[91] Voskuil, "Reaching Out: Mainline Protestantism and the Media." 74.
[92] Voskuil, "Reaching Out: Mainline Protestantism and the Media." 75.

mainstream American Protestantism had turned towards advocacy of peace. In the era of progressivism through the first decade of the 20th century, many prominent ministers had optimistically believed that a warless world, guided of course by Christian values in action, was a real possibility.[93]

It is no surprise, then, that the 1914 outbreak of World War I and its decent into an especially brutal conflict shocked American Protestants. The raw "barbarism" that "modern European Christendom" had generated was met with horror, [94] and the default stance of prominent officials, much like the rest of the nation at the time, was supportive of neutrality and arbitration. The peacekeeping mission that had been running in the years before the war continued in early years,[95] but as America's increasing involvement in the war signaled inevitable military escalation, Protestant churches evolved to match the sentiment of the nation. By the time Congress had officially declared war, most advocates of peace had "joined other Americans in wholehearted support of the nation's effort."[96] Churches overall continued fiercely to advocate peace, but the new best means to preserve peace in the world was through a swift, and committed, military involvement by the United States. Protestant peace organizations quickly shifted focus towards making the post-war world safer and praised intervention as the morally correct action to achieve that goal. Before long, however,

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[93] Ernst, Eldon G. 1972. *Moment of Truth for Protestant America: Interchurch Campaigns Following World War One*. Dissertation Series (American Academy of Religion). s.l., Missoula, Mont: American Academy of Religion, distributed by Scholars' Press. 10.
[94] Ernst, *Moment of* Truth, 11.
[95] The prominent Church Peace Union, for example, had continued to produce literature decrying the violence of the war and actively pushed against armament in the years leading up to the war, See: Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, *12.*
[96] Ibid.

commitment to the war shifted in a more radical direction. Among the consensus of Protestant-influenced Americans, the declaration of war signaled a fundamental shift in patriotic and religious duty. Over the months following the declaration, Protestant churches and organizations rapidly moved from tepid acceptance to overwhelming support and mobilization.

While the moral and patriotic support of religious leaders was not a rarity in the war in general, American Protestantism was unique in the conversion of the military conflict into a full-blown religious crusade. In public facing ways, religious leaders from across the Protestant tradition declared that the "frightful judgements of Kaiserism" and German culture were to be recognized as "the enemy of their nation and of their God."[97] The war had evolved into a divine fight between good and evil, "Heaven and Hell" as Billy Sunday had preached it, and soon ministers from all across the nation began to preach religious patriotism.[98] Across most of the denominations and among conservatives and liberals alike, America had settled in to the role of a democratic, Christ driven force against the autocratic Germans working in the interest of the devil. The war had expanded beyond mere peacekeeping or political self-interest; instead, it had become a quest to save Christian civilization itself. Throughout the war such rhetoric was used to strengthen the resolve of the Protestant masses, and churches across the nation became intimately involved in supporting the war effort. Material efforts to gather supplies and to recruit soldiers dominated the schedules of Protestant organizations. Addresses from prominent Protestant churchmen and laymen expressed unwavering support for the American

[97] Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 12-13.
[98] Ibid.

cause and received nationwide coverage.[99] While there were certainly exceptions to the Protestant commitment to the war effort, particularly among more pacifist minded factions, by and large the Protestant establishment had given itself fully in support to American involvement.

The Protestant response to the war resulted in several key shifts among the role of Protestant thinking in the country. Most importantly, the war amplified the identification of Protestantism with Americanism. The blending of Protestant values and identification with the American identity had been pervasive throughout much of the 19th century, but the role of churches in the war effort offered a renewed effort to inject Protestantism once again into the realm of national identification. To be a good Protestant in the time of war required the same conditions as those necessary to be a good American. Supporting the war effort, standing against the evils of German autocracy, and fighting for the just cause of peace became the foundations of both religious and governmental institutions.[100] This also carried great implications for the role of religious leaders in the post-war years. Protestant churches served as the utmost exemplars of American glory and patriotism in the years of the war, and such a role placed them into a position of even greater influence and authority in the eyes of the American public. Respected religious figures, in many ways, had come to represent the very spirit of America. Among church leaders themselves, the war brought about a series of questions of how American Protestantism was to proceed in the wake of such a planet-shaping

[99] Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 13.
[100] Ernst, *Moment of* Truth, 14-16.

event. At the very least, the identification of the war as a crusade for peace and holy struggle against evil had solidified the necessity of Christian motivation in future international policy.

In the aftermath of the American foray into international conflict, some prominent Protestant leaders took up the question of whether American Protestantism in all its many forms might take up a similarly ambitious focus beyond the national level.[101] With the war now over and an entire continent reeling from its effects, the time had come for Protestant organizations to deliver the lasting peace they had promised. As one Northern Baptist paper had put it, "Christian churches mobilize when armies demobilize."[102] The initial vision of such a project was discussed first among the Executive Committee of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church within days of the treaty signaling the end of the war. The project's main purpose was to unite the many denominations of American Protestantism into a single organization which would be able to provide Christian services and social support across all North America and, eventually, globally. There was a belief in the early talks of this prospective organization that, just as the great wars of the previous centuries had ushered in eras of mass Christian activities, World War I, which had been the greatest and most devastating of any war the United States or Europe had ever seen, would inevitably usher in an era of Christian expansion unlike anything the world had ever seen.[103] In December 1918, the organization

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[101] Liu, Debbie, and Brigette C Kamsler. 1919. "WAB: Interchurch World Movement Records, 1918-1962," 5.
[102] *The Standard*, November 16, 1918, 4.
[103] Such sentiments were expressed between both private letters and correspondence between some of the IWM's founding members, but other similar beliefs were expressed publicly as well. For specific details see: Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 59-61.

which would carry the banner of this great Christian mission was officially established — the Interchurch World Movement of North America (IWM).[104]

The organization's grand vision for the future was not a toothless one. Among the officers, directors, committee chairs, and spokespeople of the Interchurch World Movement stood, "the most capable, reputable lay and ordained leaders of American Protestantism of the day."[105] Across dozens of denominations, the IWM had succeeded at uniting renowned figures in Christian movements from the last several decades. Many of the men[106] had been at been active participants in the social and political changes of the Progressive Era, and the formation of the IWM signaled one of the greatest amalgamations of religious clout, not to mention monetary potential, that the United States had ever seen. The Executive Committee was headed by Chairman John R. Mott, hailed at the time as one of the most preeminent laymen at the forefront of a global Christian mission. Other prominent figures, such as Executive Committee member Robert E. Speer and General Committee Vice-Chair Fred B. Smith had become some of the most well-known lay names in American Protestantism at the time. The General Secretary and overall director of the IWM, S. Earl Taylor, had established close relationships with some of the most prominent clergy from every mainline denomination in America, bringing many of them into the organization as his closest lieutenants. The combination of men which formed the core officer corps of this new Christian mission made up

