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**FROM BOHEMIANISM TO RADICALISM: THE ART AND POLITICAL CONTEXT
OF THE *LIBERATOR*, 1918-1924**

By

Antoniette Galotola

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York

2000

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in Art History at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York in satisfaction for the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract**FROM BOHEMIANISM TO RADICALISM: THE ART AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF
THE *LIBERATOR*, 1918-1924****By****Antoniette Galotola****Adviser: Professor Marlene Park**

This dissertation seeks to broaden the scope and role of the politically active artist and intellectual during the 1920s. The *Liberator*, an American cultural and political magazine, was among the most important venues for artists and writers of the 1920s featuring the work of such prominent artists as Stuart Davis, Thomas Hart Benton, Hugo Gellert, Käthe Kollwitz, George Grosz, Reginald Marsh, and Diego Rivera. While scholars of American social history and literature have developed studies during the inter-war period, there remains a large gap in the field of art historical research. The *Liberator* was published from March 1918 to October 1924, a time of great political change, marked by the end of World War I and the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution. The *Liberator* will be viewed as a microcosm of the socially conscious American artist's response to the political events that transformed history between 1918 and 1924. While maintaining its character as an independent voice for radical intellectuals of the 1920s, the *Liberator* was committed to social change, and its contributors pioneered the concept of proletarian art, contributed to the ongoing debate on the relationship between art and politics, the conflicting objectives of artistic merit versus political message, as well as what constituted an indigenous American art.

My methodology for this study will be interdisciplinary: situating the *Liberator* in its social, historical, cultural and artistic context. To structure the discussion, certain selected themes and artists will serve to demonstrate the ideological policies and editorial goals of the magazine. The first chapter, "Framing the *Liberator*" will provide the historical and cultural background,

chronicle the genesis of the publication, its history, editorial policy and distinctive differences from its predecessor, the *Masses*. The second chapter, "Patrons and Policy" will concentrate on the financial supporters of the publication and the art editorial policy of each of its seven editors (Max Eastman, Floyd Dell, Crystal Eastman, Claude McKay, Mike Gold, Joseph Freeman and Robert Minor), as well as a description of Soviet art policy as it affected the magazine. The third chapter, "The Artists" will examine the work of Lydia Gibson, William Gropper, Robert Minor and Boardman Robinson. The fourth chapter, "Defining Bolshevism in America" will concentrate on international events that shaped American radicalism, specifically that of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent Spartacist revolt in Germany. The fifth chapter, "The *Liberator's* Response to Communism in America," addresses the effects of the revolutionary model of Soviet Russia on the national agenda. The establishment in America of the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party in 1919, and the subsequent Palmer Raids or "red scare" of 1919 to 1920 will be examined. The impact of the Communist movement on African Americans, censorship and labor became areas of concern for the publication and are also discussed in the chapter. The conclusion of the dissertation, "The Legacy of the *Liberator*: Confrontation Between Bohemianism and Radicalism" evaluates the status of the *Liberator* and its subsequent impact on the cultural and political activities which determined a socially relevant art of the late 1920s and 1930s.

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I am grateful to the many librarians, scholars, and peers who offered important information, feedback and led me in the right direction. Of particularly note is Andrew H. Lee from the Tamiment Institute Library at New York University who allowed me to photograph the fragile originals of the *Liberator*; the staff of librarians from the Lilly Library at Indiana University, particularly Helena Walsh; and the Reference Center for Marxist Studies staff for opening their minds and doors to me.

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INTRODUCTION

*"The Liberator had one foot in bohemia, the other in the revolutionary movement. For us bohemia represented fantasy, the movement reality."*¹

The *Liberator*, an American cultural and political magazine was published from March 1918 to October 1924, a time of great political change, marked by the end of World War I and the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution. Political experimentation, utopian aspirations, and new relationships between art and society accompanied the destruction wrought by the war and Revolution of the Old Order in Europe. During its seven years of existence, the New York-based monthly attempted to balance politics and culture by providing graphic art, which varied from scathing attacks on capitalists to lighthearted scenes of leisure. Among the long list of prominent artists who appeared on its pages were George Bellows, Stuart Davis, Adolf Dehn, Hugo Gellert, William Gropper, George Grosz, Käthe Kollwitz, Reginald Marsh, Robert Minor, Diego Rivera, Boardman Robinson, Maurice Sterne and Art Young. In 1923 the *Liberator* was turned over to the Workers' Party, the official name of the Communist party of America. The magazine shifted from idealistic theory toward a communist line, until ultimately in 1924 it merged with the *Labor Herald* and *Soviet Russia Pictorial* to become the *Worker's Monthly*.²

¹ Joseph Freeman, *An American Testament: A Narrative of Rebels and Romantics* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936), 292.

² Throughout this dissertation, the term "communism" in lowercase will be used when referring to its general theoretical principles, but in uppercase when denoting the specific organized political movement. The same distinction applies to the term "socialism." Communism and socialism were variants of Marxism. Marxism adopted the political and economic ideas of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, specifically a system of thought in which the concept of class struggle plays a primary role in understanding the development from the allegedly bourgeois oppression under capitalism to a classless society. While both the socialist and communists were committed to Marxism, the Communist movement was distinguished from the Socialist movement by its insistence that the transition to socialism required the leadership of a disciplined party of professional revolutionaries. See Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 2. For a full discussion, see chapter five.

As the title of this dissertation suggests, the *Liberator* represents the transformation of the American radical from bohemian to political activist.³ The early *Liberator* circle of intellectuals representing New York's Greenwich Village bohemia sincerely revolted against the confines of outward traditions, and were interested in the many forms of socialism, genuinely desiring to ameliorate social injustice. However, bohemians were rarely active revolutionaries in the field of politics; they sought change, but their support was inconsistent. After the initial enthusiasm generated by the Russian revolution, these bohemians were confronted with the practical realities of revolutionary change and were forced to decide precisely what their beliefs were. Many socialists found themselves torn between the prewar idealism and the postwar reality of actualizing that change. Artists of the *Liberator* represented the struggle of the bohemian artist-intellectual to define a role for art in society and for themselves in the 1920s.

This dissertation will trace the evolution of the *Liberator* through an examination of its illustrations; in so doing, it will contribute to a re-evaluation of the role of the American artist in early twentieth century art and help to define the politically committed artist. I plan to establish the magazine and its artist-illustrator contributors as the foundation of politically relevant art of the 1930s. Within this context, the *Liberator* will be viewed as a microcosm of the socially

³ In France, "bohemian" originally referred to wandering gypsies who came from Bohemia, a central European region. In the nineteenth century, bohemian came to refer to an intellectual revolt against the confines of established society resulting in the creation of intellectual community. In addition to the intellectual who is against convention, tradition and social injustice, the evolving definition of the term also includes the intellectual who is concerned but not active. See Frederick Hoffman, *The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), 24. By contrast, "radical," as used in this paper, pertains to the individual who is actively involved in left-wing political doctrine designed to overthrow the current system of government through extreme reforms and/or revolutionary change. Radicalism refers to the doctrines or practices of radicals. The term "left" or "left-wing" is adopted in American political scholarship to denote people or groups who advocate liberal, often radical measures to effect change in the established order. In contrast, the "right" or "right-wing" advocate the adoption of conservative or reactionary measures. The term "lyrical left" is sometimes used in connection with the prewar bohemian radicals. See John Diggins, *The American Left in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1973), 96.

conscious American artist's response to the political events that transformed history between 1918 and 1924.

Scholarship addressing the socially engaged American artist privileges the period before the *Liberator*, namely the Ashcan school, or the period following the *Liberator*, Social Realism of the 1930s. While scholars of American social history have developed studies of radical and leftist writers and intellectuals during the inter-war period, few have devoted studies to the artist or political cartoonist. Aside from Milton Brown's seminal survey of 1955, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression*, literature from this period focuses on the influence of European modernism. Brown recognized the significance of magazine illustration and the graphic media as the only acceptable formats to the socially committed artist of the 1920s: "the importance of these journals was not only that they were illustrated by so many of our best artists, though that, of course, gives them intrinsic value, but that they fostered the development of a critical realism which could grow nowhere else."⁴ Donald Drew Egbert's 1967 study, *Socialism and American Art*, traced the influence of Marxist theory on American culture from the nineteenth century to the 1930s.⁵ His study provided an informed background to the socially engaged artist, particularly with regard to the role of art and propaganda. The ongoing debate between art and propaganda, becomes another critical aspect of the art of the *Liberator*, particularly after 1923 when it began to propagandize specific communist agendas. The 1997 publication of Virginia Halgestein Marquardt's *Art and Journals on the Political Front, 1910-1940* provides a broad analysis of politically affiliated magazines. The chapter, "Art on the Left in the United States, 1918-1937," developed from her 1993 essay in *Art Journal* "Art on the Political Front in America: From the *Liberator* to *Art Front*," the first

⁴ Milton Brown, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 190.

⁵ Donald Drew Egbert, *Socialism and American Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

scholarly examination of political illustrations in American journals spanning the late 1910s to the 1930s.⁶ While the *Liberator* is among several journals studied, Marquardt's essay provides an important analysis of the formulation of revolutionary and proletarian art developed in journals. Marquardt studies the dual goals of a politically active art and the persistent desire to maintain an indigenous American art. Her analysis substantiates my argument that the *Liberator* pioneered proletarian art in America and simultaneously sought to preserve a distinctly American form of expression.

Not surprisingly, there have been no published academic studies on the *Liberator*. When discussed at all, the magazine is relegated to that of a gratuitous appendage to its more popular forerunner, the *Masses* (1911-1917). So much has the *Liberator* been eclipsed by history in favor of its predecessor, that at times, the *Masses* is used when the author is actually referring to the *Liberator*, creating inaccuracies and difficulty in ascertaining accurate information. As the acknowledged successor to the *Masses*, the *Liberator* preserved most of the same editorial staff of writers and artists. Among them were Max Eastman as the executive editor, John Reed, Floyd Dell, Robert Minor, Boardman Robinson and Art Young. The literature on the *Masses* is therefore basic to my study.

Over the years, the *Masses* has received considerable attention, particularly during and after the 1960s. One of the earliest scholarly examinations of the magazine was John Waite's 1951 dissertation, "*The Masses: 1911-1917, A Study in American Rebellion.*"⁷ This interdisciplinary study covering feminism, labor and reform, religion, literature, political history and a chapter on the artists provided much of the groundwork for studies that followed.

⁶ Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt, "Art on the Political Front in America: From the *Liberator* to *Art Front*," *Art Journal* (Spring 1993): 72-8, and *Art and Journals on the Political Front, 1910-1940* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997).

⁷ John Waite, "*The Masses: 1911-1917, A Study in American Rebellion*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1951).

Subsequently, various facets of the magazine have been examined, beginning with William O'Neill's 1966 *Echoes of Revolt: The Masses 1911-17*, an anthology of selected writings and reproductions which included an essay by Max Eastman, the editor of both the *Masses* and *Liberator*. O'Neill's book serves as an example of Cold War anti-Communist bias which insisted on presenting the period of the *Masses* as a nostalgic and sentimental look back at the "innocent" days before the Revolution. This is also the case with William O'Neill's *The Last Romantic: A Life of Max Eastman* and Robert E. Humphrey's *Children of Fantasy: The First Rebels of Greenwich Village*.⁸ As a result, early scholarship on the American left often misinterpreted radicalism of the prewar period as ingenious and ineffectual.

Much of the literature on the *Masses* circle takes a literary or historical approach to the magazine: for instance Leslie Fishbein's *Rebels of Bohemia* of 1982 and, more recently, Thomas Maik's, *The Masses Magazine 1910-1917: Odyssey of an Era*. Other studies focus on specific issues, such as Cynthia Ann Bolger Schmidt's dissertation, "Socialist-Feminism: Max Eastman, Floyd Dell and Crystal Eastman."⁹ Of broader scope and of particular significance for my research is Melissa Nickle's 1996 dissertation, "Max Eastman and the Greenwich Village Left, 1900-1929," which provides a comprehensive look at the period without privileging the *Masses*. While her emphasis is on writers, she challenges previous studies of the Greenwich Village left as an isolated episode in American radicalism that had no long-term significance. Nickle points out that many studies of the modernist period end with America's entry into World War I, thus

⁸ According to Zurier, William Phillips, an editor of the *Partisan Review* accused O'Neill of making the presentation "too carefully packaged." See Rebecca Zurier, *Art for the Masses: A Radical Magazine and Its Graphics, 1911-1917* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 68. See William O'Neill, *Echoes of Revolt: The Masses 1911-17* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966); O'Neill, *The Last Romantic: A Life of Max Eastman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Robert E. Humphrey, *Children of Fantasy: The First Rebels of Greenwich Village* (New York: Wiley, 1978).

⁹ Leslie Fishbein, *Rebels of Bohemia: The Radicals of the Masses, 1911-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Thomas Maik, *The Masses Magazine 1910-1917: Odyssey of an Era* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994); and Cynthia Ann Bolger Schmidt "Socialist-Feminism: Max Eastman, Floyd Dell and Crystal Eastman" (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1983).

neglecting the response of intellectual's to the Bolshevik revolution and as result, "how modernist impulses shaped the politics of revolutionary socialism in America." Her observations are important to my developing analysis of the period, particularly with regard to the *Liberator's* identification with Bolshevism, the subsequent impact of Eastman and the *Liberator* circle, the intersection between modernism and political activism, and the continuity between prewar and postwar radicalism.¹⁰

Among the literature that deals directly with the graphics of the *Masses* is John Fitzgerald's *Art and Politics: Cartoonists of the Masses and Liberator*, which focuses on five artists: John Sloan, Robert Minor, Art Young, K.R. Chamberlain and Maurice Becker. This arbitrary selection neglects all of the female illustrators and excludes the new staff after 1922. Fitzgerald's work, however, is useful for providing information on politically committed artists never before studied.¹¹ Rebecca Zurier's *Art for the Masses* grew out of an exhibition of *Masses* art organized by the Yale University Art Gallery in 1984-86. Her book is not limited to individual artists; instead it details the history, origins, influence, graphic style, and the relationship of the visual art to its editorial goals. While work by the Ashcan school is emphasized, Zurier raises some issues that will resurface in my examination of the *Liberator*: the pluralistic, eclectic policies of the Bohemian intellectuals; the dichotomy between cultural and political expression; and the resistance of the editorial staff to European modernism. Aimee Nicole Marcereau's 1995 thesis, "The Avant-Garde in America, 1911-1917: A Study of the *Masses*, *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Collier's*," diverges from traditional approaches to the *Masses* by asserting that both the graphic imagery and the radicalism of the magazine were part

¹⁰ Melissa Nickle, "Max Eastman and the Greenwich Village Left, 1900-1929" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Irvine, 1996), 9-10. Bolshevik is the name for the majority party that took over the Russian government in 1917; Bolshevism pertains to the doctrines adopted by the Bolsheviks. Even though Bolshevism was renamed communism in 1919, the continued use of the term persisted until the mid-1920s. For a full discussion of Bolshevism, see chapter four.

¹¹ John Fitzgerald, *Art and Politics: Cartoonists of the Masses and Liberator* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1973).

of American avant-garde modernism.¹² It will be my contention that the artists saw themselves as both modern and political and the magazine itself promoted the art of the politically avant-garde art.

Scholars are in agreement that the *Liberator* deviated from the *Masses* in that the *Liberator* moved toward a more pointedly communist view. My intention is not to challenge the position of the *Masses*, but to examine the new set of conditions, which altered the nature of the magazine. Fitzgerald states, “since artists on the *Liberator* were faced with the example of socialist Russia, the tensions between artistic sensibility and social reconstruction were far greater than on the *Masses*.”¹³ This dissertation will challenge the dismissive treatment of the *Liberator* by most scholars of the *Masses*, who have argued that because the *Liberator* became more politicized it lacked the quality of artistic representation of its predecessor. The proletarian example promulgated in Russia challenged artists to direct political action. The Soviet revolutionary model provided the artists of the *Liberator* with a clearer objective than the vague socialist concerns of the *Masses*. To a large extent, the *Liberator* and its artists marked the shift from the pluralistic, indeterminate ideology of pre-Russian Revolution American socialism to that of the hard-line communism of the depression era. Even though the majority of illustrators and contributors to the *Liberator* were not communists, their socially relevant work reflected Marxist ideology. With the demise of the *Liberator*, many of the artists continued their social protest work in the 1920s and 1930s via political journals, most notably the *New Masses* (1926-1934), in the existent artistic social organizations, most eminently the John Reed Clubs, and in Social Realism itself.