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[104] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 212.
[105] Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 60.
[106] Women were granted roles within the Interchurch World Movement's ranks, but were delegated entirely to lower ranking positions, often working at local levels or in logistical positions; all leadership positions were held by men.

the ultimate "honor roll" of Protestant pragmatists for the era who, when added together, made up an organization with wide and powerful reach.[107]

By early 1919, the organization was a cooperative venture of over thirty Protestant denominations across the nation.[108] Despite the ideological differences between churches and sometimes more severe ecclesiastic disagreements, the IWM had successfully shelved questions of doctrinal concern in favor of sheer pragmatism. Wartime had demanded a coordinated effort from across denominational lines, and the spirit of that cooperation continued to stand strong in the war's immediate aftermath.[109] As a result, the chief concern of the IWM was to establish a world mission of evangelization, and putting this plan into action became the sole focus.[110] While the global vision of the organization made up the bulk of long-term goals, the IWM quickly established a series of immediate steps the organization was to take at home in the U.S. first. Progressivism and the Social Gospel had lost much of its popular fervor and organizational power in the years leading up to the war, and by the late 1910s had seen a sharp decline compared to the late 19th century.[111] For American Protestantism to take hold of the global order as it aspired, it would first need to revitalize the spirit of the Social Gospel among American Protestants in the face of their own political turmoil. Along with

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[107] Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 20.
[108] Ernst, "The Interfaith Movement of North America 1919-1920," 213
[109] The questions of doctrinal difference were not entirely shoved into the corner, and the question of Christian unity remained a hot-button issue throughout the IWM's existence. Despite this fact, the overall ranking corps of the IWM had successfully mobilized their core initiatives and pragmatic message without having doctrinal debates take center stage. For more, see: Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 69-86.
[110] Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 60-61.
[111] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 212.

setting massive fundraising goals to begin mission projects throughout North America, many factions of the IWM began pondering the prospects of involving themselves in the questions of the day. As the nation's transition out of wartime shepherded in a series of economic and industrial challenges, the IWM sought to use its post-war standing to reincorporate the role of religion in the solutions of such problems.

These commitments were rapidly prioritized as the chaos of 1919 economic and social strife erupted. On May 1, 1919, a bloody riot had erupted in downtown Cleveland after a demonstration of socialists, trade unionists, and laborers turned violent in the city. At the same time on the same day, the Cleveland Interboard Conference of the Interchurch World Movement, a conference called to set course on the IWM's immediate goals, had entered their noon intermission.[112] Through their sheer proximity to the event, many of the 500 delegates of the IWM had witnessed the violence of the riot first-hand, and quickly the conference became dominated by discussions of labor and economic turmoil. For many of those attending, the personal proximity to the violence in Cleveland made the threat of industrial unrest far more real. It was far more difficult to shove the questions of the day to the side when they wereso personally situated in their midst. By the next day, the conference released a decree calling for "Christian America to apply completely [democracy] in the realm of industry" in order to make religion and democracy real in the common life of mankind."[113] The IWM declared in no uncertain terms that the, "current disorders and disasters cannot be cured without recognizing

[112] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 212.
[113] Committee of Seven Report, Cleveland Interboard Conference, found in: "History of the Interchurch World Movement of North America," IV, see: Ernst, "The Interfaith Movement of North America 1919-1920" for more detail on documents which are no longer available.

the essential partnership of capital and labor and the interdependence of social and industrial groups and their mutual obligations."[114] The IWM had not only identified labor issues as a major point of concern, they had also stated their intention to be directly and intimately involved in labor activity. These declarations marked a shift in the overall vision of the IWM. Rather than acting as a mere outside authority, they had named their intentions to become actively involved in labor activity.

As with nearly every other major American institution, the Interchurch World Movement had been touched by anti-Bolshevik fervor. From a more conservative minority within the organization, there was an increased pressure to turn the IWM into a more explicitly anti-Red movement. Among such factions, involvement in labor politics presented a clear danger. Religious communities and leadership had not remained immune from the anti-Bolshevik fervor of the post-war months. Just as it had become the American patriotic and religious duty to stand up against the anti-democratic German Kaiser, Bolshevism posed an existential threat to the lives of American Protestants. It had become solidified in the American imagination that the democratic forces of the West were the true bearers of God's mission on earth, and any non-democratic forces stood in opposition to that mission. Not only did Bolshevism represent the antithesis of American's democratic values, but it was also understood to be entirely atheistic. It was this anti-religious aspect of the ideology which rendered the prospect of a Bolshevik takeover a far greater threat to the stability of a Christian world than even an autocratic, German Europe.

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[114] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 212.

The prospect that anti-democratic forces might be infiltrating American institutions was not only a call for fear among Protestant organizers, however, it also signaled a call to action. In the wake of the labor unrest across the nation and reports that labor was becoming increasingly Bolshevized, *The Christian Advocate*, a periodical affiliated with the United Methodist Church and one of the nation's foremost progressive religious newspapers, declared on July 31st, 1919: "America is God's final reservation for the moral schooling and training of civilization… For the sake of the entire world, America owes everything to the preservation of her own best ideals." The protection of American ideals and democracy, just as in the Great War, was a matter of utmost religious conviction, and, in the anti-Bolshevik fervor of the year, this meant that religious organizations had to stand steadfast against the encroaching Red menace. Not falling to the general fear which had consumed the nation to this point, the bulk of the Interchurch World Movement, however, did not surrender to popular opinions on organized labor. The IWM sought to position itself as a "promoter of reform" rather than revolution and upholders of the "democratic American character."[115] The organization's public declarations to these commitments made it clear that it was no friend to Bolshevik sympathies, but it had clearly positioned itself as open to a reformation of American institutions. Regarding labor organizing, the message was clear: organized labor which has been infiltrated by radical or revolutionary forces is no friend to Protestantism, but organized labor which is committed to the progression of Christian values will have our support. After all, American industrial laborers needed to be saved just as every other American needed to be saved, and if there were

[115] Ernst, Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 116-117.

legitimate concerns from workers in need, the progressive spirit of the IWM would naturally be inclined to share those concerns.

The leaders of the IWM quickly established the Interchurch Department of Industrial Relations to take on this new, deeply involved role within labor politics. The department was established, quite intentionally, as distanced from any one set vision of how labor conflicts of the era should be approached. Instead of taking a positive position in favor of any particular general plan for the reconstruction of society, the department was founded upon the basis of "the teaching and the spirit of Christ," with the aspiration "that it seek to create a religious fellowship which shall be broad enough to allow for conservative, liberal and radical thinkers."[116] From the moment of the department's founding, then, they aimed to be perceived as a nonpartisan and "objective" organization seeking only to further a Christian mission rather than achieve any one goal in relation to labor organizing.