¹² Aimee Nicole Marcereau, “The Avant-Garde in America, 1911-1917: A Study of the *Masses*, *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Collier's*,” (M.A. thesis, Michigan State University, 1995).

¹³ Fitzgerald, 229.

The art of the 1930s is substantially documented. Most pertinent to my dissertation is David Shapiro's *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon*, which broadens the range of influences in Social Realism. Shapiro asserts that it was not the economic depression alone that caused American social protest painting of the 1930s but also the threat of Fascism, the Second World War and the role of communism. He writes, "social realism might never have become a major cultural force if it had not been actively promoted by Marxist artists, critics and theoreticians."¹⁴ In addition, Shapiro's book reprints many significant documents, such as the John Reed Club Manifesto, pertinent to my study.

Despite the loss of all office records and subscription lists for both the *Masses* and *Liberator*, a wealth of primary source documentation by artists and writers who have recorded their experiences in memoirs and autobiographies is available. Unlike the secondary sources, these authors do not favor the *Masses* over the *Liberator*, and in some cases, consider the *Liberator* a more important magazine. Published accounts range from artists such as Art Young, to writers such as Floyd Dell and Claude McKay. Max Eastman, who was one of the leading leftist intellectuals in America, was the editor and owner of the *Liberator* from 1918-1922. As a prolific writer he published extensively; of particular significance to this topic is *Love and Revolution: My Journey Through an Epoch*, which focuses on the period of the *Liberator* up to 1941.¹⁵ Eastman was a meticulous record keeper and his archives, housed at the Lilly Library at the University of Indiana in Bloomington, include correspondence, manuscripts and press clippings. Of particular relevance were press clippings from obscure local newspapers commenting on his lecture circuit of 1919 during the "red scare" and his correspondence with the actress Florence Deshon of 1919 to 1922. Joseph Freeman was one of the editors of the *Liberator*

¹⁴ David Shapiro, *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon* (New York: Ungar Publishing Co., 1973), 18.

¹⁵ Art Young, *On My Way: Being the Book of Art Young in Text and Picture* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1928); Young, *Art Young: His Life and Times* (New York: Sheridan House, 1939); Floyd Dell, *Homecoming: An Autobiography* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1933); Claude McKay, *A Long Way*

from 1922 to 1923, during the critical years when ownership was transferred from Eastman to the Workers' Party. Freeman wrote *An American Testament: A Narrative of Rebels and Romantics* (1936), which is one of the finest personal narratives deriving from the *Liberator* circle and contains valuable information on the role of the Workers' Party. In addition, *An American Testament* stands as a central text in the history of the American literary left, containing at its core Freeman's autobiographical account of becoming a communist and personal struggle between the roles of artist and activist.

In addition to primary source documentation, a few noteworthy biographies of some of the editors of the *Liberator* have been published. Milton Cantor's 1970 biography of Max Eastman, Douglas Clayton's 1994 biography of Floyd Dell, Blanche Wiesen Cook's collected anthology of Crystal Eastman's writing, and Wayne F. Cooper's biography of Claude McKay.¹⁶ Even though a considerable amount of material on the major figures involved with the *Liberator* circle have been published, a recurring problem was the lack of pertinent information regarding explicit communist-related activities. Dates are inaccurate, information misleading, or what was often the case, simply not included, particularly from sources written during the Cold War period.

The bulk of my research, of both a political and artistic nature, derives from a careful examination of the *Liberator* itself. Most research libraries, however, do not have the complete original copies of the *Liberator*, and in most cases, the issues are in poor condition. It therefore became imperative to visit several institutions. The Tamiment Collection Institute Library at New York University contains most of the original issues of the *Liberator*, as well as unpublished

From Home (New York: Arno Press, 1937); and Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution: My Journey Through an Epoch* (New York: Random House, 1964).

¹⁶ Milton Cantor, *Max Eastman* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc. 1970); Douglas Clayton, *Floyd Dell: The Life and Times of an American Rebel* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994); Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Cook, *Toward the Great Change: Crystal and Max Eastman on Feminism, Antimilitarism and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Wayne F. Cooper, *Claude McKay Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); and Cooper, *The Passion of Claude McKay: Selected Poetry and Prose, 1912-1948* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973).

material in “vertical files” pertaining to labor leaders and artists involved with the magazine. The Reference Center for Marxist Studies in New York also houses some of the original copies of the *Liberator*, as well as other radical journals such as the *New Masses*, the *Labor Herald* and the *Workers Monthly*. Lastly, the Special Collection at the University of Washington in Seattle also contains original copies of the *Liberator* as well as obscure magazines difficult to locate in their original that include *Blast*, *Dial* and *Modern Quarterly*.

My methodology for this study will be interdisciplinary: situating the *Liberator* in its social, historical, cultural and artistic context. The dominant material for the inter-war period centers on the study of its literature and writers. Adam McKible’s recent dissertation, “The Space and Place of Modernism: The Little Magazine in New York,” examines four magazines, including the *Liberator*, in an attempt to redefine the origins of American literary modernism. Noteworthy to my discussion is chapter five, “Beauty in Our Slaughter-Fold: The Gold-McKay *Liberator*” which demonstrates how Claude McKay and Mike Gold, co-editors in 1922, shifted the editorial direction of the magazine. The year 1922 would become crucial for the publication as it moved toward a more politically active agenda. Marcus Klein’s *Foreigners: The Making of American Literature 1900-1940* provides a concise and rich source for literary radicalism, specifically chapter two, “Tradition on the Left.” The chapter discusses experimental journals and contributes pertinent information on the impact of the Russia Revolution. Another important source for literary radicalism in America is James Gilbert’s *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America*, which traces the origins of radicalism from the early part of the century to the 1930s with special emphasis on radical periodicals and magazines. Klein and Gilbert deviate from the oft cited and authoritative source for literary radicalism, Daniel Aaron’s

1961, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism*, which argues that the *Liberator* had no enduring influence and was not successful at integrating art and politics.¹⁷

The list of publications on the Russian Revolution, the Communist movement and the American left is extensive. Particularly useful for background information was Philip S. Foner's *The Bolshevik Revolution: Its Impact on American Radicals, Liberals, and Labor*, which provides a useful chronological compilation of reprinted articles from the radical press including a summary of political events. Bernard Johnpoll's *A Documentary History of the Communist Party of the United States* in eight volumes, is an ambitious endeavor to provide an authoritative critical history of the American communist movement based upon original primary source documents. Harvey Klehr and John E. Haynes' *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* traces the history of communism in the United States from 1919 to 1929 and offers incisive analysis. James Weinstein's *Ambiguous Legacy: The Left in American Politics* includes information on the emergence of Communist parties in America, their relations with Russia and a chapter on African American involvement. Louis F. Post, the United States Assistant Secretary of Labor from 1913-1921 chronicled his experience during the Palmer Raids in *The Deportations Delirium of Nineteen-Twenty* and provided valuable first-hand accounts of the tumultuous period.¹⁸

Due to the extent of the subject, my approach will be limited to specific themes and artists. The first chapter, "Framing the *Liberator*" will provide the historical and cultural

¹⁷ Adam McKible, "The Space and Place of Modernism: The Little Magazine in New York" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998); Marcus Klein, *Foreigners: The Making of American Literature 1900-1940* (University of Chicago Press, 1981); James Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); and Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961).

¹⁸ Philip S. Foner, *The Bolshevik Revolution: Its Impact on American Radicals, Liberals, and Labor* (New York: International Publishers, 1967); Bernard Johnpoll, *A Documentary History of the Communist Party of the United States*, 8 vols. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1994); James Weinstein, *Ambiguous Legacy: The Left in American Politics* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975); and Louis F. Post, *The Deportations Delirium of Nineteen-Twenty* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1923).

background, chronicle the genesis of the publication, its history, editorial policy and distinctive differences from the *Masses*. The chapter will establish the position of the *Liberator* in the early twentieth century's golden age of magazine publishing known as the "little renaissance." The second chapter, "Patrons and Policy" will concentrate on the financial supporters of the publication and the art editorial policy of each of its seven editors, as well as a description of Soviet art policy as it affected the magazine. The patronage consisted of benefactors such as Ellen Scripps, the millionaire heiress to the Scripps newspaper chain, Aline Barnsdall, who commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to build Hollyhock House for her California estate, and William Bross Lloyd, the "millionaire socialist" and active member of the Communist Labor Party. These patrons, most of whom were socially prominent female activists have gone unrecorded in the literature on political art in America. Through the analysis of each individual editorial policy, I plan to support my claim that the *Liberator* pioneered Marxist political art, proletarian art, and art and propaganda in America while simultaneously preserving a true cultural identity for Americans.

The third chapter, "The Artists" will examine the work of four *Liberator* artists.¹⁹ The specific technique employed by the artists will be described in this chapter, as well as a general profile of the politically active artist that include influences, education and work in other mediums. In order to provide a structure by which to explore the scope and dimensions of the publication, I will focus on the art of Lydia Gibson, William Gropper, Robert Minor and Boardman Robinson. These artists exemplify the sort of diversified illustration represented in the magazine. Lydia Gibson, who was married to Robert Minor, serves as an example of the considerable presence of female illustrators whose efforts and work remain unrecorded. Robert

¹⁹ Throughout the dissertation, the term cartoon and illustration are often used interchangeably and refer to the black and white drawings printed in the magazine. By the nineteenth century in London, the term cartoon, (derived from the Italian word, "cartone" meaning preparatory sketch for fresco) came to be widely used to designate a caricature, often satirical commentary on political and public events.

Minor is selected for his work as editor, writer, political activist and illustrator for the magazine. Robinson and Gropper demonstrate the visual shift in the direction of the publication in what Milton Brown called the older, “symbolic” cartoon style, represented by Robinson, toward the newer style of critical, “satirical” realism represented by Gropper.

No published scholarship on the work of Lydia Gibson exists. While researching at the Reference Center for Marxist Studies in New York, I was fortunate to “stumble” upon uncatalogued material for the artist accumulated by the former secretary, Edith Needleman who was planning to write a biography of Gibson. The archival material, some donated by Gibson, is scant but includes original poetry, oil paintings, illustrations, and book reviews. Given the prominence of Robert Minor in the American Communist movement and his acknowledged technical innovation in cartoon illustration, no critical published scholarship on the artist has been published, save for one chapter in Fitzgerald’s book. In 1956 Joseph North published Minor’s biography, *Robert Minor: Artist and Crusader*.²⁰ However, North was a close personal friend of Minor and Lydia Gibson, who paid North a weekly salary while he wrote the biography in her home. In addition, North was an active member of the CPUSA (Communist Party of the United States), a *New Masses* editor, and *Daily Worker* correspondent. In the biography, North presented Minor almost exclusively as a dedicated Communist and omitted any information contrary to that position, failing to discuss Minor’s 1919 dispatches from the Soviet Union critical of the Bolsheviks and Minor’s place in Communist party factional fights.²¹

Gropper is fairly well treated in the literature. Nonetheless, most studies such as the 1994 dissertation by Norma S. Steinberg, “William Gropper: Art and Censorship from the 1930s Through the Cold War Era,” focus on his post-1925 work. The exception is Anthony Gahn’s

²⁰ Joseph North, *Robert Minor: Artist and Crusader* (New York: International Publishers, 1956).

²¹ The Robert Minor Papers at Butler Library, Special Collection at Columbia University in New York include clippings, manuscripts, some cartoons but no letters. North, who used the correspondence for

essay, "William Gropper--A Radical Cartoonist: His Early Career, 1897-1928," which provides some important biographical data on Gropper's early career. Gahn's essay was based in part on his dissertation, "The America of William Gropper, Radical Cartoonist," which includes archival information and interviews with the artist. However, Gahn offers little information on the artist's political involvement and refrains from attaching any explicit radical meaning to Gropper's work, thus portraying a fragmented early portrait of the artist.²² Aside from a 1964 collection of work on Boardman Robinson by Albert Christ-Janer, no critical published scholarship on the artist has been published.²³ Much of the remaining research material for the artists came from several sources in New York that included the Archives of American Art (John Barber, Maurice Becker, Adolf Dehn, William Gropper papers), the Special Collection Print Division at the New York Public Library (Robert Minor, Boardman Robinson, and Art Young), and the Artists Files at the Museum of Modern Art (Hugo Gellert, William Gropper, and Boardman Robinson).

The fourth chapter, "Defining Bolshevism in America" will concentrate on international events that shaped American radicalism. Again, to structure the discussion, certain selected themes will serve to demonstrate the ideological policies and editorial goals of the magazine. The single most important political event determining the editorial policy of the *Liberator* was the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The *Liberator*, renowned for disseminating information from the Soviet Union and distinguished for being "the only magazine of national importance that had direct and constant access to Russian information," was given exclusive rights to John Reed's

Minor's biography, when questioned by Fitzgerald, claimed he had no knowledge of their whereabouts. See Fitzgerald, 117, n35.

²² Norma S. Steinberg, "William Gropper: Art and Censorship from the 1930s Through the Cold War Era" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1994); Anthony Gahn, "William Gropper--A Radical Cartoonist: His Early Career, 1897-1928" *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 54 no. 2 (April 1970): 111-144; and Gahn, "The America of William Gropper, Radical Cartoonist" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, New York, 1966). A recent dissertation, Patricia Phagen, "William Gropper and *Freiheit*: A Study of His Political Cartoons, 1924-1935" (Ph.D. diss., The Graduate Center, City University of New York, 1999) has currently been completed, but is not yet available.

²³ Albert Christ-Janer, *Boardman Robinson* (University of Chicago Press, 1964).

first-hand account of the Russian Revolution.²⁴ Published in the 1919 issues, it became the nucleus for Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919). The Spartacist revolt in Germany of 1919 was another revolutionary example to spur visual and journalistic coverage. Minor, a correspondent in Berlin during the insurrection published his report in the August 1919 issue. This chapter will also explore the published illustrations of both Käthe Kollwitz and George Grosz and the relevance of their postwar German scenes to the magazine.

The fifth chapter, "The *Liberator's* Response to Communism in America," addresses the effects of the revolutionary model of Soviet Russia on the national agenda. The establishment in America of the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party in 1919, and the subsequent Palmer Raids or "red scare" of 1919 to 1920 will be examined. In January of 1920 alone, over six thousand alleged radicals, including labor leaders, anarchists and radical immigrants were arrested for subversive activities. In this repressive climate, censorship and freedom of speech became areas of concern for the publication and are discussed in the chapter. The impact of the Communist movement on African Americans was a defining aspect of American radicalism. The name for the magazine was inspired by William Lloyd Garrison's nineteenth century anti-abolitionist magazine, the *Liberator*. Further, the *Liberator* editorial staff consisted of Claude McKay, a socialist African American poet and Minor, who was entrusted with "Negro" rights in the Communist party. African American issues were thus given considerable attention, particularly as they related to communism. This dissertation will establish the *Liberator* as one of the earliest publications with a predominantly white audience, addressing the concerns of African Americans.

The conclusion of the dissertation, "The Legacy of the *Liberator*: Confrontation Between Bohemianism and Radicalism" evaluates the status of the *Liberator* and its subsequent impact on

²⁴ Maurice Klein, *Foreigners: The Making of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 60.

the cultural and political activities which determined a socially relevant art of the late 1920s and 1930s. For the *Liberator* circle, the year 1922 marked the shift from utopian idealism to political commitment; the original editor Max Eastman left the magazine, the initial enthusiasm following the Russian Revolution had dissipated, and the former *Masses* circle had dispersed. The artwork gradually shifted from passive narrative, in the early years of the *Liberator*, to images designed to stir, provoke, incite and attack in its later years, and as such anticipated the 1930s rallying call, “art as a weapon” for the class struggle. In addition to introducing the concept of proletarian art, the *Liberator* also stressed the idea of art used for propaganda. Included in the conclusion will be a critical assessment of the magazine's response to modernism, the integration of art and politics, and the ultimate contribution of the magazine.

This dissertation will reconstruct the role of the artist in the 1920s, with the contention that the *Liberator* and its artists provided a model for active engagement in art and politics that would unfold in the 1930s. It will also address the circle of artists, writers, activists, patrons and collectors who helped support and define American culture of the 1920s. The absence of literature on these artists as well as the lack of critical assessment of this period underscores the need for this study. My intention is to shed light not only on a momentous epoch in American history but, more specifically, on its socially committed artists who have not received appropriate critical attention. In its commitment to international reportage, the magazine was instrumental in introducing the work of the two most prominent Communists of their time: George Grosz (whose work first appeared in the March, 1922 issue) and Diego Rivera (December 1923) to the American public. In 1921, it was among the first publications in the United States to address the cultural issues faced by the newly developing Soviet state, publishing Irwin Granich's (Mike Gold) seminal article, “Towards Proletarian Art.” The *Liberator* and its contributors pioneered the ongoing debate on the relationship between art and politics, the conflicting objectives of artistic merit versus political message, as well as what constituted an indigenous American art.

This study will provide the foundation for an expanded discourse on the identity of American artists of the 1920s.

CHAPTER ONE

FRAMING THE *LIBERATOR*

*"We issue the Liberator into a world whose possibilities of freedom and life for all are now certainly immeasurable"*¹

*"The birth number of the Liberator was like rain from heaven to a host of thirsting minds."*²

The *Liberator* (1918-1924) was an artistic, literary and political magazine that included the work of some of the finest illustrators in America during the 1920s. The New York based monthly was one of the most important documents of American radicalism and became a critical bridge between the bohemian idealism of the pre-war generation and the radical activism following World War I. While the magazine served as an unofficial organ of the Socialist Party during the war, championed the Russian Revolution after the war, and ultimately aligned itself with the Communist movement, it avoided any explicit partisan affiliation during the first six years of its existence. Unlike most historical accounts of the 1920s, which dismiss the immediate postwar period as one of disenchantment, referred to as "the lost generation," the *Liberator* circle of artists responded with redoubled dedication to radical alternatives and continued critiques of bourgeois institutions.³ Set apart from the apolitical lost generation, the *Liberator* staff identified with the Bolsheviks and interpreted events in Russia as the fulfillment of their own program, enabling American radicals to maintain hope and sustain their culture throughout a period of

¹ [Crystal Eastman] "Statement of Purpose," *Liberator* 1, no. 1 (March 1918): 3.

² Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 78.

³ Although Gertrude Stein has been credited with the term "lost generation" to suggest those who fought in the war and were now lost, the term actually originated with Ernest Hemingway as an unpublished introductory note to *The Sun Also Rises* in 1925. See Frederic J. Svoboda, *Hemingway and the Sun Also Rises: The Crafting of a Style* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1983), 106-108.

crisis. Reflecting the early involvement of American intellectuals with the Russia Revolution of 1917, and the newly formed Communist movement, the *Liberator* was the only magazine in America at this time devoted to the arts. The *Liberator* and its circle would turn to a revolutionary agenda, which was more focused and more radicalized than its better-known predecessor, the *Masses*.

World War I began unexpectedly in July 1914 as a result of the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. The country accused Serbia of the murder and made demands that foreshadowed military action. Along with this intrigue were the pre-existing rivalries and alliances between Germany, Britain, France, Japan and Russia over land in the Balkans, Africa and Asia that more than once brought them to the brink of war. At first, the Wilson administration urged neutrality, maintaining its isolationist policy but in 1917 the United States entered the war, aligning itself with the Allied Powers of Great Britain and France against Germany. Radical groups such as the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) and the Socialist Party urged neutrality and were firmly opposed not only to the war but also to American participation.⁴ With American entry into the war, radicals faced an unparalleled climate of suspicion, repression, and harassment. In June 1917 the United States government passed the Espionage Act and a year later the Sedition Act, giving federal authorities the power to suppress dissent. The hardest hit were labor leaders from the IWW, the Socialist Party and radical periodicals. In 1917 Federal agents raided IWW offices nationwide, arresting about three hundred labor leaders. Altogether the government convicted and sentenced approximately two thousand

⁴ In the early twentieth century the three most important parties advocating workers rights were the Socialist Labor Party, formed in 1877, the Socialist Party, formed in 1901 and the IWW (also known as Wobblies), formed in 1905. The IWW, led by William Haywood was by far the most revolutionary of these organizations and championed industrial unions, organized unskilled workers, and welcomed minority and immigrant workers. See Klehr, *The American Communist Movement*, 10-13.

people for violation of the Act.⁵ The war continued until the end of November 11, 1918, bringing in its train the Communist revolution in Russia and the overthrow of monarchies in Austria-Hungary and Germany. In Russia in November 1917 revolutionary workers under Bolshevik leadership, pulled out of the war, overthrew the Czar and abolished capitalism in Russia. Throughout the world events in Russia were viewed with both terror and inspiration. For many radicals world revolution appeared imminent.

As a result of the war there was a shortage of labor and immigration was at an all time high. Labor issues became important to the American political agenda. In every year from 1916 to 1920, a higher proportion of the workforce went on strike than during any equivalent period before or since. The year 1919 can be used to suggest critical changes in the American radical movement. In 1919 four million workers went on strike. In 1919 the Socialist party splintered into three factions leading to the formation of the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party. The year 1919 was also the beginning of the notorious anti-red crusade, often referred to as the "Palmer raids" or "red scare," led by Attorney General Mitchell Palmer with the arrest and deportation of anarchists, immigrants and radicals. At its height in January 1920 there were over six thousand alleged communists arrested. Radical tensions and lynching also increased dramatically, resulting in the "Red Summer" of 1919 with an acceleration of race riots in urban centers throughout the country.⁶

Before 1917 in the United States, several radical strains co-existed that complemented one another with very little conflict. The divisions between Marxists of one persuasion and those of another were not clearly or effectively drawn. The real crisis of definition came after the war and the Russian Revolution. Radicals were forced to decide precisely what their anarchism, their

⁵ Maik, 206. The government used the Espionage Act to wage a massive campaign aimed at destroying the IWW.

⁶ For statistics and a general overview of this period, see The American Social History Project, *Who Built America?* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 3: 227.

liberalism, their radicalism or their communism meant. The question of whether to support the war, the urge to take a stand one way or the other, split the American intellectual community. The war and the Russian Revolution inserted a quality of seriousness into the bohemianism and radicalism of the New York intellectuals that had heretofore been missing. Where the unfocused and pluralistic nature of the pre-war left made it possible for labor leaders, artists and rebels to find a common ground while pursuing independent interests, such was no longer the case. The war and the Revolution became a dividing line between generations and attitudes.⁷ Joseph Freeman, radical poet, writer and one of the editors of the *Liberator*, summed up the concerns of his generation when he wrote: "For we were compelled to be conscious of every step when we grappled with unprecedented problems raised by the war, the October Revolution, the American class struggle, the melancholy capitals of postwar Europe, the fraud of a free life of Greenwich Village, the rise of the Communist party in this country, the critical relations between art and society, the transformation of love, marriage and the family."⁸ It was against this background of international change and domestic reaction that the *Liberator* came into existence.

During the decade preceding World War I, Greenwich Village became the haven for young intellectuals distressed by the social, economic and political inequities of American society. Greenwich Village bohemia before World War I had channeled European ideas in art, science, philosophy and politics into the American intellectual environment. These bohemians were interested in Marxist theory and the many forms of socialism in the broadest sense. They found no immediate conflict between modern ideas of socialism, anarchism, feminism, science and Freudianism; viewing them as linked together in a rebellion against tradition. Socialism to the radical American intellectual in the early twentieth century meant the dream of a society

⁷ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 39.

⁸ Freeman, *An American Testament*, viii.

transformed. A general atmosphere in which ideas appeared interchangeable precipitated the association of art and radical politics.

Scholarship of this period is in agreement that the 1920s were for many radicals a time of disillusionment. One of the most complex and well-known responses of the postwar American intellectual was expatriation. Unable to change society, many intellectuals felt they could do nothing but leave. In the 1920s some political radicals remained in the Village and the suburb of Croton-on-Hudson to become the custodians of the prewar tradition. For many New York intellectuals and artists, Croton became a type of Greenwich Village suburban bohemia. At the time, Croton was the last commuter stop on the train from New York City, providing the necessary access and distance from the bustling city lifestyle. At Croton stood the homes of many of the major figures associated with the *Liberator* circle including Max Eastman, Lydia Gibson and Robert Minor, Floyd Dell, John Reed, Boardman Robinson, Maurice Sterne and Mary Heaton Vorse (William Gropper moved to Croton in 1940 and Louis Lozowick in 1943).⁹ After the war, the continued importance of Greenwich Village and the growing centralization in New York of the Communist movement helped sustain and strengthen the patterns of cultural radicalism drawn before the war. The traditions begun in New York became the historical context for the nation-wide radical movement in the 1920s.

There has been a long tradition in America made up of liberals, or even radicals, of various shades of opinion who have been interested in the arts. This was true of several members of the group of artists known as "The Eight," also called the "Revolutionary Black Gang," formed in 1908 under the leadership of Robert Henri. They opposed academic traditions in art, painted realistic urban street life, and upheld modernism of one sort or another. It was largely friends of Henri and members of the Eight (particularly Arthur B. Davies) who were chiefly responsible for

⁹ For further information on Croton-on-Hudson, see Jane Northshield, *History of Croton-on-Hudson, New York*. (New York: Croton-on-Hudson Historical Society, 1976.)

putting on the Armory Show of 1913. The celebrated Armory Show introduced European modernism and abstraction to the American public and fostered the Forum Exhibition of American modernist art. Several New York artists came under the influence of Henri's and John Sloan's rejection of the academic tradition and interest in the depiction of contemporary urban life. This group of artists would later become known as the "Ashcan School." Many of these artists exhibited at the Armory Show and were also contributors to the *Masses*. In fact, the term "ash can" was coined by the cartoonist Art Young at a *Masses* staff meeting in 1916 (fig. 1).¹⁰ Several painters and illustrators in New York in the 1920s had been molded to a great extent by the Ashcan School of Henri and Sloan and also absorbed their ideas of social reform. The consequence was an art of social commitment, that is to say, a realism concerned with social events of the day. In addition, many of these artists were also involved with centers of intellectual activity such as the Modern School in Stelton, New Jersey, the Francisco Ferrer Center in New York, and the Rand School of Social Science in New York. The Ferrer Center was founded in 1909 by a group of intellectuals that included the anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman and whose instructors included George Bellows and Henri. The Rand School was founded in 1906 with an endowment from Mrs. Carrie Rand, the wealthy mother-in-law of Iowa Christian Socialist, George D. Herron. The school was the first of its kind in the United States to

¹⁰ It was not until the 1930s that the name was applied to designate the movement, see Maik, 25. For further information on the Ashcan school, Robert Henri and John Sloan, see Bennard B. Perlman, ed., *Revolutionaries of Realism: The Letters of John Sloan and Robert Henri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), Zurier et al., *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., for the National Museum of American Art, 1995), John Loughery, *John Sloan: Painter and Rebel* (New York: Holt, 1995), Perlman, *Robert Henri: His Life and Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1991) and William Innes Homer, *Robert Henri and His Circle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).

serve as a training center for labor unions and socialist organizers.¹¹

American art in the postwar period took several directions. First, the direction of artists influenced by European modernism and abstraction, best represented by those of the Stieglitz circle, Katherine Dreier's Société Anonyme, and the "machine age" aesthetic of the Precisionists. Second, the efforts of the individual artist spearheaded during this period by George Bellows, Charles Burchfield, Edward Hopper and Rockwell Kent as the continuation of the realist tradition in the more sanctified realm of "fine arts."¹² Third, realism that conveyed the African American experience, known as the Harlem Renaissance. And lastly, social and political realism derived from the circle of the Ashcan school, which continued in the work of the Social Realists of the 1930s. These were primarily the artists of the *Liberator*.

In the early twentieth century the most effective means to inform the public was through the medium of popular journalism. Illustrated popular magazines were the principle source of entertainment and information before the advent of radio and television. For the entire period from 1900 to the 1950s radical intellectuals have relied on small journals to express their ideas. Social consciousness was limited in the "fine arts" because there was no patronage and the artist instead turned to the graphic arts. American scholarship is only now beginning to examine the prominence of illustrators and the graphic artists of the postwar years of the 1920s as the voice of a nation struggling with a national identity and its social place in international events.¹³

¹¹ For a further discussion on the artistic training of the *Masses* and early *Liberator* artists, see Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 101. The Modern School in Stelton was part of the Ferrer Center. The Ferrer Center was named after the Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer (1859-1909) who was sentenced to death for his involvement with the July Revolution in Barcelona; see William Archer, *The Life, Trial and Death of Francisco Ferrer* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1911). Louis Untermeyer, one of the contributing editors of the *Liberator* was the head of the Rand School and editor of International Publishers. See Untermeyer, *From Another World: The Autobiography of Louis Untermeyer* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1939).

¹² Brown, *American Painting From the Armory Show*, 173.

¹³ The rise of the illustrated periodical began in the mid-nineteenth century and took the place of books as a primary medium for illustrations, see Steven E. Smith, Catherine A. Hastedt and Donald Dyal, ed., *American Book and Magazine Illustrators to 1920*, vol. 188 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography*

The term “little Renaissance” has been coined to describe the proliferation of small magazines in New York between 1908 to 1917. The “little magazine” provided the appropriate medium of dissent and was devoted to experimentation. These magazines were established to afford authors an outlet for works of artistic merit or experimentation that could find no place in commercial magazines. The “renaissance” in the little magazine first appeared with the founding in 1912 of Harriet Monroe’s, *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. Among scores of these periodicals, the most prominent were: *The Little Review* (1914-29), *Broom* (1921-1924), *Secession* (1922-24), *The Reviewer* (1921-1925), *The Double Dealer* (1921-1926), *The Quarter* (1925-32), *Smart Set* (1912-24), *Seven Arts* (1916-17), *Mother Earth* (1906-1917), and *The Masses* (1911-1917, Fig. 3).¹⁴

The *Liberator* emerged on the cusp of the “little renaissance,” and serves more as an example of the relatively new, but expanding radical press, undergoing a major resurgence at this time. Until World War I and especially until the Russian Revolution, the United States had very few intellectuals who were directly interested in socialism.¹⁵ It was primarily through the medium of American socialist periodicals published in New York from 1901-5 that the influence of socialism was popularized. The forerunner of the socialist oriented press was the *Comrade* founded in 1901 and edited by John Spargo and Algernon Lee. The magazine typified the early taste of American socialism via William Morris and his followers. Prior to the formation of the *Masses*, the *Comrade* was distinguished by devoting itself expressly to socialist art and literature.

(Detroit: Gale Research, 1998), xvi. For a further discussion on the importance of magazine illustration at this time, see Brown, *American Painting From the Armory Show*, 173.

¹⁴ See Arthur Frank Wertheim, *The New York Little Renaissance: Iconoclasm, Modernism, and Nationalism in American Culture, 1908-1917* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 227. At times, the term “Golden Age” of illustration is also used to describe the proliferation of magazines in America during the early twentieth century. The parent of the American little magazine was *Dial* (1840-44), edited by Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson. According to McKible, little magazines, as an often-underutilized source of analysis, were the cornerstone of literary modernism in America. See McKible, 1-24.

¹⁵ Egbert, 85.

The conjunction of radical journalism and the socialist movement had begun by 1910. Among the best known were *Appeal to Reason* (1895-1922), *The Nation* and the *New Republic* (1914+). While these magazines addressed controversial political issues of the day, and at times clashed with public opinion, their editorial policies still reflected moderate mainstream interests.

Among the more radical press, which espoused the causes and concerns of the working class, there were at least six hundred socialist periodicals published in America in the early twentieth century, excluding daily newspapers and local publications.¹⁶ During the period of the *Liberator* from 1918 to 1924, roughly eighty-five radical periodicals or magazines were published in America. Most were short-lived magazines from various facets of the labor movement or of the socialist and communist press. Often they changed ownership and titles frequently and very few were independently run and operated. The radical press were often far ahead of their times in their advocacy of social reforms and became the chief source for understanding the radical experience in America.

The Department of Justice's Lusk Committee investigation of "seditious activities" in 1919 compiled the most accurate listing of influential radical periodicals. The Lusk report lists the *Liberator* in its first table titled, "Revolutionary and Subversive Periodicals Published in New York City."¹⁷ The largest circulation under this heading was the *Forward*, a Yiddish language daily representing socialists with a circulation of 161,000. The *Crisis*, a radical African

¹⁶ Walter Goldwater, *Radical Periodicals in America 1890-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Library, 1964), vii-ix. Any thorough list of radical publications would be nearly impossible to compile. Documentation is scant, as some individuals have denied having been involved in the publication of the very periodicals which list them as editors and some organizations have denied even their existence because the radical left did not preserve or deliberately did not keep records. See Goldwater and Joseph R. Conlin, *The American Radical Press, 1880-1960* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974), 1-7.

¹⁷ The title "*Liberator*" was used for the American Negro Labor Congress publication, which ran from 1925-1932 and published in Chicago and New York, superseded by the *Negro Liberator* and later the *Harlem Liberator*. There was also a *Liberator* weekly devoted to revolutionary propaganda along lines of anarchistic thought published in Chicago from 1905-6, and a *San Francisco Liberator*, representing Citizens League of Justice from 1908-1910. In the 1960s there was yet another *Liberator*, founded by John Henrik Clarke, as an African American socialist review.