The Industrial Relations Department's broad founding principle and non-ideological presentation won it widespread support among clergymen,[117] providing an immediate base of legitimacy to the organization. By September 1919, the department dived into issues of the time by creating specific guidelines and policies to apply to any labor conflicts that might arise. When the Boston police strike erupted into violence in early September, the Industrial Relations Department's measured support for the strikers and denouncement of its radical elements won it further support and established its authority as a "nonideological, Christian" institution.[118]

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[116] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 213.
[117] Liu & Kamsler, "WAB: Interchurch World Movement Records," 5.
[118] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 214.

Less than two weeks later, on the 22nd of September, the department found itself deeply involved in the Great Steel Strike of 1919, "one of the most significant industrial conflicts in American history."[119]. Much like the rest of the nation's public and major institutions, the Industrial Relations Department quickly knew it would have to become involved with the conflict at hand. As the rest of the nation was consumed with the anti-Bolshevik fervor permeating all coverage of the strike and the official Senate investigation beginning in late September, Methodist Bishop Fred B. Fisher, Director of the Interchurch Department of Industrial Relations, began meeting with a number of powerful politicians, labor representatives, and business leaders in order to better gauge the appetite for IWM involvement in the strike.[120] Only days later, calls for Protestant churches to provide aid in alleviating labor problems were published in the *New York Times* by prominent pro-labor politician and Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education and Labor Senator William S. Kenyon, Labor Secretary William B. Wilson, officials of the A. F. L., and the Chamber of Commerce of the United States.[121] Having received this and other public calls for more direct involvement, the Interchurch Department of Industrial Relations held a conference in early October to address the issue.

This conference, which had initially aimed more "to point out the moral principles involved in all industrial relations" rather than get deeply involved in any specific conflicts, quickly turned towards calls to engage in more direct action. While a general establishment of

[119] Ibid.
[120] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 215.
[121] *New York Times*, October 1, 1919, 1.

principles was quickly issued, many conference members had grown frustrated at the lack of established facts in media coverage of labor issues, with the Great Steel Strike dominating all discussion. The increasingly sensationalistic nonreligious press had not been seen as a reliable source among many at the conference, and even among more neutral or trusted press coverage, the accurate details of the strike remained largely unknown.[122] The IWM was convinced that the public had not been informed of the basic facts of the strike, instead being fed only "straw-man explanations."[123] These straw-man explanations, referencing the growing anti-Bolshevik fervor, had made it impossible for the public to have clear access to the facts of the strike. Soon, Methodist Bishop Francis J. McConnell, a longtime social gospel advocate and the leader of the conference, put to vote a motion to establish a proper commission to investigate the causes of the strike in full.[124] On October 5, a nine-person Commission of Inquiry was formed with McConnell as chairman. The commission was granted near full autonomy to draft a report on the causes and activities of the strike.[125]

Investigation of the Strike

The investigation itself was kept as airtight as possible from outside sources. In the view of the IWM, the commission had been formed as a direct response to the "failure of the press,"

[122] Coverage from both the *Outlook* and *Independent*, for example, was balanced overall but lacked any in-depth investigative capacities to better understand the root causes of the strike.
[123] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 216.
[124] "History of the Interchurch World Movement of North America," IV, Resolution 125.
[125] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 217.

to properly cover the strike.[126] As a result of this distrust of the media and fear that publicity would lead to immense backlash and pressure from steel interests, the commission made the decision to operate as quietly as possible.[127] Despite anxiety of how the report might be received, the commission sought "to take all consequences of telling [the] truth," and ensure that, whatever the facts came out to be, the report "receive the widest publicity."[128] With their aim of impartiality and secretive methodology, the commission began its investigations immediately. The investigation itself was a deeply involved affair. Over 400 affidavits were collected from workers across the industry and "mountains of papers, contracts, letters, and transcriptions" were collected from labor organizations, steel company affiliates, and other civilian organizations throughout the steel producing regions.[129] These affidavits contained information on every aspect of the steel industry, providing details on working conditions, company practices, and community organizing at all levels. Along with the formal investigating aspect of the commission, the creation of a formal report required an unfathomable amount of fact checking, verifications of statements at nearly every level, and the requisition of additional documentation from institutions all around the country. Naturally, much of the information coming in did not match up with other sources, especially when it came to comparing company statements to those of workers, and, committed to presenting nothing but the entire truth of

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[126] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 87.
[127] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 218.
[128] "History of the Interchurch World Movement of North America," IV, 123-124
[129] See Introduction of Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919." for more on precise methodology.

the strike, this left the nine members of the commission with a complicated web of information to untangle. With the commission intentionally kept to a smaller number of individuals with only limited help from outside organizations so as to not threaten leaks to the public, it was expected that the investigation would be a prolonged affair, possibly lasting years.

Only three months after the start of the investigation, however, on January 8, 1920, the strike ended in total defeat for the workers.[130] The company had not budged on their lack of willingness to negotiate with organized labor leaders, and public support for the strike had reached an all-time low in the face of the red-scare style media coverage surrounding the strike. Notably, even many Protestant churches which had been active participants in Social Gospel movements throughout the previous decades began publicly to denounce the strikers.[131] While many within the IWM remained skeptical over the claims being made in the secular national press, the shift in public mood away from the strikers had become overwhelming. Soon the workers had found themselves without any credible allies, public support, or financial means of keeping the strike going.

Despite the strike's collapse, the commission proceeded with its investigation over the next several months. Shortly after the end of the strike, however, many non-commission members of the IWM began to doubt behind closed doors as to whether the investigation was even worth continuing in the wake of the strike's collapse. Several prominent members of the General Committee had signaled their belief that the strike was a lost cause, if not an outright

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[130] Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 174-175.
[131] Miller, Robert Moats. 1958. *American Protestantism and Social Issues, 1919–1939*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1958, 42.

Bolshevik orchestration. The IWM had also faced a number of internal challenges within the year which had led many members and outside supporters to believe the organization was on the verge of complete collapse. Increased attention by many Protestant leaders to Prohibition and the rebuilding of European states had drawn funding and attention away from the IWM over the course of 1920.[132] Moreover, the organization had failed to reach several of its lofty funding goals, and, despite continued support from religious leaders, the movement was seeing desperately little involvement from citizens. Concerns started to surface that the report, if found to be as staggering as many expected, would be the final nail in the coffin for the organization if it was not well received. It was only the continued, if cautious, blessing from the Executive Committee and S. Earl Taylor, its general secretary, which allowed for the investigation to complete.[133] The Executive Committee, still firm in their belief that the strike had not received fair coverage, were determined to see the report through to the end.