American monthly was second, with a circulation of 104,000. *Die Zukunft*, a Jewish socialist monthly was listed third, at a circulation of 65,000, and the *Liberator* fourth, described as a socialist monthly at a circulation of 50,000. The less radical papers were listed under “Liberal Papers Published in New York City Having Endorsement of Revolutionary Groups.” Among this category is found the more moderate magazines, the *Freeman*, *The Nation*, and *New Republic*. In addition to distinguishing between the radical press and liberal press, the Lusk report also detailed subversive publications outside of New York City. This category included the foreign press and undoubtedly was perceived as the most dangerous. Included on this list were *New Solidarity* (1918-1920), *The Communist Weekly* (1919), *The Toiler* (1919-1922) and all IWW publications. Among the leading socialist daily newspapers were the *New York Call*, also known as *The Call*, with a circulation of 15,000 and the *Jewish Daily Forward*, edited by Abraham Cahan with a circulation of 250,000.¹⁸

While these publications were influential to the radical experience, they did not feature art, poetry or literature. Radical publications preferred the use of documentary photography and were not concerned with artistic or technical merit. Socialist and politically oriented magazines neglected the arts and tended to be didactic, ponderous and somber. The *Liberator*, however, was not the only political magazine that included art.¹⁹ Three journals, *The Young Worker* (Chicago,

¹⁸ In its thoroughness, the Lusk report even included, “Revolutionary and Subversive Publications Printed in New York City Which Have Discontinued in the Past Year.” Of note in this category was the *Class Struggle* (1917-1919), *The Communist* (there were a total of six magazines with this title in 1918-1919), *Dial*, *Novy-Mir*, and John Reed’s *Revolutionary Age* (1918-1919). For a reprint of the Lusk report listing of the radical press, see Jon Christian Suggs, *American Proletarian Culture: The Twenties and the Thirties*, vol. 11 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography Documentary Series* (Detroit and London: Gale Research Inc., 1993), 43-48. See also, Julian F. Jaffe, *Crusade Against Radicalism: New York During the Red Scare, 1914-1924* (Port Washington, NY and London: Kennikat Press, 1972), 14-15.

¹⁹ See Marquardt, “Art on the Left in the United States, 1918-1937,” in *Art and Journals on the Political Front. The New York Call and Freiheit* (1922-1929) were both daily newspapers and included illustrations by some of the *Liberator* artists. *Freiheit* (1922-1929), a Yiddish newspaper edited by Moissaye J. Olgin was distinguished from most political dailies because of its commitment to culture by featuring literature, poetry, and literary reviews. In October 1924 Gropper became its staff cartoonist. For further information, see chapter three.

February 1922-28; April 1936), *The Labor Herald* (Chicago, March 1922-October 1924) and *Good Morning* (New York, 1919-1921) included drawings by political cartoonists and artists. *The Young Worker* discussed proletarian culture occasionally and included social content drawings and cartoons of capitalism and labor. *The Labor Herald* focused on a single labor union or event in each issue and its visual material was limited to its covers. *The Labor Herald* was a short-lived publication that had minimal impact on the development of proletarian art. Each issue focused on a single labor union or event and visual material was limited to the covers. Art Young's *Good Morning* (fig. 2) attempted to invest humor in the somber reportage of labor and political events; nevertheless, it too was short-lived and had limited impact. While these publications attempted to merge art with politics, none had the reputation, circulation, and quantity of illustrations, scope or artistic diversity of the *Liberator*.

The war and the repressive measures taken by the Wilson Administration against dissenters snuffed out the lives of many socialist and radical magazines and created an atmosphere of repression for those that followed. The Espionage Act passed by Congress on June 15, 1917 after the United States entry into World War I in April, made it possible for the Post Office to withhold from the mail any material promoting what they deemed treason, insurrection, or forcible resistance to any law of the United States. The Espionage Act, which was originally designed to protect the nation from German foreign agents, was later used for censorship, making it a federal crime to publicly express antiwar sentiments on the ground that it might interfere with conscription. The Sedition Act of May 1918 amended and broadened the Espionage Act by making it a crime to write or publish "any disloyal, profane, scurrilous or abusive language about the form of government of the United States or the constitution, military or naval forces, flag, or the uniform."²⁰ The application of these broad provisions by the Post Office in banning

²⁰ Edwin Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretative History of the Mass Media* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 594-595.

publications from the mails gave the postmaster general immense powers. Altogether some seventy-five papers either lost their mailing privileges during the first year of the Espionage Act or retained them only by agreeing to print nothing more concerning the war. The *Masses* was among the many casualties of the Espionage Act.

THE MASSES

The *Masses*, the forerunner of the *Liberator*, was considered the first important literary and artistic forum of the left (fig. 3). The New York monthly was in existence from 1911 to 1917, edited during most of its run by Max Eastman. Piet Vlag originally founded the *Masses* in 1911 as the voice for a group of Greenwich Village writers and artists who came together to produce a journal dedicated to socialist causes. These writers and artists were the contributing editors and cooperatively owned the magazine; most were not paid for their efforts.²¹ By 1912 the *Masses* under Vlag began narrowing its focus by excluding more radical contingents and became little more than an advocate for conservative socialism. At the suggestion of Art Young, the contributing editors selected Max Eastman as their new editor in 1912.

Max Eastman (1883-1969), a known socialist and feminist who had recently been discharged as a professor of philosophy at Columbia University for refusing to pay his diploma fees, would later become one of the best-known literary radicals of his generation. In 1912, the same year he became editor of the *Masses*, he joined the Socialist Party. Advocating social revolution over reformism, Eastman announced his support for the direct action of revolutionary socialism, which Vlag had earlier denounced and converted the policy of the *Masses* from right-wing socialism to left-wing socialism.²² The *Masses* was reorganized and its content changed

²¹ Art Young wrote of the *Masses*: "No money was paid for contributions, but most of us held stock in the Masses Publishing Company just for fun." See Young, *On My Way*, 278.

²² Eastman was described by the *New York World* as "the most influential radical in the United States." See "New York Bolsheviks Divided But Both Groups Work Night and Day Spreading Propaganda" 4 June 1919, press clipping, Max Eastman Papers, Special Collection, Lilly Library, University of Indiana, Bloomington. The FBI compiled a 369-page file on Eastman who they judged to be "one of the most dangerous radical socialist in America." See Natalie Robins, *Alien Ink: The FBI's War on Freedom of Expression* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1992), 38. For information on Eastman's socialist position, see Eastman, "Knowledge and Revolution," *Masses* (December 1912), 5-6. "Knowledge and Revolution" was a series that was published in the *Masses* until 1915. The Socialist Party had long been divided into a left and right wing faction. The Socialist left, which also included the Social Labor Party differed with the right, not so much in ideology, as in attitude. The traditional left-wing extolled the

under Eastman. The magazine became the center of bohemian rebellion against middle-class America. Because of its eclectic editorial policy, the *Masses* opened its pages to an unusually wide range of ideas and encouraged experiment and “free expression.” The *Masses* radicals took up the causes of feminism, sexual freedom, birth control, and pacifism. It was committed to the working class and the underprivileged. While the magazine retained the appearance of a cooperative effort, Eastman controlled the magazine’s ultimate direction, determining what was to be included in each issue. In 1913 Eastman offered Floyd Dell (1887-1969), a former magazine editor from Chicago and newly arrived in New York, the job of managing editor. Dell was responsible for assisting Eastman in the magazine’s production, literary reviewer and assumed editorial responsibility in Eastman’s absence. Dell and Eastman played instrumental roles in formulating the character and content of both the *Masses* and the early years of the *Liberator*.

Artistically, the *Masses* attracted a group of urban realists of the Ashcan school such as George Bellows, Glenn Coleman, Stuart Davis, and John Sloan. During its publication, the magazine became known as one of the best illustrated periodicals in the country.²³ Unlike most pictorial magazines of the period, art was not subordinate to the text. Leftist journals printed only a few political cartoons and leading art journals were not interested in overtly political cartoons. Drawings were presented as independent works, and the editors were committed to developing fine techniques of reproduction, resulting in an uncluttered design that would feature the artwork at its best. As with its written selections, not all of the art published in the *Masses* had political content. The sketches and drawings were often able to project a radical view of society within the confines of advanced artistic technique. Preoccupation with urban settings and the forms and

“direct action” of economic struggle, and identified with orthodox Marxism in its ultimate goal of class struggle and proletarian revolution. By contrast, the right wing sought a peaceful and gradual reform and cooperated with the pre-existed labor movements. See Theodor Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia: The Formative Period* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 13, and Klehr, *The American Communist Movement*, 9-15. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 these divisions would become more acute and ultimately lead to the formation of the American Communist parties in 1919. See chapter five.

²³ Egbert, 96-97 and Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 27.

shapes of the modern city was typical of much of the artwork. The artists of the *Masses* sought to create an American equivalent to the lavishly illustrated European satiric journals such as *Simplicissimus* (1896-1944, fig. 4) and *L'Assiette au Beurre* (1901-1912). While the *Masses* provided artists and writers the freedom that commercial publications denied, disputes between the writers and artists were not uncommon. In 1915 the contributing artists objected to Eastman's strict editorial control and protested that journalism was taking precedence over art. Another major "artist quarrel" erupted in early 1916. The artists objected to, among other things, the captions under pictures, the voting upon the drawings, and the dictatorial powers of Eastman and Dell.²⁴ This led to the resignation of Joan Sloan, Stuart Davis, Maurice Becker, Alice Beach Winter, Charles A. Winter, and Glenn O. Coleman. That same year, a new staff of artists who would become major contributors to the *Liberator*, John Barber, Boardman Robinson and Robert Minor replaced them. The direction of the art moved from the realist urban genre tradition to more politically charged images.

On July 5, 1917 the New York Post Office informed the *Masses* that they were in violation of the Espionage Act. The specific charge against the publication was obstruction of recruitment. In the May 1918 *Liberator* editorial, Eastman wrote: "At the time when this editorial is read some of my best friends and I will be on trial for sedition and disloyalty to the republic. The specific charge against us is that, in publishing our opinions in a magazine called *The Masses*, we did feloniously and maliciously and not respectably conspire to discourage enlistment in the armed forces of the United States." The *Masses*, which maintained a firm policy of opposition to the war, was the first well-known publication to be affected by the law. Post office officials cited the August 1917 *Masses*, containing four cartoons and four articles which had the

²⁴ At the *Masses* staff meetings, the contributing editors, who consisting of both artists and writers, would vote on potential material to be included in the publication. The artists objected to the arbitrary selection of artwork, particularly those that were judged by the writers. For a full discussion see Eastman, *Enjoyment of Living* (New York: Harper, 1948), 289-291. See also chapter two.

potential effect of interfering with the implementation of America's war effort (fig. 5). While the *Masses* editors challenged the decision and would subsequently go to trial in 1918, after the combined November-December 1917 issue, the magazine ceased publication. The first trial began on April 15, 1918 and was fully reported in the June 1918 issue of the *Liberator*. The Government was unable to prove conspiratorial intent and the charges were dismissed after the jury was deadlocked on a verdict; nonetheless, the government moved for a new trial. The second *Masses* trial began on September 1918 and even though the war was over, the government had assumed an even harsher attitude toward anti-war protestors. Despite the conditions, the second trial resulted in the same outcome as the first and the case was permanently dismissed. For all practical purposes the second trial signaled the end of the *Masses* chapter in history. However, the issue of censorship would be decisive in the formulation and direction of the *Liberator*.²⁵

²⁵ See Eastman, "Flavors of Sedition," *Liberator* 1, no. 3 (May 1918): 6-7. The four cartoons considered violations of the Espionage Law were: Boardman Robinson's "Making the World Safe for Democracy;" H.G. Glintenkamp's "Liberty Bell" and "Conscription;" and Art Young's, "Having Their Fling"(fig. 5). The texts cited were: Eastman's "Revolutionary Progress: A Question;" Josephine Bell's "Tribute;" Dell's "Conscientious Objectors;" and Reed's "Friends of American Freedom." The first *Masses* trial was reported by Floyd Dell, "Story of the *Masses* Trial," *Liberator* 1, no. 6 (June 1918): 7-18. The second trial was reported by John Reed, "About the Second *Masses* Trial," *Liberator* 1, no. 10 (December 1918): 36-38.

THE LIBERATOR

While awaiting trial, the *Masses* editors already had made plans for the creation of a successor magazine.²⁶ Despite the repressive measures that crippled the *Masses*, Eastman and his circle brought out a new journal dedicated to “revolutionary progress.” The first issue of the *Liberator* appeared March 1918. The magazine was named in honor of William Lloyd Garrison’s nineteenth century anti-abolitionist paper from the Civil War. Explaining his reason for adopting Garrison’s title, Eastman wrote: “It was with the diffidence of a deep admiration that we adopted the name of this magazine. . .Garrison’s *Liberator* was the greatest paper in the United States and it was great not only because it concentrated a prophetic sacred fire against the sin of chattel slavery, but because it sounded the music of the love of utter liberty for all. . . the motto that opened the pages of ‘*The Liberator*’, ‘Our Country is the World—Our Countrymen are Mankind.’ ”²⁷ The issue of civil rights thus became one of the distinguishing characteristics of the magazine’s editorial policy.

The list of contributing editors printed in the first issue, largely brought over from the *Masses*, included the artists Cornelia Barns, Hugo Gellert, Robert Minor, Boardman Robinson, and Art Young, and the writers Howard Brubaker, Arturo Giovannitti, Charles T. Hallinan, Helen Keller, Ellen La Motte, John Reed, Louis Untermeyer, and Charles W. Wood. Along with Max Eastman as editor and Floyd Dell as associate editor there was one key addition; Crystal Eastman joined her brother as co-editor, owner and fund-raiser. Crystal and Max owned the *Liberator* Publishing Company, holding the controlling fifty-one shares. Crystal Eastman (1881-1928) was a graduate of Vassar, received her Masters of Arts at Columbia in Sociology, and attended Law

²⁶ Schmidt, 103. While historical accounts vary on the rationale behind its inception and contribution, all sources unequivocally agree that the *Liberator* was the successor to the *Masses*.

²⁷ Eastman, editorial *Liberator* 1, no. 2 (April 1918): 5. Garrison’s *Liberator* was published from Boston and ran from 1831-1865.

School at New York University. She was the head of the New York Woman's Peace Party, executive secretary of the American Union Against Militarism and known for her work on behalf of peace, labor and feminism. It was Crystal's decision to join the magazine that convinced Max to remain as editor. Max felt Crystal's assistance would allow him the time to concentrate on his own literary output. Hoping to devote most of his time to writing, Max allocated larger salaries for Crystal and Dell as justification for his decreasing responsibility. Max revealed in his autobiography of the period, *Love and Revolution*, that aside from historical events, "the actual cause of the emergence of the *Liberator* was personal and accidental." Crystal's decision to join as co-editor would free him from the burden of full time editorial responsibilities. Eastman wrote:

It occurred to me that I could realize all my conflicting ambitions, including a show of resoluteness and 'devotion to the cause,' by getting her to join me as co-editor and manager and money-raiser . . . With Crystal to raise the money and conduct the business, I could make this fantastical pretense come true.²⁸

While his personal writing career was a primary motive for Eastman, events in Russia played an even greater role in the genesis of the magazine. In the combined last issue of the *Masses* of November-December 1917, the editors promised, "if the censors permit, we will have his [John Reed's] first article in the next number." The *Masses* closed its offices in November 1917—the month following the October revolution in Russia. Eastman stated: "History was unwilling to let the *Masses* die intestate in the very months when its revolutionary prophecies were being fulfilled. There had to be an heir; there had to be a magazine to talk understandingly about what was happening in Russia." Eastman had already decided to launch a new magazine when Reed informed him via cablegram that he had witnessed the assault on the Winter Palace. Because Eastman felt that Reed's "priceless news story" would ultimately find its way in his possession, he finalized his decision on the magazine. Reed had given Eastman exclusive rights to

²⁸ Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 69.

his reports on the revolution in Russia. Eastman concluded: "With that asset, and the subscription list, and the fame—and yet more, the infamy—of the old *Masses*, and its brilliant staff of contributing editors, the opportunity to start a magazine was irresistible."²⁹

The first issue of the *Liberator* was largely devoted to events in Russia and included Reed's "Red Russia—The Triumph of the Bolsheviki." The article was the first in a series by Reed on the Bolshevik revolution, leading to his highly influential book, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919). The cover by Hugo Gellert of a peasant sowing heart-shaped seeds evokes the heroism of Millet's peasant in the canonical painting, *The Sower* as the new proletariat symbol (fig. 6). The first written page declared:

Never was the moment more auspicious to issue a great magazine of liberty. With the Russian people in the lead, the world is entering upon the experiment of industrial and real democracy . . . The possibilities of change in this day are beyond all imagination. We must unite our hands and voices to make the end of this war the beginning of an age of freedom and happiness for mankind undreamed by those whose minds comprehend only political and military events. With this ideal THE LIBERATOR comes into being on Lincoln's Birthday, February 12, 1918. . . The *Liberator* will be owned and published by its editors, who will be free in its pages to say what they truly think. It will fight in the struggle of labor. . . It will advocate the opening of the land to the people . . . It will stand for the complete independence of women . . . it will stand for a revolution in the whole spirit and method of dealing with crime. . . It will assert the social and political equality of the black and white races... The *Liberator* will endorse the war aims outlined by the Russian people and expounded by President Wilson—a peace without forcible annexations... The *Liberator* will be distinguished by a complete freedom in art and poetry and fiction and criticism. It will be candid. It will be experimental. It will be hospitable to new thoughts and feeling. It will direct its attack against dogma and rigidity of mind upon whatever side they are found.³⁰

The opening statement outlining the goals of the magazine was followed by Max Eastman's editorial describing Lenin's government in Russia and the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in favor of an industrial parliament. Eastman considered the Revolution in

²⁹ Eastman discussed the formation of the *Liberator* in *Love and Revolution*, 69-70.

³⁰ [Crystal Eastman] "Statement of Purpose," 3. The statement was unsigned; however, according to Blanche W. Cook, Crystal was the author. See *Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution*, 290.

Russia, "the most momentous event in the history of peoples." The premier issue, inspired by revolutionary events in Russia was issued "into a world whose possibilities of freedom and life for all, are now certainly immeasurable." The editorial goals centered on the concept of a utopian transformation of American society. The Russian Revolution was perceived as an unprecedented example of the socialist dream turned reality. The magazine would proceed with renewed efforts to rigorously defend freedom of speech and expression, attacking injustices of all types, in an ultimate quest for revolutionary change in the very fabric of American society. The first slogan adopted by the magazine in May 1918 read, "the great radical magazine of America." The term "radical" underscored their identity as an organ for change. The magazine was created to provide an exposition of truth at a time of auspicious momentum. Eastman himself claimed, "the birth-number of the *Liberator* was like rain from heaven to a host of thirsting minds."³¹

As far as Eastman was concerned there were three fundamental differences between the *Masses* and *Liberator*. First, was the concern with reprisals from the Postmaster General, secondly, and most important to Eastman was that he would be able to lead a more creative life and lastly, the pretense of being a co-operative was abandoned. The magazine was forced to work within the constraints of the new anti-Sedition laws if it was to survive. Editorials had to be carefully worded to avoid outright criticism of the war effort, or explicit appeal to revolution in the United States. During its first year, features bringing news of radical activities ran with a disclaimer. When reporting on the trial of Eugene Debs for the November 1918 issue, Eastman wrote: "I find myself in a very real perplexity in trying to report his trial on a charge of obstructing the war program. I believe the postal authorities will recognize the necessity I am under, as a Socialist editor, of giving this news to the readers of the *Liberator* . . ." Eastman believed the compromise with authority was worth the sacrifice; with most of the radical press decimated, the left needed the independent voice of the publication. According to Young: "It is

³¹ Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 78.

easy to discern that the soft pedal was being used, in contrast to the outspokenness of the *Masses*. But the terror against all objectors to the war was in full force, and with our trial coming on, we were not inclined to aggravate the situation further." Because of the precarious circumstances surrounding its inception, the magazine at first conveyed a noticeable tone of caution in comparison to the earlier *Masses*.³²

The *Liberator* gave up the pretense of being a co-operative magazine. The cooperative editors at the *Masses* had managed, but more often mismanaged the magazine. Decisions had been made in lengthy and chaotic meetings, which often alienated and annoyed some contributors. Eastman's decision to adopt a more structured business enterprise by holding controlling interest in the *Liberator* Publishing Company was a move designed to prevent some of the internal problems, which had always plagued the *Masses*. As important as these changes were, the real difference between the two magazines was the Russian point of reference, a genuine opportunity for endowing political theory with evidence and substance.³³

Ironically, the *Liberator*'s struggle to embrace the possibility of actual change and even world revolution led to unduly harsh denunciations, not only by hard-line communist theorists of the 1930s but by more contemporary critics who insisted on viewing the magazine as a prewar bohemian organ. Typical of statements by *Masses* scholars are: "The *Liberator* while retaining most of the staff . . . it could not maintain a grip of the experimental nature and political commitments that had characterized the prewar magazine" or "It stressed politics but could not synthesize art and politics."³⁴ Careful perusal of the *Liberator* indicates that it was more politically committed than the vague, eclectic *Masses*: it was also one of the only experimental

³² See Eastman, "The Trial of Eugene Debs," *Liberator* 1, no. 9 (November 1918): 5. For Eastman's discussion of the differences between the two magazines, see *Love and Revolution*, 70. See also Young, *Art Young: His Life and Times*, 331.

³³ For a further discussion of these early changes, see Nickle, 83 and Schmidt, 104.

³⁴ Leslie Fishbein, intro. to Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 27 and Fitzgerald, 229.

venues in America that recognized the need to synthesize art and politics at a time when this very same ideology was in its formative stage in Bolshevik Russia. In their comparison of the *Masses* and *Liberator*, many writers merely evaluate Eastman's role as editor and its shift in direction under Robert Minor to a communist-aligned publication. Therefore, they neglect the editorship of Claude McKay who was committed to bringing racial issues to the forefront of the social agenda and the pioneering efforts of its editors Mike Gold and Joseph Freeman to define the role of proletarian art in society. These efforts were attempted under the repressive censorship of the Department of Justice. It is perhaps Art Young who provided greater perspective when he looked back at the period and wrote:

I knew, too, that the original *Masses*, out of which the *Liberator* had evolved, had receded far enough into history to be thought better than it really was. The *Masses* came along at that well-known 'psychological moment,' at least for a few thousand people who were tired of the conventional contents of bourgeois publications. By 1922 many of them had forgotten that the time and the innovation had much to do with the loving acclaim as well as the fierce denunciation with which our magazine was received. The devotees of the *Masses* had made it a model, a shining exemplar.³⁵

Other scholars acknowledge a more political agenda but do not consider the *Liberator* a significant departure from the *Masses*. Thomas Maik chose to view the *Liberator* as a natural progression of the *Masses* and argued that the interest in Russia was not an aggressive change in policy toward Russian communism, but rather another of the many social changes inherently endorsed by the *Masses* and subsequently the *Liberator*. Daniel Aaron recognized that the *Liberator* devoted more space to economic and political affairs than the *Masses*; nonetheless, he felt that "it still retained much of the old Bohemian intransigence." Eastman's biographer, Milton Cantor, also insisted that the *Liberator* was like its parent in the editorial selections of art, poetry and politics, stating: "It was torn between poetry and politics, a schizophrenic view that

³⁵ Young, *His Life and Times*, 392.

percolated also into its prose and drawings. Its artists also ranged the entire spectrum of left-of-center opinion and personal commitment.”³⁶

In the final analysis, the *Liberator* was a different magazine than the *Masses*. It was a more sober, reflective journal than its predecessor. Its contributors took more seriously the barriers to creative change. As Eastman explained: “The *Liberator* was a better magazine than the *Masses*, and instead of dwindling, the group surrounding it drew larger and attracted new talents of high distinction.”³⁷ Artistically, the *Masses* showcased the work of the Ashcan school, most notably John Sloan and the drawings were presented in a larger format with higher quality paper. By contrast, the *Liberator* did not focus on the Ashcan school and presented a broader and more diverse range of subjects, styles and artists. While the size of the publication was smaller than that of the *Masses*, the magazine contained more pages, more illustrations and therefore more artists. A typical issue of the *Masses* would contain approximately twenty pages with three to four artists represented. A typical issue of the *Liberator* contained forty pages with seven to ten artists represented. The *Liberator* had a more clearly defined objective—the support of Bolshevism, and subsequently, the newly emerging communist doctrines. As such, the visual images were more propagandistic, caustic, and pointed.

During the seven years of its existence, the *Liberator* went through eight different editors, beginning with Eastman and ending with the Workers’ Party, the official name of the Communist party of America. The magazine ran as a monthly from March 1918 to October 1924. In 1924 it merged with the *Labor Herald* and the *Russian Pictorial* to become the *Workers Monthly*, a communist-aligned organ (fig. 7). During its existence it became known for its coverage of radical causes and became recognized as the best disseminator of information from Russia. For Freeman and other young intellectuals, the *Liberator* seemed to embody all that was best in

³⁶ See Maik, 348; Aaron, 82; and Cantor, *Max Eastman*, 70-71.

³⁷ Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 72.

American culture and in the revolutionary movement, especially during the war when most other radical publications were suppressed. The magazine continued to attract the best American political cartoonists, writers and social illustrators of its age and added a new list of artists, among them: William Gropper, Hugo Gellert, Adolf Dehn, Fred Ellis, Lydia Gibson, Wanda Gág, Reginald Marsh, Louis Lozowick and Clive Weed. Circulation doubled that of the *Masses* at thirty thousand in its first month, and rose to sixty thousand at its peak.³⁸ As a more tightly woven business enterprise, the magazine published separate pamphlets to elaborate on issues that were too verbose for the concerns of the magazine. Its influence extended throughout the continental United States and internationally. The publication had foreign correspondents in Europe, as well as foreign subscriptions to the magazine; it had agencies for advertising in Australia, England, France, Hawaii, Norway, Scotland, South Africa, and Wales.

At first, Eastman was enthusiastic about the newly formed magazine and even considered making it a weekly. In a letter to subscribers dated February 9, 1918, he promised that the *Liberator* would have more variety than the *Masses*: "It will appeal to more kinds of people, it will be better organized as a business . . . I believe that the opportunity for such an achievement at this moment in the world's history, is extraordinary and never to be repeated." The *Liberator* never became a weekly and as a business enterprise it was subject to promotion that did not correspond to reality, as in its list of contributing editors, some of whom barely participated in the publication. The masthead was often misleading and could not be used as an accurate gauge in determining the direction of the magazine.³⁹

³⁸ Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 78.

³⁹ See Eastman, TLS, Max Eastman Papers. Names of people who barely participated in the publication such as Charles T. Hallinan, Charles W. Wood, Ellen La Motte and Helen Keller were included on the masthead. In these instances, they were listed merely because of their support or had high name recognition. Conversely, many writers and artists contributed regularly and would not be included on the masthead. This was the case with Stuart Davis who appeared in the 1918-1919 issues, but never on its masthead. Similarly, editorship titles would be given to those who had already stopped participating as such, and again merely used for name recognition.

Soon after its inception, the *Liberator* was dealt a major setback with the resignation of John Reed. Reed had joined the staff of the *Masses* in March 1913, and was a committed figure in the *Masses* circle. In the September 1918 issue, Reed's resignation letter appeared: "I've thought about it for a long time, and I make this decision not without emotion, remembering our long work together on the *Masses*. But I feel I must take my name off the editorial page. The reason is, I cannot in these times bring myself to share editorial responsibility for a magazine which exists upon the sufferance of Mr. Burleson [Postmaster General]." Replying in print, Eastman expressed a deep feeling of regret, but said the members of the editorial board believed it was their duty to the "social revolution" to keep the publication alive. Reed assumed that the *Liberator* would condemn President Wilson's foreign policy and adopt more revolutionary editorial goals. When Eastman refused to condemn the President and instead took a more cautionary tone, Reed resigned. In Eastman's defense, he was in constant fear of reprisal from the Post Office after the censorship and *Masses* indictment. In addition, there is ample evidence to indicate that the *Liberator* and its contributing editors were continually under surveillance for what were deemed subversive activities. Trying to function in a climate, which was suspicious and hostile to all brands of radicalism, the magazine's very existence was from month to month. By November 1918, Reed was no longer listed on the masthead as a contributing editor; however, he did continue to write articles for the magazine until his death in October 1920.⁴⁰

In its first year Max and Crystal shared a mutual responsibility and commitment to the magazine evidenced by the unsigned editorials that suggest their unity in policy and directorship. During this time, Max lived at Croton where he had moved in 1917 and in addition to his editorial responsibility, he was also writing his first novel, *Colors of Life* (1919/20). As early as August of

⁴⁰ Reed's resignation letter and Eastman's reply appeared in *Liberator* 1, no. 7 (September 1918): 34. During the "red raids" of 1919 Department of Justice Agents hunted many staff members, see chapter five. On two occasions, Eastman mentions his fear of the *Liberator's* indictment by the Lusk committee. See Max Eastman to Florence Deshon, ALS, 4 January 1919 and July 1919, Max Eastman Papers.

1919, Eastman's involvement with the magazine was taking its toll as he wrote: "I am working on the magazine, and my heart is not there . . . I guess I've become an author for good." In addition, Eastman repeatedly expressed his frustration with Crystal, who evidently was not assuming the responsibility he had envisioned for her. According to Eastman, Crystal had a frail ego and low physical stamina, which resulted in her continued absence from the magazine. At these times Eastman was forced to "drop everything again to work on the magazine." Dell's involvement with the magazine was limited as well. Dell felt the Village had become commercialized and moved to Croton, and he too was pursuing his literary career. Swamped with editorial duties and reluctant to devote all his time to political causes, Dell made arrangements with Eastman for a three-month leave of absence in January 1920 in order to write his novel, *MoonCalf* (1920). By all accounts, Max assumed the full time editorial responsibilities he had been hoping to avoid when starting the magazine. Years later, in his autobiography Eastman admitted: "I never wanted to run a magazine, and I kept pretending I wasn't running it, but just presiding over its parturition."⁴¹

In the January 1921 issue of the magazine, Eastman announced: "In order to devote my time exclusively to writing, I have resigned my position as co-editor of the *Liberator*. This is the fulfillment of a plan which had long been in my mind." Eastman reassured the readers that he would continue writing for the magazine. In March 1921, Crystal officially resigned from the magazine. The editorial for that month claimed that she would be devoting more time to the labor movement and to revolutionary women's activities. In his autobiography Eastman revealed that when he resigned in January, he gave Crystal sole editorship. Crystal's editorial responsibility proved unsuccessful in his absence. According to Crystal's biographer, between 1911 and 1921

⁴¹ See Eastman to Deshon, ALS, 4 June 1919, Max Eastman Papers. Later, Max wrote of his sister: "Crystal is a great problem to me... It was a great mistake her coming on the *Liberator* with me. It puts her in a position of fixed and public inferiority--..." See Eastman to Deshon, ALS 19 January 1920, Max Eastman Papers. See also, Eastman to Deshon, ALS, February 1920, Max Eastman Papers, and Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 69.

Crystal's physical constitution had broken down several times. At the insistence of doctors, she removed herself from the management of the *Liberator*, became a contributing editor and agreed to rest while writing a book on feminism and taking more personal care of herself and her daughter, Annis. Crystal's departure would be a great loss to Eastman. She acted as fund-raiser, investigative reporter and accompanied him on speaking tours. Although Crystal agreed to remain as co-editor, she no longer played an active role in the magazine's publication.⁴²

Crystal's departure had again left him the executive head of the company with the full burden of the magazine. Unable to stand by and watch his magazine collapse altogether, Eastman agreed to return to the *Liberator* in March 1921, and a new management format was established. Eastman informed readers that he, Floyd Dell, Robert Minor and Claude McKay would share editorial duties. Despite the change, Eastman made the ultimate decisions for the magazine and it still bore the decisive imprint of his editorship. Eastman wrote many, if not most, editorials while Dell continued to write his book reviews and social criticism. In the March 1921 editorial, Eastman declared a reorganization of the magazine by hoping to make it like the *Masses* in spirit, more involved in the labor movement and with a re-emphasis on international coverage.