Report and Reception

The report was finalized near the end of March, 1920 and presented to the Interchurch Executive Committee by Bishop McConnell.[134] Despite fears from several church leaders that the report might cause too much disruption and controversy,[135] the committee cleared the report after facing strict scrutiny from multiple other church groups. The report, while containing immense detail of the investigation and the actual conditions of the industry, was

[132] Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 165-169.
[133] Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 140.
[134] Ernst, Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 131.
[135] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 219.

also specifically written to appeal to the mass public. As the original motivation for the report had been to bring the true facts of the strike into the public eye, the opening pages of the report sought to distill the most vital information of the investigation into a format fit for mass distribution. With committee members' own experiences in publishing weighing heavily on the format, the opening of the report was designed to provide the headlines which would dominate the mainstream press for months to come. In its first lines, the IWM declared to the nation that "the steel strike of September 22, 1919, to January 7, 1920, in one sense, is not over. The main issues were not settled. The causes remain."[136] With those words, the Interchurch Department of Industrial Relations immediately made the Great Steel Strike the top priority of the American political agenda.

The opening pages of the report provided a succinct, but thorough, description of the real conditions within the industry, outlining many justifications for the strike and calling for pressure to be put on both company and governmental authorities to seek immediate change. More importantly, however, the initial summary placed blame on people's general ignorance of the event. The "public mind," the report said, had "completely lost sight of the real causes of the strike."[137] The committee declared that providing the true facts of the strike carried implications beyond a simple understanding of events. Providing a true account of the strike, the report claimed, was the only way in which the nation could avoid the violent unrest that it had come so desperately to fear:

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[136] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 1.
[137] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 5.

> If the steel industry is to find a peaceful way out of its present state, it must do so on the basis of a general understanding of such facts as are here set forth. If the country is to find peaceful ways out of the present industrial tension it must find them through an enlightened public opinion based on a more generalized understanding of those national conditions and trends here analyzed.[138]

With the aims of the investigation set and stakes of the report made clear, the report was sent to numerous newspapers across the nation and directly to the desk of President Woodrow Wilson on July 27th and 28th, 1920. It was quickly made into a book for popular distribution, and within several months, the contents of the report became "common knowledge across the nation."[139] In addition to its scandalous findings and revelatory nature, the report was especially attractive for its plain literary appeal. Having been written by a collection of experienced clergymen and preachers, the report's tone and ability to utilize anger, severity, and comedy allowed it to be read more as a particularly compelling Sunday sermon rather than a dull academic catalogue of data and numbers.

In its findings, the report presented a narrative much the opposite of the popular understanding of the time. For one, the report had verified nearly all claims the workers had made regarding working conditions within the industry. Twelve-hour workdays, seven-day work weeks, and wages well below that required to live at minimum capacity were all confirmed to

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[138] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 3-4.
[139] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 221.

be widespread across the industry.[140] Conditions beyond those highlighted by the strikers themselves caught special attention as well. The commission had found widespread discrimination against immigrant workers, arbitrary tampering of wages, company blacklists against workers raising concerns, and little to no way for workers to engage with their management.

Despite the red-scare spectacle which had been perpetuated by the media, government officials, and even some Protestant church leaders across the nation, the report found no evidence of any Bolshevik infiltration or domination of the strike, labeling such accusations as farces.[141] The general assumption made by the American public, press, government officials, and even the IWM, according to the report, was that such claims of Bolshevism must have had in depth evidence behind them to have received the degree of coverage they did. When the committee asked to see this evidence themselves, the steel companies were able to produce nothing. After calling out each individual chairman of the nation's three largest steel companies, the report stated that "no steel company officially presented to the Commission any evidence of Bolshevism."[142] The naming of each chair — in particular Judge Gary of United States Steel Corporation, H. D. Williams of Carnegie Steel Company, and E. J. Buffington of Illinois Steel Company — was especially notable as all three men had been cited frequently in both newspaper coverage and government investigations as the most outspoken proponents of

[140] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 6-8.
[141] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," Chapter II: Bolshevism.
[142] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 33.

Bolshevik accusations. In a particularly scathing characterization of investigative officials, the Committee speculated that it had not seemed as if any member of the press or investigative government officials had ever considered asking for the foundations of such claims. Following their assertion that no evidence had been provided, the committee provided quotes from each steel chairman detailing their individual distain of organized labor, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions as to the men's real motives. The most often cited "evidence" of radical infiltration, the circulation of Foster's *Syndicalism* in the months following the strike, was revealed not to have been in the personal possession of a single strike leader or organizer. The only physical copies of the pamphlet which were actually found, the report noted, were those printed and distributed by steel companies themselves.[143] Distribution of the pamphlet being perpetuated only by steel companies in the weeks following the strike provided clear evidence that the text was "in no way causative" of the strike; rather, "it was injected as a means of breaking the strike."[144] The almost comedic nature of this revelation was a source of especially strong embarrassment to company officials.[145] The report's extensive evidence and its backing by the IWM as a whole had earned it enough respect that even claims such as these, which ran entirely contrary to everything the press had said up to this point, were taken deathly seriously.

A deeper dive into Foster's involvement with the strike played an equally crucial role in dispelling the accusations of radical hijacking. Foster's own motivations in the strike were reframed as relatively inconsequential in comparison to the hundreds of thousands of workers

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[143] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 34.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 221.

who took part. The report, while mildly admitting to some of Foster's past radical affiliations, instead emphasized the relatively conservative nature of AFL organizers and the denouncement the strike organizers received from actually radical organizations, such as the IWW and certain branches of the communist party.[146] Apart from the sheer number of striking workers and critical nature of the industry to the national economy, the strike was an otherwise fairly standard industrial strike motivated by the same kinds of economic complaints hundreds of other organizers had voiced across the country. Of the hundreds of strike leaders who had been arrested for "radicalism" not one was charged or convicted in a court of law, and conditions in the industry were once again emphasized as the clear cause of the strike. While this section of the report remained the most controversial in the months following its publication, the widespread acceptance of the report's conclusions on working conditions in the industry bolstered its claims about Bolshevism. One of the main reasons that Bolshevism had been so appealing an explanation for the strike's breakout was that no other reason had been given by the press for why a strike would be necessary. Because there had been no obvious reason, it had made more sense that the strike represented radical forces attempting to make a power grab. As the public came to accept that workers had, at least in large part, initiated a strike because of dire conditions within the industry, it was easier to accept that the narrative of Bolshevism had been misguided. With the destruction of the narrative of Bolshevik infiltration,

[146] The balance of power between radical and non-radical forces were also commonly used in strike breaking. For example, the report revealed attempts by company agents to convince workers not to identify themselves too closely with conservative ideology out of threat for alienating Slavic and Russian striking workers who would distrust conservative voices in the movement. See: Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 161, for more details.

the report had ripped apart bit by bit the explanation that the American public had generally come to accept, replacing that explanation instead with data regarding the conditions within the industry.