In *Love and Revolution*, Eastman explained his selection of Dell, Minor and McKay as editors. While he felt Dell "had a gift in judging the writings of others" and "was free from dogmatic attitude toward political thought," in Eastman's estimation, "he lacked stability of opinion." Eastman added that since the rest of the editors did not often share Dell's views, McKay and Minor would balance the editorial decisions. Claude McKay (1889-1969) was a pioneering Jamaican-American writer, best known as a leading literary figure of the Harlem Renaissance. He came to New York in 1912, publishing his poems in several magazines, including *Seven Arts* and *Pearson's*. He began contributing to the *Liberator* in July 1919 and

⁴² See Eastman, "Announcement," *Liberator* 4, no. 1 (January 1921): 24, Eastman, editorial, *Liberator* 4, no. 3 (March 1921): 5, and Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution*, 28.

afterward became a regular contributor. Minor was selected because Eastman felt he “possessed brilliant and original gifts both as a writer and artist.” Eastman, however, had reservations about Minor’s political beliefs and referred to him as a “natural-born fanatic.” Robert Minor (1884-1952) was a successful newspaper cartoonist and journalist who had initially joined the *Masses* staff after the artist strike of 1916 (fig. 8). After a visit to Russia in 1919, Minor was converted from anarchism to Bolshevism and became completely devoted to communist principles, joining the party shortly after it was formed in 1920. In time, Minor became a prominent figure in the Communist movement.⁴³

From all accounts, Eastman and Minor were at odds. Eastman was concerned that Minor’s political beliefs were too erratic and his actions unpredictable. Evidently, Eastman never trusted Minor and feared for the magazine’s stability if placed exclusively in his hands. Minor and Eastman had a clash of opinion when Eastman questioned the selection of material Minor made for the April 1921 issue, calling them dilettante, and “surrendering to Greenwich Village studio art.” In reply, Minor defended his position and asserted that the art in the *Liberator* should be of high quality:

Max, damn it, I maintain that a monthly magazine cannot carry cartoons that are of the same value only as daily newspaper cartoons . . . If that is all we are trying to get for the *Liberator*, then I don’t know what the *Liberator* is trying to be. I declare that to be available for use in the *Liberator*, a cartoon must contain either an extraordinary ‘literary ingenuity’ or else a distinctive artistic value.⁴⁴

Even though Minor continued as editor, after this episode, he was less visible in the magazine until April 1922, after Eastman’s departure.

⁴³ Robert Minor (1884-1952), the illustrator, editor and political activist of the *Liberator* should not be confused with the artist, Robert Crannell Minor (1839-1904), born in Watertown, Connecticut, who was an exponent of the American Barbizon school. Eastman discussed his selection of the editorial staff in *Love and Revolution*, 221-223.

⁴⁴ Robert Minor to Eastman, TL, 8 April 1921, Max Eastman Papers.

While Eastman's stamp of editorship still remained, there was a noticeable difference in the *Liberator* during mid-1921. The magazine lacked the spirit of the earlier issues and appeared loosely organized and unfocused. During their editorship together McKay and Minor differed in their selections for the magazine; McKay preferred more literary selections while Minor preferred more labor-related material. McKay wrote of Minor, he was "... a warrior who had found the revolutionary road to heaven and who would annihilate even the glorious and ineffectual angels if he found them drifted and stranded on his warpath." Despite the internal conflicts, at the end of 1921 Eastman, Dell, McKay, and Minor were still listed as co-editors. The majority of contributing editors continued to have a broad definition of social democracy with no party affiliation. An important change for the magazine in 1921 was the addition of the artist, William Gropper and Michael Gold, a young political poet committed to revolutionary ideals, to the list of special contributors. These two men would have a major role in yet another and perhaps more profound change in the magazine's history. Even though unofficial, Eastman claimed that by the fall of 1921 he was no longer an editor. "I had perceived at last that I could not run a magazine one half the day and pursue a literary career the other," wrote Eastman: "It would be better, from the standpoint of my real ambition, to throw the tormenting and too wonderful creation into the ashcan."⁴⁵

The end of Eastman's active editorship of the *Liberator* began with a challenge by the younger staff members to Eastman, who according to Gropper "made seventy-five dollars a week for lying on a couch and composing poetry and reading books." Eastman had called a special meeting sometime in late December 1921 or January 1922 to discuss, among other things, the leadership of Mike Gold whom he felt wanted the magazine to produce only proletarian art and literature. Unknown to Eastman, some members of the staff staged an organized confrontation.

⁴⁵ See McKay, as quoted by Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 221-223, and Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 265.

As Eastman relates the story, it was Gold who masterminded the plot to overthrow him. Mike Gold (1893-1967), whose original name was Irwin (also known as Iztok and Isaac) Granich was of Russian-Jewish descent; he changed his name to Mike Gold during the Palmer Raids of 1919-20 as a protective pseudonym. In 1921 Gold went to Mexico to avoid the draft and upon his return joined the staff as contributing editor in January 1921. Gold would later become a major bridge between the prewar bohemian and the communist literary movement of the 1930s.⁴⁶

At the *Liberator* staff meeting, the question rose as to whether Eastman was fit to be editor and a vote was taken. Eastman recalled: "Instead of a debate, therefore, the meeting turned out to be an eloquent discourse by Mike Gold on my lackadaisical spirit and remoteness from the suffering proletariat." Among the votes against Eastman were Arturo Giovannitti, William Gropper and Hugo Gellert. Because Eastman had already planned a trip to the Soviet Union, he was by chance one step ahead of the conspirators and surprised them by offering them control of the magazine and suggested to Gold that he take his place as editor. Eastman wrote, "I was ready to forswear magazines for the rest of my life, and had only waited for this meeting in order to present my resignation." After a long discussion, the group chose Gold and McKay, representing two opposite poles of the controversy as the executive editors, along with a staff of Dell, Eastman, Gellert, Giovannitti, Gropper, Minor, and Robinson. In addition, there were at that time twelve contributing editors: Cornelia Barns, Maurice Becker, Howard Brubaker, Eugene Debs, Crystal Eastman, Lydia Gibson, Helen Keller, Maurice Sterne, Louis Untermeyer, Clive Weed, Charles W. Wood, and Art Young. The editors reasoned that McKay's sophistication and radical skepticism would balance Gold's tendency toward revolutionary extremism. McKay's "political intelligence" and "literary tastes" would balance Gold's strident, increasingly humorless, communist absolutism. In private, Eastman suspected that neither man had the patience and tact

⁴⁶ See Gahn, "William Gropper--A Radical Cartoonist: His Early Career, 1897-1928," 124, and Michael Folsom, intro. to *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 10.

necessary to manage “the rather impractical bunch of creative geniuses that had gathered around [the magazine].” After helping them put together the December and January issues, Eastman left for Europe in February 1922.⁴⁷

Dell, recently married, resumed his novel writing, which necessitated less time with the *Liberator*. Although he remained editor and the Eastmans theoretically retained financial ownership, Dell proved incapable and unwilling to assume the responsibility for the magazine. Like Eastman, he too was seriously considering leaving the *Liberator* to finish his novel. In *Love and Revolution* Eastman remembered Dell’s many capabilities and wondered why he had not left the magazine with him, concluding that Dell was too busy with his novels. Another problem was that by 1921, Dell did very little work with regard to the politics of international revolutionary socialism. Instead, he concentrated almost exclusively on socialism’s internal domestic ramifications. Further, for Dell, the magazine never inspired the camaraderie typified in the *Masses*. Novel writing and extended leaves of absence had kept him from full absorption in the publication. He found himself increasingly out of step with the magazine’s turn to doctrinaire radicalism. Dell went along with the new changes but was never happy with them and dropped out of the battle to control the magazine’s editorial policies. Dell nonetheless, never relinquished his place in the radical community during the 1920s and kept his name on the masthead of the *Liberator* until it expired. By 1924 he was little more than an honorary editor and an isolated contributor.⁴⁸

For Eastman, the decision arrived at among the contributing editorial majority, “was the beginning of a profound and total split among the group which had gathered around the two magazines—a split between the emotional true believers and the thinking minds.” The former “true believers” were “against ‘rigidity and dogma’ wherever they are found . . . against

⁴⁷ Eastman’s recollections of the meeting are disclosed in *Love and Revolution*, 267-269.

⁴⁸ Clayton, *Floyd Dell: The Life and Times of an American Rebel*, 235.

regimentation whether by a church a party, a state, an idea." Gold represented to Eastman:

"The very thing that I was fulminating against in those editorials on the party priesthood . . . He was on the way to becoming an intellectual robot in the cause of communism; I was on the way to exercising an independent judgment about it."⁴⁹ This division within the *Liberator* circle not only marks a change of direction in the history of the publication, but also highlights the crisis of an historical moment: the time had come when the radical intellectual was forced to decide between former socialist reformist thinking and commitment to a radical new world order. Gold's increasing emphasis on proletarian literature and art marked the split between the old bohemianism and the new communist influence. Because the doctrines of Communism were still at a formative stage, these policies had yet to be conclusively defined by the Soviet Union.

Beginning with the January 1922 issue, Gold and McKay appeared as the new executive editors. For a brief while ideological and temperamental differences were subordinated to practical necessities. The March 1922 *Liberator* announced that Eastman was in Europe, intending to go to Russia and would send back articles, which he continued to do until the magazine ceased publication. The issue also announced the new Board of Directors as Dell, Crystal, Gold, Gropper and McKay.⁵⁰ Crystal was no longer an active participant in the magazine and Dell, as discussed, was only marginally involved. William Gropper thus took on a more visible and active role in the publication at this time. Gropper had begun submitting cartoons to the *Liberator* in October 1918 and by January 1921 was listed as a special contributor. In addition to Gropper, Hugo Gellert also took a more active role at this time. Gellert and Gold were life-long friends and in 1918 both had fled to Mexico together to avoid the draft. During the Russian Revolution they both joined the young Red Guards, a group of revolutionaries who wanted to go to Russia to fight for the Bolsheviks. Gold's brother introduced Gellert to his future

⁴⁹ Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 268.

⁵⁰ "We Haven't Cracked Under the Strain," *Liberator* 5, no. 11 (December, 1922): 7.

wife, an Australian pianist named Livia Cinquegrana, and through Gold he became an art teacher at the Modern School in 1919. Gellert had worked for the *Masses* since 1916, and while listed as a contributing editor for the *Liberator*, it was only in January of 1922 that Gellert became full editor for the first time. With the involvement of Gropper and Gellert, there was a noticeable change in artistic selections for the magazine, as illustrations became more diversified and experimental.

Throughout 1922 there were frequent staff changes, internal disputes among staff, and continuous shifting roles and responsibilities of editors. From the start there was very little agreement between McKay and Gold. McKay insisted that judging art and literature with class labels was incidental and thought Gold too preoccupied with the idea of bringing a new literature produced by the proletariat to the *Liberator*. Eventually, their verbal arguments led Gold to challenge McKay to a fistfight. McKay and Gold announced their differences to be irreconcilable and compelled the board of editors to choose between them. The editors, partly because of Eastman's advice from abroad, chose Gold to carry on as executive editor. Eastman explained to McKay the rationale for his decision: "On the basis of the magazines you each put out, in spite of the superior reliability and delicacy of yours, I was in favor of Mike because his magazine had more 'pep'." The July 1922 *Liberator* announced McKay's resignation. Even though he continued to be listed as a contributing editor, McKay no longer participated in the magazine and in 1923 traveled to Petrograd.⁵¹

Gold not only clashed with his co-editor, but also with Dell and in the June 1922 issue their disagreement and ideological differences were made public. Gold resented Dell's allegation that his veneration of working people was typical of middle class radicalism: "Comrade Mike, I think, really cherishes the romantic delusion that he belongs to the working class. But the fact is

⁵¹ See McKay, *A Long Way From Home*, 138-139 and Eastman to McKay, Spring 1923 (Moscow), reprinted letter in Cooper, *The Passion of Claude McKay*, 79. For a full discussion of the seven-month Gold-McKay editorship, see McKible, 186-229.

that Comrade Mike is a literary man, an intellectual, and a member of the salaried middle class.” Dell defended the position of the intellectual in the social transformation of society and mocked Gold for his denial of it: “But Comrade Mike is for some obscure reason ashamed of not being a workingman . . . It is that that I take issue with . . . He tells us that we are a lot of poor aesthetics, and that our habit of sitting around and talking, about ideas disgusts him.” Dell argued that the working man sought and should expect the leisure time of the intellectual middle class. “well, for my part, I want workingmen to have a chance to sit around and talk about ideas.” Even though Dell exaggerated Gold’s position, the theoretical differences created a lasting rift between the two men.⁵²

Joseph Freeman replaced McKay in July 1922. Freeman (1897-1965), the “wayward” son of a wealthy real estate broker came from a Russian-Jewish background and as a student engaged in subversive radical activities. Upon graduating from Columbia in 1919, he began contributing poetry to the *Liberator*. After a trip to Paris in 1920, he returned to New York in 1921 and began his political activism by joining the Communist Party and associating with the *Liberator* circle. Before formally joining its staff, he wrote verse, book reviews and features for the paper. Freeman’s entire creative life was one of struggle between the dual role of poet and revolutionary. Freeman and his friends developed the “Cult of the Universal Man” as the ideal of the intellectual who combined imagination with practical pursuits, art with the life of action. Their contemporary models were Reed, Eastman, Dell, Giovannitti and Minor. Unlike McKay, Freeman admired Gold’s total commitment to the working class. Both Gold and Freeman would later be recognized as the best proletarian writers of their generation and also as the founders of the *New Masses* in 1926.

Gold brought out the July 1922 issue as executive editor with Freeman as associate editor. By the time Freeman came on board most of the old staff had scattered and

⁵² See Dell, “Explanations and Apologies,” *Liberator* 5, no. 6 (June 1922): 25-26.

disorganization was rampant. As he described it, “each issue was casually got together; the organized punch of the old journal was gone.” The Gold-Freeman alliance lasted from July until August. The September issue announced without explanation that Gold had left for California. In the October issue, Dell became listed as executive editor and Freeman remained associate editor. According to Young, Gold was exhausted from the hectic pace of editorial responsibility, had reached his physical limit and went off to California to work at the *San Francisco Call*. Gold’s departure left Freeman holding the reins, with Dell still faithfully co-operating. According to Freeman, sometime during September or October of 1922, “the editors learned that the police were going to raid all radical publications that included the *Liberator*.” At that time, Freeman tore up everything in his desk, including all manuscripts and letters. By the end of 1922 the magazine had suffered considerably from the raid, its extensive staff turnovers, and a serious decline in circulation. The November 1922 issue was not published. At this time the *Liberator* was about to take yet another critical direction in policy and ownership.⁵³

In October 1922 Dell held a meeting with the editors and Charles Ruthenberg, a representative of the Workers’ Party. Ruthenberg was one of the founders of the Communist Party of America, elected to the Central Executive Committee at the second Workers’ Party convention in December 1922 and the Executive Council when the illegal Communist Party was absorbed into the Workers’ Party. Ruthenberg would later become the first secretary of the Communist Party of America. Before Eastman’s departure from the magazine in January 1922, he had made one stipulation to those present: “If they could not keep the *Liberator* going, they should not sell it to a commercial publisher but turn it over to the Workers’ Party. This they all solemnly agreed to do.”⁵⁴ The time had come to make the decision concerning the future of the

⁵³ Freeman, *An American Testament*, 257 & 260, and Aaron, 144. The raid may account for the lost business records of the magazine.

⁵⁴ Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 269.

magazine. The October 1922 meeting took place in Gropper's 14th street studio. Those present included Minor, Dell, Gropper, Gellert, Freeman, Young and Ruthenberg. As Young recalls in his memoir:

Floyd Dell opened the discussion, explaining that the *Liberator's* financial status was steadily growing worse. The responsibility was too great for those in charge to continue. If we stopped publication it would be a good deal like killing a child. If we changed the magazine into an art and literary journal, catering to those who wanted to escape from thinking, the effect would be decorative but of little purpose.

Ruthenberg indicated that the Communists would like to have the *Liberator*, and Floyd asked us each for our opinions on a proposition to merge whatever was left of the magazine—subscription list, news-stand orders, name, prestige, and good will—with the *Workers' Monthly*, then being published in Chicago. Naturally, Ruthenberg was negotiating not only for the *Liberator*, but also for the prestige of the *Masses*, which in memory was bathed in an aura of admiration by its readers as the first magazine of cultural quality in America to espouse the cause of industrial freedom.⁵⁵

According to Freeman, the request to turn the magazine over to the Workers' Party came from Minor; however the staff present at the meeting made the ultimate decision.⁵⁶ Even though the editors supported the proposal, the magazine continued as a privately owned publication until its move to Chicago in May of 1923. Although the magazine was privately owned, it took a decidedly partisan direction. In the combined November/December 1922 issue the editors explained their new policy: "We expect to direct our attention more than we have for some months past to political issues, and to direct attention more deliberately than heretofore, to The Workers' Party, the organized political movement which, as we declared at its inception, best represents the revolutionary interests of the American workers." As promised, Minor and Freeman as the new executive editors moved their offices to party headquarters on 14th street and began to focus on more labor related issues. The masthead now included a separate heading for editors: Eastman, Gellert, Gibson, Gold, Gropper, Giovannitti, Robinson, McKay, and Dell and

⁵⁵ Young, *His Life and Times*, 391-392.