In one of its more scandalous charges, the report also reported companies' strategy of establishing communities of terror and fear where undercover agents of the company had successfully infiltrated life beyond the factory to directly infiltrate or bribe the local press, law enforcement, and even church officials to tow the company line.[147] Descriptions of "company spy systems" and "inaccurate, prejudiced and usually misspelled reports of professional spies"[148] lent themselves to especially sensationalistic coverage and gripped an outsized amount of media attention. Local businesses had reportedly turned against strikers out of fear that steel companies, which owned an immense interest in nearly all related industries, would economically retaliate against any expressions of sympathy.[149] Over fifty pages of internal correspondence between company officials were published directly in the report, some of which contained borderline violent language towards organized workers and provided evidence that local magistrates and police officers were directly on the company payroll.[150]

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[147] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 26.
[148] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 28.
[149] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 185.
[150] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," Chapter VIII for the list of letters, for more on claims regarding local corruption see 239.

In an interesting reversal of rhetoric, the report utilized language of "un-Americanism" and democratic stakes against United States Steel Corporation and its affiliated officers. Workers were repeatedly described as "democratizing" forces seeking to uplift their own living conditions and family units while company interests and anti-union infiltrators were said to be "not serving the interests of the country."[151] The company was described as frequently threatening the civil rights and liberties of workers, placing "arbitrary limits on their lives and being for their own purposes."[152] The rhetoric of secret infiltration by tyrannical forces closely mirrored the kind of allegations set against supposed Bolshevik infiltration, and the repeated use of the phrases "autocratic" and "highly militarized"[153] to describe company's handling of workers was a direct reflection of how the American press and pulpit had characterized the regime of the German Kaiser. For many among the American public and press, descriptions of proud working-class Americans fighting against the secret dominating menace of American steel had invoked the values of bravery and strength which had come to dominate the American population in the wake of American involvement in World War I and the Bolshevik terror of the post-war years. These invocations were made explicit in comparisons of industry practices to wartime governments seeking to monitor civilian populations.[154]

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[151] See: Introduction, Chapter VII of Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919."
[152] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," Chapter VII.
[153] See, Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 123, 125 for several examples.
[154] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 29.

While the report provided a scathing view of industry practices and coverage, it also took great care to veer around the edge of certain accusations. Although the initial report stopped short of accusing United States Steel Corporation of outright fabrication, the charge of incompetence and overreliance on unreliable infiltrators made clear that company explanations for the strike were entirely unfounded. Judge Elbert H. Gary, whose guidance had directly led to the strike and whose Senate testimony provided the most damning accusations against its organizers, was specifically targeted for his lack of accurate testimony over the conditions within his own company. Outside of the companies, it was the press which was most harshly criticized for their coverage of the strike. While later reports would address the specifics of press coverage, the Report on the Steel Strike of 1919 did report on workers' beliefs that the "press immediately took sides, printed only the news favoring that side, suppressed or colored its records, printed advertisements and editorials urging the strikers to go back, denounced the strikers and incessantly misrepresented the facts"[155] — all accusations which the report confirmed to be true.

Thus, the report sided heavily with the laborers and offered a strong condemnation of both U.S. Steel Company and the many institutions which they had come to dominate. The strike was ultimately declared as having "just cause" and the Committee confirmed that those causes continued to persist.[156] Despite the report's explosive revelations and coverage, the initial response to its allegations was tepid. In the months following the report's bombshell

[155] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 242.
[156] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. "Report on the Steel Strike of 1919," 245

release, "not one statistical or analytical reply from the criticized managers of the industry" was put forth from any source.[157] Elbert H. Gary left the country to go on an extended vacation to Europe and remained entirely silent on the issue, matching the utilization of his initial strategy in response to striking workers. The only major rebuttal came from local press, particularly in Pittsburgh. Newspapers affiliated with the Steel industry[158] continued to print editorials claiming that the investigators themselves were "known to certain radical opinions" and the report "minimizes revolutionary sentiments."[159] Eventually, financial organizations opposed to organized labor, company spokespeople, and trade journalists mobilized against the IWM using similar tactics to the ones used against the original strike. Instead of attacking the report or its findings directly, much of the opposition was focused on labeling the investigators themselves as Bolshevik radicals, with the official line of United States Steel Corporation being that "a lot of Reds made that report."[160] Anonymous reports were generated and published throughout the following months claiming that the IWM had been overwhelmed with radical "intruders" seeking to use the organization to promote Bolshevism across the nation.[161] Contrary to the

[157] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 308.
[158] More on this affiliation is detailed in the section, Second Report and Consequences to the Industry.
[159] *The Iron Age*, July 29, 1920, 3.
[160] See: Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 309 for official company policy; Ernst, *Interfaith World Movement*, 221 for more information of how affiliated agencies and individuals responded to the claims of the report.
[161] D. B. Meyer, 1961, *The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919-1941*, 420.

success of this tactic in crushing public opinion of the original strike, the IWM saw little drop in public support.

The Committee's own explanation for this phenomenon was the lack of a formal response from the companies themselves. According to the IWM's later supplementary report, the failure of the company to reply with its own evidence had resulted in the failure of their character assassinations to make any headway in public opinion. While the companies' failure to respond adequately certainly posed issues for their credibility, deeper forces were at play. More specifically, the failure of radical accusations to properly discredit the report's findings has more to do with the identity of those presenting it than the evidence itself. The evidence the report had gathered was certainly damning, but it was the Interfaith World Movement itself, not the conditions of the industry, which provided the opportunity to present this information in the first place. Workers and organizers had, after all, tried desperately throughout the strike to get fair and accurate coverage of their movement but were met with next to no support. What the Commission of Inquiry possessed which their secular counterparts lacked was a real, grounded authority. In the years and months leading up to the strike and later report, the American public had been assaulted with endless coverage of organized labor's susceptibility to Bolshevism and radicalism. During that same period, Protestant leaders had established themselves at the pinnacle of American exceptionalism and patriotism. In other words, the particular social conditions of the post-war era had provided the Commission, and by extension their report, with a unique credibility granted to them not solely by the strength of their investigative prowess, but by the social position their identity granted them.

Not only did their elevated social position grant them special access and opportunity to present their gathered evidence to both the press and public, it also uniquely protected them from the greatest threat to their continued credibility. Throughout both the media and the American public, the notion that a reputable Protestant organization could have been infiltrated by atheistic Bolshevik radicals had little serious purchase. The Protestant identity of the IWM and, perhaps more importantly, the religious standing of the Commission's members, played a key role in refuting such accusations. The chairman of the Commission, Francis J. McConnell, was a Methodist bishop of immense prestige among prominent ministers across the nation.[162] The vice-chairman, Daniel A. Poling, was ordained in the United Evangelical Church, had a decade-long resume of commitments to various Protestant causes, and was a leader in the modern temperance movement.[163] Poling had also served personally near the front lines during the recent war, and was decorated by the armed forces for his actions during a gas attack on his posting.[164] The notion that Bolshevism, which had at this point in the American imagination been defined as an amoral and atheistic ideology, could have overtaken the sympathies of war-serving Protestant clergymen would have been a lethally difficult pill to swallow.

With the crusade of the first world war still fresh in the public mind, accusing the Commission of Bolshevik infiltration and un-American activity was equivalent of saying that no

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[162] Hutchinson, "Protestantism as Establishment," 23-25.
[163] Feller, Wende Vyborney (2007). "Poling, Daniel Alfred (1884-1968)". In Shearer, Benjamin F. (ed.). *Home Front Heroes: A Biographical Dictionary of Americans During Wartime*. Vol. 3. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press. ISBN 978-0-313-33423-8, 676.
[164] Ibid

member of the Commission was a true Protestant. McConnell was a prominent minister among the elite nationwide and Poling's decorated military involvement made them unlikely suspects in "disloyal," "atheistic," or "un-American" activities. Even among those who remained opposed to the strike after the release of the report, the allegations largely fell flat.[165] The *Wall Street Journal*, for example reprinted an editorial criticizing the report itself while still labeling the investigators "well-meaning men" who had simply been led astray from the facts.[166] Beyond the members of the Commission, the report had the entire backing of the IWM's leadership. Accusing the report of radicalism was accusing not just the investigators on the Commission of Inquiry, but the entire IWM. Unlike the striking immigrant workers of the strike itself, there was a demand among both the press and public for hard evidence that such trusted figures could be Bolshevik sympathizers. The religious dimension of this trust cannot be overstated. The unique identity and associations of specifically *Protestant religious authorities* in this particular moment were so diametrically opposed to the public's understanding of Bolshevism that such a comparison could not logically be comprehended or accepted without a vast shift in the public's understanding of the nation's social order. It is worth emphasizing once again just how prominent the heads of the Interchurch World Movement were to the country at the time. If the IWM had truly been infiltrated by radical ideals, it would mean that nearly every mainline Protestant denomination, cause, and Christian organization in the nation had been taken over. The sheer scope of involvement the leaders of both the Commission of Inquiry and the

[165] Brody, *Labor in* Crisis, 178.
[166] *Wall Street Journal* national issue, August 2, 1920, 1.

organization had in the activities of Protestant organizations tied the credibility of the report to the standing of American Protestantism itself.

The mistake of the steel companies was not just their initial silence in the face of hard, accusatory evidence, it was their underestimation of how difficult it would be for an American press and public to accept that even their most trusted establishments had been infiltrated by their enemies. The hysteria over atheistic Bolshevism and its utility in preventing labor activity, it seemed, had collapsed when put up against those with established religious clout. This fact is only further evidenced by attempts from Elbert Gary to quietly refute some contents of the report. The first public statement from United States Steel Corporation was the publication of a private correspondence Gary had supposedly received from Lutheran pastor Rev. John Wedley praising the steel industry for how far its working conditions had come.[167] The decision to have the first public response be given by a Protestant pastor was not coincidental; instead, the letter signifies some acknowledgement that the contents of the report could not be refuted by a secular authority alone.

In the weeks following the report's release, media and government officials quickly changed their stances on the strike. Major publications issued editorials apologizing for their previous condemnation, and calls started for new investigations into the steel industry.[168] The report was covered in overwhelmingly positive light among the nation's most popular newspapers, with 49 of the nation's 73 largest papers offering favorable coverage, 14 offering

[167] *New York Times*, July 30, 1919, 3.
[168] See: *New York Times* coverage outlined in Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919.*

neutral coverage, and only ten papers offering explicitly negative coverage.[169] Most negative coverage expressed skepticism at the report's methodology and referred back to previous statements made by company officials in Senate testimonies as counter-evidence against the report's claims.[170] In editorials throughout the nation and even on the floor of the Senate, pro-labor politicians and clergy who had previously felt powerless to express positive sentiment towards the strike expressed calls for rapid change within the steel industry based upon the investigation by "truly patriotic and Christian men… [who] deserve the praise and support of every good citizen."[171] Even the report's sharp, and highly controversial, demand to uphold a right to collective bargaining received widespread attention.

The response from non-IWM affiliated religious leaders and periodicals in the wake of the report's release was positive, if not somewhat skeptical of the report's more controversial aspects. The report received endorsements from a number of prominent officials across denominational lines with few major exceptions.[172] Most of those exceptions were preachers who had been either singled out by the Commission as potentially taking the side of U.S. Steel for personal gain or had openly condemned the strikers repeatedly in local papers.[173] The

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[169] Granted this analysis was conducted in the months which followed by the Interfaith World Movement themselves, headlines from the countries 10 largest newspapers were all positive or neutral.

[170] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, Chapter III.

[171] This quote from a major speech given by ex-Secretary of the Treasury William G. McAdoo was not alone in its characterization of the report and its investigators as patriotic, and McAdoo's speech was quoted more than once in editorials by some of the nation's largest papers.

[172] See: Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919* for more.

[173] Ibid.

Outlook endorsed the findings of the report, asserting that its findings were generally trustworthy, but the paper also expressed skepticism that the committee was, "less judicial than argumentative," especially in its dismissal of the way the *Syndicalism* pamphlet was used.[174] Despite minor notes along similar lines from government officials and press, the ultimate verdict among nearly all major institutions was that the report was reliable and its call to action of vital importance.

In the span of only weeks, one August 9th *New York Times* editorial reported, "the Interchurch steel report at one stroke reversed the public opinion of the nation."[175] Even with the quick, and overwhelming, shift in public opinion, United States Steel Corporation continued with their strategy of attempting to ride out the storm by responding largely with silence, believing that public scrutiny of the industry would eventually die down. Knowing this strategy, however, the IWM was able to successfully keep the report front and center in the American media, and therby continuing to put heavy pressure on industry officials.[176]

Second Report and Consequences to the Industry

IWM officials worked tirelessly over the months following the report's release to maintain mainstream news coverage of the issues involved. Officials in involved churches were encouraged to discuss the strike in their religious communities, and the Commission of Inquiry worked personally with government officials to author editorials demanding changes within the

[174] *Outlook*, August 11, 1920, 785.
[175] *New York Times*, August 9, 1920, 2.
[176] Ernst. *Interfaith World Movement*, 221.

industry. Religious publications throughout the nation, including *World Outlook*, the official press organ of the IWM, *The Christian Advocate*, and *The Baptist*, continued to run stories regarding conditions within the industry, and soon the IWM partnered with some of the largest union publications to publish the report in full across several months.[177] The committee additionally prepared several supplementary investigations to report on various sub-topics of the strike. In May 1921, the Industrial Relations Department released what would become the most significant of those supplementary reports, *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike,* which added information bolstering the claims of the initial report and sought to address some of the slander tactics used by the company against the original strikers. The supplementary report provided in-depth analysis of how the state of nationwide ignorance of the strike's true nature came to be, with local news and government officials as the foremost targets of criticism.