⁵⁶ Freeman intimates that all those present at the meeting voted in the affirmative. See *An American Testament*, 309.

contributing editors: Barns, Becker, Brubaker, Debs, Crystal, Keller, Lankes, Sterne, Untermeyer, Weed, Wood and Young.

Contrary, to all accounts concerning the history of the magazine, the *Liberator* was not yet a “fully communist paper.” Despite the emphasis on labor, the magazine continued to provide art, literature, humor and poetry. It was also the intention of its editors to broaden the cultural scope of the publication. Eastman himself admitted when looking back at the magazine, “under all these changes, I must say, the *Liberator* flourished—it was just as good as it had been before.”⁵⁷

In early 1923, the *Liberator* continued under the Freeman and Minor alliance. By this time, Minor’s allegiance to Communism was complete. In the summer of 1921 he had attended the Moscow meeting of the Third Congress of the Comintern in Moscow (June 22 to July 12, 1921) where he was one of the American party’s four delegates. At the Comintern, the Soviets announced a sudden policy shift. During the 1919 “Palmer raids,” American Communists were forced underground, now they were directed by Soviet leaders to try by all ways and means to emerge from their illegal condition and move into the open and among the masses. The Workers’ Party of America was thus born in late 1921, as the aboveground, officially sanctioned title of the Communist Party in America, with Minor on its Central Executive Committee. It was under the editorship of Minor that the magazine moved toward a communist line. Minor wrote many of the 1923 unsigned editorials, and in addition, continued to draw for the paper.

The *Liberator* was officially turned over to the Workers’ Party in May 1923. The owners were listed as C.E. Ruthenberg, A. Bittleman, Robert Minor, and Elmer T. Allison (also listed as the business manager)—all party-line officials. Minor was named editor and Freeman managing editor. Two separate associate editorial boards were formed—political associate editors and art associate editors—of nearly equal number. In addition, the magazine continued to list its

⁵⁷ Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 271.

contributing editors of artists and writers. The board of art associated editors included the writers Dell, Giovannitti, Gold and McKay, and the artists Robinson, Gropper, Gibson, Gellert, Frank Walts, Don Brown and Young. The political associate editors were for the most part members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and included Charles E. Ruthenberg, Ludwig Lore, Max Eastman, William Z. Foster, James P. Cannon, John Pepper, C.S. Ware, J. Louis Engdahl, Jay Lovestone, Max Bedacht, and Moissaye J. Olgin. The two associated editorial boards reflected the dual focus of the magazine that continued to combine both politics and art. In October 1923, the *Liberator*, which moved its offices from New York to party headquarters in Chicago, had finally evolved into an organ of the Communist Party, devoting the majority of its space to politics. Instead of a magazine of art and literature coupled with a commitment to radical causes, the *Liberator* was now under the control of the Central Executive Committee, with art and literature relegated to a secondary role. The political articles were lengthy and pedantic. For the most part, reportage of labor related issues were on a national level, and lacked wit, humor, or critical self-evaluation. While the double-spread illustration continued, there was less art in each issue and illustrations were reduced in size. Even though politics was privileged, labor cartoon flourished and drawings and artists continued to be diversified. During its final year. Fred C. Ellis and Maurice Becker were added to the list of art editors and Upton Sinclair, Mary Heaton Vorse, Maurice Sterne, and J.J. Lankes were added to its list of contributing editors.

In 1923 Minor married the artist and *Liberator* contributor, Lydia Gibson. They both moved to the South Side of Chicago where Minor became a party leader in race issues, heading the Negro Department of the Central Executive Committee. In January of 1924 he was made sole editor of the *Liberator* and remained so until its merger in October 1924. Freeman, unable to move to Chicago, resigned from the magazine and in 1924 joined the staff of the American Civil Liberties Union. Most of the original artists and writers dispersed although some continued to contribute to the magazine. The September 1924 issue of the *Liberator* announced its merger with

the *Labor Herald* and *The Soviet Russia Pictorial*, effective November 1924. The editors explained that each of these publications was too narrow in scope and would be more effective if combined to combat the common enemy of “capitalist dictatorship.” The last issue of October 1924 elaborated on the merger with an announcement by Minor: “We will appear under the new name of *The Workers Monthly* (fig. 7) as the official spokesman of the organized Communist movement of the United States, the Workers Party, and the Trade Union Educational League.” Not only would the *Workers Monthly* include the “old writers and artists” of the *Liberator*, but “the leaders of the Communist International such as Zinoviev, Bukharin, Trotsky, etc...”⁵⁸ The editor of the new magazine would be Earl R. Browder, the future general secretary of the Communist Party and the editorial board would consist of William Z. Foster, Charles E. Ruthenberg, James P. Cannon, Jay Lovestone, William F. Dunne, Max Bedacht and Alexander Bittelman—a veritable who’s who of party-line officials. The article promised contributions by Eastman, Dell and the preservation of the entire editorial board of the *Liberator*, including the contributing editors of artists and writers. This never materialized—the *Liberator* was permanently silenced.

⁵⁸ “Announcing the Workers Monthly,” *Liberator* 7, no. 10 (October 1924): 5.

CHAPTER TWO

PATRONS AND POLICY

*"Our getting money from the rich was a sort of skeleton in our proletarian revolutionary closet."*¹

*"A great art will arise out of the new great life in Russia—and it will be an art that will sustain man, and give him equanimity, and not crucify him on his problems as did the old..."*²

Since the *Liberator* began, its primary concern had been economic survival. Max and Crystal Eastman owned fifty-one shares of the publication; however, raising money was a constant problem and would continue to be so until the demise of the magazine. While the office records for the *Liberator* were either lost or destroyed, much of the information regarding financial matters could be obtained through the magazine itself. According to Eastman, he and Crystal raised thirty thousand dollars to launch the magazine. Full-page announcements soliciting funds were regularly featured in the magazine. An advertisement in the October 1918 *Liberator* indicated that twenty thousand dollars a year was needed for the next three years to make the publication self-sustaining. The total monthly expense for operating and publishing the magazine averaged six hundred dollars a month, with printing fees accruing most of the expenses. When the *Liberator* was first issued in March 1918, the cost was fifteen cents a copy, by January of 1920 the price had been raised to twenty-five cents; however, this was lowered to twenty cents in November 1921 and remained the price for the magazine until it ceased publication in 1924. The editors received a marginal salary and the contributing editors were paid a minimal fee for

¹ Floyd Dell, "Memories from the Old Masses," *American Mercury* 68 (April 1949): 485.

² Irwin Granich (Mike Gold), "Towards Proletarian Art," *Liberator* 4, no. 2 (February 1921), 20-24.

illustrations.³ All in all, salaries and fees paid to contributors were negligible when compared to the total cost of running the magazine.

Because of the anti-radical sentiment of the “red scare,” it became difficult for any radical journal to solicit the funds necessary for a viable existence. Raising funds to keep the publication alive was almost entirely Eastman’s responsibility. Among the methods of raising money were selling chapters from the book he was writing, fees from lectures, accepting money from friends and lovers and promoting the magazine by a variety of creative methods.⁴ Money was also raised through social events, dress balls, debates, and dinners. To help defray costs, the magazine sold advertising space and also maintained an income from the Liberator Book Store through which they received a commission for all books sold through mail order subscriptions. Some income resulted from advertising local Greenwich Village businesses; however, the chief advertisers were small publishers and bookstores such as H.W. Wilson Co, Huebsch publishers, Herz Brothers (Waco), Little Review, Rand Book Store and Lantern Book Shop. Aside from a few book publishers, no business of importance advertised in the *Liberator*. In some cases, not all advertisers were accepted for publication; for example, Eastman refused to advertise a publisher’s announcement of John Spargo’s book on Bolshevism because it went against the editorial position of the magazine.⁵ Despite the ongoing urgency for funds, Eastman wrote:

We refuse to be persuaded by money . . . But with exactly the same energy we refuse to be persuaded by religion, by an absolute ideal, whether it be the ideal of

³ Dell disputed the recollection, insisting that an editor would never receive less pay than an associate editor. Eastman claimed that Crystal was given \$90 a week, Dell \$75, and himself “to justify his truancy” received \$60. See Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 70. According to Young, the contributing editors were not paid; however, other sources indicated there were minimal fees paid for illustrations. See Young, *His Life and Times*, 352; Freeman, *An American Testament*, 277; and Mike Gold, “Thoughts of a Great Thinker,” *Liberator* 5, no. 4 (April 1922): 23-25.

⁴ The *Liberator* announced the sale of bound volumes of the magazine from 1919 that included “nearly two hundred drawings, there are eleven of our famous colored covers.” See, Staff Solicitation, *Liberator* 3, no. 1 (January 1920): 40.

⁵ John Spargo, *Bolshevism: The Enemy of Political and Industrial Democracy* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, c. 1919).

free speech or any other. Our loyalty is not to abstract ideals, our loyalty is to concrete purposes.⁶

The *Liberator's* future seemed temporarily secure when in 1921 it was given an unexpected cash refund by the government. Financial security was short-lived; by the end of the year its bookkeeper, E.F. Mylius absconded with a \$4,500 treasury certificate; the magazine's only financial reserve.⁷ Without a monetary base, the *Liberator's* editors were forced to announce impending bankruptcy in the December 1921 issue. Through a combination of fundraisers and private contributions, the magazine temporarily managed to survive; nonetheless, it was by no means secure. With Eastman's departure in 1922, the magazine was left without its chief fundraiser. As a result, the *Liberator* was once again on the verge of financial collapse and internal chaos. With the steadily widening cleavage in the radical movement, circulation had fallen off. According to Young, a large percentage of the *Liberator's* audience was displaying weariness, especially when asked to pay money for subscriptions. "Month after month the boys in the editorial office had to go out and find money to cover printing and paper and distribution costs," wrote Young and "often their untiring services were paid for in fragmentary installments." The January 1922 issue announced: "Our main problem remains unsolved. We must find a way for

⁶ Eastman, editorial, *Liberator* 2, no. 9 (September 1919): 5-7.

⁷ On February 11, 1918, the *Liberator* Publishing Company had applied for admission to second class mails. Postmaster General Thomas Burleson at the time denied that application, and instead, the magazine was accepted as third class mail, thereby making it more expensive to mail. In May 1921 the Post Office Department finally accepted the *Liberator's* original application for second class status. Calling Burleson's action indefensible, and maintaining those decisions against magazines were the jurisdiction of the Justice Department, the new Postmaster General ordered that the *Liberator* Publishing Company be refunded \$11,277, the difference between second and third class mailing from February 1918 through May 1921. See *New York Times*, 26 May 1921, 17, as explained by Schmidt, 106. E.F. Mylius (alias Edward Boskin) was an Englishman notable for writing a pamphlet criticizing the British government's colonial methods. Mylius was hired as a business manager sometime in June 1921 and was going to be dismissed that October, as an economic measure. Mylius wrote to Eastman: "I had very little money of my own but I had the Treasury Certificate belonging to the *Liberator*, and in a moment of weakness, thinking I could make some money by using them as security. I had a fling in Wall Street...I will make restitution. Give me time and I will pay all." See E.F. Mylius to Max Eastman, AL, 19 October 1921, Max Eastman Papers. Mylius repaid five hundred dollars and then disappeared. Eastman claimed that when he received the refund from the government, \$7,000 was spent on the *Liberator* and the rest was taken by the bookkeeper. Eastman to Florence Deshon, ALS, 14 June 1921, Max Eastman Papers. Years later, Eastman claimed he left publishing altogether in 1922 because Mylius absconded with the money.

guaranteeing the life of the *Liberator*, year in and year out . . . Of one thing be certain: the *Liberator* will not go under.” The editors hired a new General Manager who assisted with fund raising and appeals were made in a variety of social forums. Dell proved unwilling to assume the financial responsibilities of the magazine. Unable to secure the growing financial debts, Dell reluctantly agreed that the Workers’ Party, as the sole possible guarantor of the magazine’s solvency, would have to take over.⁸

By the end of 1922 the overworked staff, finding it difficult to pay themselves or their contributors turned to the alternative Eastman had suggested before leaving and met with Charles Ruthenberg. Thus, economic instability became the determining factor in the *Liberator*’s eventual takeover by the Workers’ Party. Ironically, the magazine was still in desperate need of funds after the change of ownership. The *Liberator* continued solicitation for funds, only now the pleas included self-righteous rhetoric. The full-page solicitation of June 1923 reads: “The *Liberator* is VITALLY NECESSARY to the American labor movement. . . we do believe that the reader who is also a sponsor of the magazine bears a moral obligation toward it which can only be expressed in financial assistance.”⁹ Despite the overwhelming financial hardship of the magazine, it nonetheless managed to survive for seven years, close to six of those years as privately owned and independently operated. For a small radical magazine existing in a climate of governmental oppression and censorship, this was no small feat. Aside from the perseverance of its editors and contributors, a great part of the magazine’s continued survival was due to its silent, but generous patrons.

⁸ See Young, *His Life and Times*, 391-392, and “Announcement,” *Liberator* 5, no. 1 (January 1922): 9.

⁹ Staff solicitation, *Liberator* 6, no. 6 (June 1923): back cover.

THE PATRONS

In addition to intellectuals involved with progressive causes, there was another group of sympathizers to liberal and counter-culture causes, known as “parlor reds.” This group consisted of intellectuals or humanitarians, more often than not, representing the wealthiest and most respected strata in society. Many in this category were wealthy widows who used their money for the benefit of the masses by contributing to socialist and communist causes. In a 1918 article, “parlor bolshevism” was ridiculed as the latest “fad” and as “fashionable indoor amusement.” The article claimed that these benefactors were ignorant of the new Soviet state. Not only were “parlor reds” derided for their reckless use of money, but the recipients of their funds also belittled: “The money of dilettantes is just as good for advancing the cause as any other money, and it has the advantage that the real comrades who make up the bulk of the membership do not have to dig it up out of their jeans.” According to Young, “debts, which our income would not cover, were met as a rule by individuals of wealth who thought our experiment worth while and were partly, at least, in sympathy with our ideas.” Dell mentioned the printers’ bills were paid by large cash contributions from the wealthy and wrote, “our getting money from the rich was a sort of skeleton in our proletarian revolutionary closet.” Even during the *Masses* trial, rich reformer friends had rallied to their aid and put up bail for those indicted. Dell referred to them as the “rebel rich,” reformers, liberals, progressive, or “just fed up and disgusted who wanted muckraking.”¹⁰

All who knew Eastman concurred that no one else had his ability to extract generous contributions from wealthy liberals. In Eastman’s memoirs of the *Masses* period, he mentioned a

¹⁰ See Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare, A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 54-55, “Detroit Admirers Hear Bolshevik Tiger Purr,” c. 1918, press clipping, Max Eastman Papers; Young, *On My Way*, 292; and Dell, “Memories from the Old *Masses*,” 485.

few patrons who helped finance the magazine, but provided no other information. Although it could be assumed that many of these patrons were also assisting the *Liberator*, it is known with certainty that after the departure of Max and Crystal Eastman, the December 1922 issue included a "Statement of Ownership" listing the owners as: Aline Barnsdall; A. B. Leach; William Bross Lloyd; and Miss E.B. Scripps.¹¹ All of these patrons had also contributed funds during Eastman's editorship as well.

Aline Louise Barnsdall (1882-1946) was a California heiress, best known for commissioning Frank Lloyd Wright to build her home, Hollyhock House in Los Angeles, California. Hollyhock was built between 1919 and 1921 and was intended to be the nucleus of a cultural center devoted mainly to the dramatic arts. Barnsdall originally came from Pennsylvania and inherited her fortune from her father, Theodore, who discovered oil near Bradford after the Civil War. Although little is known of her personal life, Barnsdall had a penchant for the performing arts and studied art and drama in Europe. After World War I she took an active role in theatre production and became the co-director of the Players Production Company at the Fine Art Building in Chicago. She was dedicated to bringing culture to the masses and sought to expand small theatres that would be more accessible to the public. Barnsdall moved the Players Production Company to California in 1916, with plans for a new theatre, but was unable to proceed due to the death of her father the following year. The heiress had formerly contributed funds to the *Masses* and may have become associated with Eastman through the *Masses* circle and their involvement with the Provincetown Players, a small experimental production company, which included Eugene O'Neill. Although the details of her socialist activities remain undocumented, she was a supporter of Upton Sinclair's campaign to end poverty in California and contributed generously to the campaign to pardon Tom Mooney. Barnsdall's patronage

¹¹ "Statement of Ownership," *Liberator* 5, no. 11 (November- December 1922): 38.

appears to have been a result of both her socialist and cultural concerns and, as such, the *Liberator's* ability to reach a diverse audience would have appealed to the wealthy heiress.¹²

Agnes Brown Leach (Mrs. Henry Goddard Leach, 1884-1975) was born in Villanova, Pennsylvania, educated in private schools, and moved to New York where she became active as a civic leader. She was married to Henry Goddard Leach, an author, instructor at Harvard (1910-1912) and secretary of the American Scandinavian Foundation in New York (1912-1921). Among Mrs. Leach's civic activities were: state chairman of the New York League of Women Voters (1925-1930); member of New York State Health Commission (1930-1932); New York State chairman of the League of Women Voters (1925-1930); and a member of the New York State Commission on Administration of Justice in 1930.¹³ Her participation in social organizations would naturally have made her sympathetic to the goals of the *Liberator*. Leach's interest in women's rights and pacifism would have brought her into direct contact with both Crystal and Max Eastman. Crystal was a founding member of the New York League of Women Voters and Max was the head of the first Men's League for Woman's Suffrage in New York.