The supplementary report, unlike the original, did not shy away from harsher accusations. The original report, while heavy in attitude and criticism, had specifically shied away from direct citations of workers and witness testimony, instead choosing to compound their data into broader conclusions. Perhaps having taken a page from the playbook of the national press, however, *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike* incorporated witness testimony that spoke directly to the reader. Many of the affidavits which the Commission of Inquiry had obtained provided vivid, graphic descriptions of harassment and violence at the hands of police and company authorities while delving deeper into the actual living conditions of working men and their families. Many of the seediest revelations regarding press coverage, such as the

[177] See: Ernst, *Moment of Truth for Protestant America: Interchurch Campaigns Following World War One*, 120-125; Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*. 195.

revelation that press and police had covered up the murder of an innocent bystander and passed it off as a heroic standoff won by police, were detailed through direct witnesses. Vivid descriptions of police officers' targeting of strike leaders detailed how workers were "grabbed by the throat and struck in the face" with "blood streaming down [their] lips," while their "clothing was all dirty and bore the distinct marks of deputy's boots."[178] The Pittsburgh press and local authorities were accused of keeping a "blanket of silence held down tight over Pittsburgh,"[179] ensuring that the word on the ground could not be covered in detail. Police harassment, breaking up of worker's rallies, and threats to anyone seeking to express public sympathy with the strikers helped ensure that public opinion would not shift in a favorable direction.[180] The enforcement of such despotic conditions was only made worse by the fact that "correspondents of out-of-town newspapers signally failed to investigate."[181] As local papers had taken on the role of suppression and other papers across the nation failed to verify any facts, public opinion was able to be singularly shaped by the direction of the local press that produced unambiguously biased accounts in favor of U.S. Steel.

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[178]Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 218.
[179] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 220.
[180] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 220-225.
[181] Interchurch World Movement of North America and Bureau of Industrial Research. *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike; Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, 220.

This report was not covered as widely in the national press. Regardless, the Committee had garnered up enough support with the union press and other publishers that distribution of the supplemental report remained widespread. Word of its brutal depictions of cruelty and bias on part of the Pittsburgh press and local officials allowed for its popularity to skyrocket, especially among the horrified elite of the country who could not believe that such violations of liberty would take place in their own backyards.[182] Beyond the initial report's goal of ensuring fair coverage of the strike itself, *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike* had taken aim squarely at both the company and the press, the latter being the driving force of the committee's original formation. In many ways, the release of this report, demonstrating the slant of the press and the extent of public manipulation by company-affiliates, signaled the full conclusion of the investigation's original aims.

In addition to its scathing critiques and emphasis on the lack of progress in the industry, *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike* renewed the national interest in, and anger over, the working conditions provided by United States Steel. Organized labor had remained in the news as widespread strikes continued in post-war years, albeit at a much lower rate than 1919, and the continued coverage provided ample opportunity for the steel strike to be continually referenced. In the two years following the report, public anger over the conditions experienced by steel workers only grew, much to the chagrin of company officials.[183] Throughout 1922, facing continued public pressure and increasing threats from government officials of federal investigations, the United States Steel Corporation slowly conceded the demands of its

[182] Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 183.
[183] Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement and the Great Steel Strike of 1919-1920," 230.

laborers. The first fundamental shift in the industry was the end of the twelve-hour workday which, according to false company testimony in Senatorial investigations, had long been phased out of the industry. The second most controversial policy, the seven-day work week, was phased out soon after. Whether these shifts were caused primarily by public pressure or threats from government officials of additional investigations is a matter of speculation, but either way, it is fair to conclude that these changes would not have been possible without the publication and reception of the Committee's report.

The IWM's reports and the public pressure those reports had generated directly resulted in the end of both the twelve-hour workday seven-day week in the American steel industry, the two conditions which had motivated a substantial amount of the discontent underlying the strike. The achievement of these goals should be understood as nothing less than monumental. Despite these changes, public pressure did not seem to slow. The report's revelation that over half of workers made wages well below minimum levels of living continued to stimulate public outcry. Furthermore, the use of industrial spies to undermine the efforts of organized labor continued to attract attention, especially in union papers.[184]

By the year's end despite the strike's collapse, U.S. Steel had been forced to cede to nearly every original demand of the strike,.[185] Workers had achieved updated safety conditions as well as lasting wage increases. Nevertheless, the relationship between the steel corporation and the formally organized unions remained rocky at best in the years which followed. While it would be a stretch to claim that collective bargaining was fully recognized, steel workers were

[184] Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 176.
[185] Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 177.

ultimately granted limited power in voicing their concerns, and unions were granted more assured stability (though not all fully recognized by the company).[186] The *Report On The Steel Strike Of 1919* and the efforts which had followed in the years after its release had achieved undeniable success in furthering the goals of organized labor, and the IWM had succeeded in their initial mission to provide more accurate findings to the American public. Unfortunately for the IWM, this success would be their grandest achievement.

After the initial high point of its founding, the Interchurch World Movement began receiving criticism from all angles. The financial goals of the IWM, and the extravagance of events they became affiliated with, won them trickling condemnation throughout early 1920 from both press and churchmen alike. The financial focus of the institution had marked them as "materialistic" and "flippant" among detractors.[187] As it became apparent that the institution had been taking on massive debt, individual denominations became concerned that their own finances would be dragged down by the organization. Such concerns set off disagreements within the movement itself regarding when, where, and how money should be spent. Soon those disagreements spiraled into denominational bickering on a wider level. The cooperative spirit fostered by wartime commitments had quickly faded in the post-war years, and IWM projects, initially pitched as a series of opportunities for different churches to work together for a common goal, increasingly saw individual denominations operating independently of one another.[188] By the end of 1920, bitterness had overtaken optimism as the prevailing force

[186] Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 173.
[187] Ernst, *Moment of Truth*, 162.
[188] Ibid.

among IWM churchmen, and prominent members had taken to the General Committee floor to declare that "There was none too much unity among us anyway."[189]

While the war had initially been a uniting force across the country, demilitarization and the reality of rebuilding nations devastated by the war effort had brought on an era of disillusionment among the American public. Soldiers returning from the front had acclimated back into civilian life and the initial high of patriotic unity slowly faded into questioning resentment of American involvement. As the American people had turned slowly against the war, so too had they turned against the principles of the Interchurch World Movement.[190] The call to establish a globally dominant American Protestantism through the unity of Protestant denominations no longer seemed as achievable or admirable, and by 1922, the IWM saw many of its major projects either abandoned or passed on to other organizations. With little social or financial support, the organization was renamed and repurposed in 1923, marking the unofficial death of the Interchurch World Movement. The IWM, in very public fashion, faced complete collapse and failed to achieve their main organizational goals.

Conclusion

In the most direct sense, the Great Steel Strike and the Interchurch World Movement were both failures. The strike itself had ended in complete defeat for the workers, and the accusations of radical infiltration continued to hurt organized labor activities in the following

[189] Quote from James M. Speers found in Ernst, *Moment of Truth for Protestant America: Interchurch Campaigns Following World War One*, 163.
[190] Ernst, *Moment of Truth for Protestant America: Interchurch Campaigns Following World War One*, 163.

months. In particular, the great coal strike of 1919-1920, which had been triggered in part by the mass mobilization of striking steel workers, saw punishment from the widespread coverage of Foster's *Syndicalism* and their speculated connection to steel unions. [191] As with so many of the prominent strikes earlier in 1919, the Great Steel Strike signaled another drop in the bin of failed industrial strikes. In isolation, the strike had proven that even a united force of 350,000 striking workers could not pose a threat to industrial powers; not only had they failed in the material sense, but the strike had demoralized some of the more ambitious minds within the American labor movement.[192]

As has been demonstrated, however, these movements, although failures in the most literal sense, made a phenomenal achievement when their efforts overlapped. The *Report on the Steel Strike of 1919* had directly resulted in a mass shift of working conditions within one of the most powerful American industries. Before the events of 1919 and 1920, the United States Steel Corporation had been *the* most persistent holdout from progressive era reforms, and, as the report demonstrated, hundreds of thousands of workers had been subjected to abysmal wages and oppressive working conditions. By the end of 1922, the workers of the steel industry, aided by the support of a massive interdenominational Protestant effort, had succeeded in achieving nearly every demand for improving the standards of the industry.

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[191] The proximity of the industries in the industrial chain of supply and the high immigrant population among coal miners in striking regions left them particularly vulnerable to accusations of Red infiltration.

[192] Demoralization of American labor is covered more extensively in Soule, *The Economic History of the United States*, where the continued failures of industrial labor strikes into the post-war economic slump of the early 1920s did devastating damage to the ability of organizers to mobilize workers into action.

What is especially important to note about the role the IWM played in these events is the fact that its efficacy could not have been replicated by any other organization. To appear credible in both the press and the imagination of the American public, it would be necessary to provide extensive, hard evidence supporting the workers, have access to widespread media coverage so that such evidence could even reach the public at large, and be able to refute accusations of radical infiltration. While investigative power could have come from many sources, the reach of the IWM at this moment was built upon decades and decades of relationship building between Protestant churches, government officials, and members of the nonreligious press. In many ways, the very fabric of the Protestant "establishment" as it might be understood, was built upon these personal networks.[193] It would have been difficult for any other organization to gain serious, widespread attention from the press and government officials. Worth mentioning again is that the IWM was able to get a copy of the report directly to the desk of the President of the United States, as well as nearly every major political player in the Senate who might have any sympathies towards the conditions in the industry. The fact remains that a religious organization like the IWM was uniquely positioned to resist the Bolshevik accusation about labor.

Throughout the original strike, strikers and union leaders had repeatedly centered the conditions of striking laborers and provided evidence for their claims only to be ignored in the fervor of Red-scare mania. The report had achieved success by essentially repackaging the original message of the strikers and delivering it through the mouth of an established,

[193] Hutchinson, "Protestantism as Establishment," 6-8.

Protestant organization. The messages the IWM and the strikers were delivering to the American public were largely the same, and the opposition's accusations of radical infiltration were nearly identical. The key to this entire event, then, is in understanding the IWM as providing legitimacy where the strikers had none. The original striking workforce had been made up largely of poor, uneducated immigrants, a group which, especially at that point in American history, lacked much meaningful political authority.[194] It is no wonder, then, that the moment unsympathetic media, business interests, and government officials questioned their true motivations, the public turned immediately against the workers. The IWM, however, faced no such crisis. For decades and centuries up to this moment, Protestant churches had been staples of American society, and they had enough established authority to brush off accusations of radicalism and Bolshevism as a direct result.

Social change in the moment of the post-war years required, above all else, the support of the public, a fact that steel companies and press knew all too well. The only condition which would allow for a fundamental shift in company policy was overwhelming public pressure upon both government and company officials. The only conditions which would allow for such overwhelming public pressure were a tested, trusted authority to inform, motivate, and mobilize the American people to such action. Ultimately, that is the role the IWM was able to fill. The social weight of Protestant social leaders outweighed that of the secular press and steel corporation, and the unique religious identity of the IWM's leadership left the organization one of few groups mostly immune from accusations of Bolshevik infiltration. By leveraging their

[194] Adamic. *Dynamite. The Story of Class Violence in America*, 36.

authority and overwhelming social standing, the IWM was able to change public perception, and it was *this* shift which proved vital in actualizing the change workers had been seeking.

The Steel Strike and the IWM, despite their failures, demonstrate nuances in the ability for social movements to achieve real change. While both movements eventually collapsed because of their lack of sustained public support, it was the nationwide alteration of public opinion which allowed for their greatest successes.

The Great Steel Strike thus demonstrates the importance that the shaping of public perception played in the ultimate successes of organized labor. This is not to say that the actual demonstration of organized labor, the strike itself, had nothing to do with the improvement of conditions within the industry; instead, the strike's collapse demonstrates how even a powerfully organized and prominently backed organizing campaign can fail when public winds shift against it. Even facing such a seemingly hopeless situation, however, the IWM's involvement in the aftermath of the strike proved that the causes of organized labor do not have to stand alone. Whether a project as ambitious as the Interchurch World Movement of North America could ever succeed remains to be seen, and it is entirely possible that the IWM's involvement in a labor demonstration as substantial as the Great Steel Strike was a phenomenon which could never again be replicated. After all, the conditions which allowed for a mass unity of Protestant denominations to shift the ties of anti-unionism in a major American industry were extraordinary, even in a moment of history defined by its extraordinary nature. Regardless of its exact replicability, the Interchurch World Movement's relationship to the Great Steel Strike of 1919 is a powerful historical reminder of just how significant public

support and organizing can be in affecting real societal change, even when the odds and institutions seem unwaveringly stacked in favor of the current order.

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