¹² Toward the end of 1926, Barnsdall decided to turn over the land to the Department of Recreation and Parks of the city of Los Angeles and Hollyhock House was later transformed into the Los Angeles Art Club. The club houses a mural by Hugo Gellert, one of the contributors to both the *Masses* and *Liberator*. See James Steele, *Barnsdall House* (London: Phaidon Press, 1992). For a further discussion of Hollyhock, see Neil Levine, "Hollyhock House and the Romance of Southern California," *Art in America* (September 1983): 150-165 and Kathryn Smith, "Frank Lloyd Wright, Hollyhock House and Olive Hill, 1914-1924," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 38, no. 1, (March 1979): 15-33. Provincetown came together in the summer of 1915 at Reed and Mary Heaton Vorse's home. The Playwright's Theater on McDougal Street in Greenwich Village was the home of the Provincetown Players from 1916-1918. See Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau, *The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1931). Thomas Mooney (1892-1942), a militant Socialist, was the central figure in one of the most notorious frame-ups of the early twentieth century in America. Framed for an explosion during the Preparedness Day War Parade in San Francisco on July 22, 1916, resulting in the death of ten people, Mooney was found guilty of first-degree murder and given life imprisonment. In less than a year, solid evidence began to surface indicating that testimony against Mooney had been perjured. See Mary Jo Buhle, et al., *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1990). In 1926 Barnsdall left California for Geneva where it was reported that she lived at the "League for Universal Peace." When she deeded her property to the city of Los Angeles, one of her stipulations was that no statue of any military or political figure be erected on the thirteen acres. Reportedly, at the end of her life she became a recluse and eccentric. See Carol Dunlap, *California People* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, Inc., 1982), 10-11.

¹³ *New York Times Biographical Service*, vol. 6, no. 12, 1025-1026, and *Who's Who of American Women*, 3rd ed., (Chicago: Marquis Who's Who, 1964-1965), 590.

Max was introduced to feminist groups through his sister Crystal and Ida Rauh, a Greenwich Village socialist activist and suffragist, whom he married in 1911. Rauh was the Secretary of the Woman's Trade Union League, a sculptor, an actor with the Provincetown Players, and a *Masses* contributor.

William Bross Lloyd (1875-1946) exemplified the "millionaire socialist" of the early twentieth century, independently wealthy from his inheritance.¹⁴ He was the son of writer and reformist, Henry Demarest Lloyd and grandchild of the former lieutenant governor of Illinois, William Bross. As a child he came in contact with radical ideas at his father's home, a frequent gathering place for reformers of various persuasions. He received a law degree from Harvard and in 1905 and thereafter began his affiliation with the Socialist Party in Chicago. Following America's entry into World War I, Lloyd played an active role in the Chicago branch of the Socialist Party, standing as its candidate in several state and local elections. Lloyd frequently posted bail for arrested socialists, and was a major financial supporter of several Socialist publications, including the *Chicago Daily Socialist*. While Lloyd was never listed on the masthead of the *Liberator*, several of his letters to the editors and articles were published in the magazine. As an opponent of the war, Lloyd wrote a rebuttal to an article published in *The New Republic* regarding war psychology that was laden with anti-German sentiments. *The New Republic* refused to publish the rebuttal; nevertheless, Lloyd's letter was printed in its entirety in the November 1918 *Liberator*.¹⁵ In the letter, Lloyd declared his support for the Socialist Party and defended its position against pro-German attacks. In addition, Lloyd revealed his frustration with mainstream press: "The capitalist press is knowingly and intentionally, with the epithet 'pro-German,' trying to stamp out all opposition to the concentration of economic and political power

¹⁴ For a discussion of Lloyd's socialist acquaintances, see Robert Dwight Jr., "The Millionaire Socialists: J.G. Phelps Stokes and His Circle of Friends" (Ph.D., diss., University of South Carolina, 1974).

¹⁵ Lloyd, "Pro-German?" *Liberator* 1, no. 9 (November 1918): 25.

now accruing to the Capitalist Class.” Even though Lloyd was a member of the “capitalist class,” he was familiar with the power of the press. His grandfather was the founder of the *Chicago Tribune* and Lloyd was one of its major shareholders. Lloyd, a major advocate for freedom of speech also wrote “The Socialist Party on Trial” for the February 1919 *Liberator*. The article discussed the trial of Victor Berger, a member of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party and four other party leaders who stood trial for conspiracy under the Espionage Act. Under the impact of the Russian Revolution, Lloyd moved steadily to the left and became a pivotal figure in the formation of the Communist Labor Party in 1919. In June 1919 he was elected chairman of the National Council of the Socialist Party’s left wing, working alongside Reed to help found the American Communist Labor Party on September 1919. In 1920 Lloyd was indicted for sedition and was defended by Clarence Darrow; he served only eight days of his one to five year prison sentence. Lloyd’s pardon by Governor Len Small of Illinois was briefly mentioned in the January 1923 *Liberator* editorial. Shortly after his pardon, Lloyd became disillusioned with the Communist movement and left the party.

Lloyd’s involvement with the *Liberator* appeared to be one of mutual reciprocity. The patron shared the *Liberator*’s commitment to the Russian Revolution and leftist radicalism. As such, the magazine provided a platform for Lloyd if the need presented itself. There is no indication that Lloyd affected the policy or shaped the direction of the *Liberator*. In fact, when his rebuttal letter was published in the November 1918 issue, Eastman at that time was supporting the war effort and American involvement—a controversial view that would have been in direct opposition to that held by most radicals, including Lloyd. When Eastman declared his support of the Allies in the July 1918 editorial of the *Liberator*, Lloyd responded by calling attention to the discrepancies between Wilson’s platitudes and the intention of the warring powers.

Ellen (Elizabeth) Browning Scripps (1836-1932) was a newspaper editor and columnist, who along with her two brothers, Edward and James, formed the first chain of daily newspapers in America, known in 1907 as the United Press Association. Scripps was born in London and in

1844 immigrated with her father to Illinois. She joined her older brother, James Edmund Scripps in Detroit when he launched the *Detroit Evening News* in 1873. By 1900 the Scripps family had launched the Scripps-McCrae and later the Scripps-Howard chain. These newspapers were the start of a large family enterprise known as the Scripps-Howard syndicate that published over twenty newspapers.¹⁶ The Scripps papers sought to appeal to the common masses, with liberal, pro-labor, and politically independent views. Scripps was shareholder in six of her brothers' nine newspapers. The Scripps also contributed to the beginning of the foreign news service destined to grow into the United Press International. In 1890 the benefactor retired to La Jolla, California and continued her philanthropic efforts, founding the Scripps College for Women in Claremont, California in 1927, a small residential college for women and the Scripps Institution for Biological Research in La Jolla.

From 1900 to 1930 Scripps amassed a great fortune and made a serious decision to devote her wealth to worthy causes. Scripps was an ardent defender of free thought and free speech throughout her life.¹⁷ She gave funds to both the *Masses* (\$6,000) and *Liberator* and did so until 1922. She was opposed to the wave of hysteria and deportation delirium under General Palmer and was a member of the Amnesty League for the release of political prisoners after World War I. Scripps' devotion to free speech and civil liberties made her a feasible financial supporter of the *Liberator*. She was firmly opposed to a controlled or censored press and supported the efforts of publications to present their opinion, even if those views were not her own. Her most enduring legacy was her apparent wide spread interests, from marine life to progressive political and social ideas. She died of infirmities in her sleep at her La Jolla home at

¹⁶ Albert Britt, "Ellen Browning Scripps, Far-Sighted Humanitarian," in Scripps College, *The Humanities at Scripps College, Views and Reviews, 1927-1952* (Los Angeles: W. Ritchie Press, 1952), 26-27. See also Britt's biography of the patron, *Ellen Browning Scripps: Journalist and Idealist* (Oxford: Printed for Scripps College at the University Press, 1960).

¹⁷ Britt, "Ellen Browning Scripps, Far-Sighted Humanitarian," 28.

the age of ninety-six. Her will provided some two million dollars in bequests to new and old institutions.

Ellen's half-brother, Edward Wyllis Scripps (1854-1926) was her closest sibling and may have initially introduced Ellen to the *Masses* circle. Edward was a journalist, and along with his brother, founded the newspaper chain. Like his sister, Edward too was engaged in philanthropic activities and pledged two thousand dollars to the *Masses*. In a letter to the *Masses* business manager, Edward explained that his donation was for artistic content and not for shared political views. He wrote:

I am not a Socialist, as you know, and I do not agree with many of the details of the *Masses* propaganda. Most of the artwork and the larger part of the text of 'the *Masses*' is great art and the finest literature. Mr. Eastman himself is an extraordinary and beautiful character.¹⁸

Despite the variance with what he termed, "propaganda," Edward took a direct and aggressive role during the *Masses* indictment. The June 1918 *Liberator* editorial reported that Eastman, along with E.W. Scripps, visited the Post Master General in an attempt to apply for new mailing privileges. After the *Masses* conspiracy charges, all mailing privileges had been revoked. The Scripps' generosity may have been instrumental, not only with continued financial aid to the *Liberator*, but because of Scripps' assistance in assuring restored mailing privileges, to its formation as well.

In addition to the known list of 1922 *Liberator* owners, there were also a few *Masses* patrons who could have donated to its successor.¹⁹ Mrs. O.H.P. Belmont (1853-1933), later known as Mrs. August Belmont was a militant suffragist who had acquired her money through

¹⁸ Edward Wyllis Scripps to Mrs. Kate Crane Gartz, business manager of *Masses*, TLS, 8 October 1916, Max Eastman Papers.

¹⁹ There is scant information on Elizabeth Sage Hare; however, in *Love and Revolution*, Eastman mentioned her as a "generous friend also of the old *Masses* and the *Liberator*." Hare invited Eastman to her estate at Fontainebleau, Paris in June 1925. Her name again appears as paying \$10,000 bail for Bill Haywood of the IWW when he fled to Moscow. See Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 479 & 430. McKay also mentioned that Hare gave him a check for \$500. See McKay, *A Long Way From Home*, 130.

her marriage to W.K. Vanderbilt.²⁰ After her divorce in January 1896, Alva married Oliver Hazard Perry Belmont, son of the wealthy banker and art collector, August Belmont. From 1921 to 1933 Alva played a leading role in several woman's organizations including serving as president of Alice Paul's National Woman's Party. Eastman met Belmont through Inez Milholland, a fellow suffragist. Belmont's lifelong commitment to feminist issues determined her patronage to the *Masses*. While not a Socialist, Belmont financed Reed's trip to Russia under Eastman's directive. Because the *Liberator* was inaugurated shortly after Reed's trip, it may be safe to assume Belmont continued her support, at least during the *Liberator's* early years.

Eugen Jan Boissevain (1880?-1949) was a long time friend to Eastman and was still in communication with the editor in the 1940s. Boissevain was a successful New York importer who commanded a fleet of merchant ships. He was first married to Inez Milholland (1886-1916) and after their divorce he married Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950) in 1923; both women were close friends of the Eastmans. Documentation exists to suggest that Boissevain was donating money to the *Liberator*. In Young's autobiography, the cartoonist claimed that Eastman was "vexed" because Boissevain was contributing to Young's newly formed magazine, *Good Morning*. Eastman felt that the money Young was receiving would be "cutting into the *Liberator's* sources of money, for naturally we would appeal to much the same kind of people for support." In 1919 Eastman claimed to have borrowed two hundred dollars to finance Young's trip to Washington D.C. as a correspondent for the *Liberator*. In addition, Boissevain convinced Ms. Belmont to finance Reed's trip to Russia. Documentation suggests that Boissevain was not politically active or a supporter of the arts; rather, his assistance appears to have been solely that of benefactor and friend.²¹

²⁰ She is also known as Alva Belmont and Erskine Smith Vanderbilt.

²¹ Edna St. Vincent Millay received the Pulitzer Prize for poetry and was part of the *Masses* circle. For information regarding Boissevain's association with Young, see Young, *His Life and Times*, 356.

Mabel Dodge (1879-1962), the famous heiress known for her eclectic New York Salon evenings, was married to Maurice Sterne from 1917 to 1923. Sterne, a Russian-born painter and illustrator was a regular contributor to the *Liberator*. Dodge had met Sterne for the first time in May 1915 when she visited Paris.²² Prior to her marriage to Sterne in August 1917, Dodge had had an affair with John Reed and was closely affiliated with the *Masses* circle. Dodge may have been instrumental in assuring Sterne's contribution to the magazine. If she indeed continued to donate to the *Liberator*, Sterne's continued appearance in the magazine would have been a contributing factor.

Amos Pinchot (1873-1944), attorney, reformer and liberal was the treasurer of the *Masses* Defense Committee during the sedition trial and had also been a fundraiser for the *Masses* since 1913.²³ He was married to Ruth Pickering and both were life-long friends of the Eastmans. Pinchot attended Columbia Law School and later New York Law School, passing the bar in 1900. In 1901 Pinchot managed the family estate, which consisted of his father's successful wallpaper business and his mother's inheritance from a prominent real estate and banking family. During the war, Pinchot emerged as a civil libertarian and in 1917 helped found the National Civil Liberties Bureau, which eventually became the American Civil Liberties Union, whose activities he helped guide until his death. While Pinchot took a more active role with the *Masses*, his enduring friendship with Eastman and commitment to socialist causes suggest continued financial assistance to the *Liberator*.

Although the financing of the *Liberator* was ironic in its breadth, the ownership and operation had much more meaning in accounting for the magazine's identity. Patrons were a sundry lot; some friends, but mostly wealthy allies who, for the most part, did not fully endorse

²² Robert Crunden, *American Salons: Encounters with European Modernism, 1885-1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 395-396.

²³ Alden Whitman, ed., *American Reformers: An H.W. Wilson Biographical Dictionary* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1985), 655-656.

the policy of the magazine but were nonetheless sympathetic and generous. The reasons varied, from a strong belief in freedom of speech to promotion of the arts. Despite the anti-capitalist diatribe of the editors, the motives of these patrons was philanthropic rather than self-serving. Although many were committed to social reform, evidence indicated that the owners and benefactors to the publication had little input in shaping its direction. While the patrons were instrumental to the continued survival of the magazine, it was primarily the decisions of editors that established the course and set the policy of the publication. Even after the *Liberator* was turned over to the Workers' Party in 1923, it could be argued that Minor, who became sole editor, did not compromise his principles since he was completely in accord with those of the owners. Ultimately, the decision-making and galvanizing force behind the *Liberator* were its editors: this was particularly true of its policy toward art and culture.

ART POLICY

The editors had complete authority in the selection of artists and drawings that would be published in the magazine. In addition, they often suggested ideas to the artists and captioned many of the illustrations.²⁴ While discussing the *Masses*, Dell admitted that after the contributors meeting:

The hodgepodge of art work and writing that had been approved at the meeting wouldn't make a magazine . . . So we went about and got new contributions; we wrote things ourselves; we received unexpected treasures in the mail . . . Sometimes Eastman and I had to think up cartoons on current events . . . All that remained was to get those artists to do the drawing.²⁵

The editor's writing of captions was not as persistent as they suggest. The artist Maurice Becker claimed that he wrote his own captions and only occasionally was a change requested.²⁶ Aside from Robert Minor, all of the *Liberator* editors were writers or poets; none were educated in art, collected art or delved in art. As such, stylistic innovation, connoisseurship, or artistic trends did not govern decisions: instead selections were based primarily on the reputation of the illustrator, the content of the material, and the editor's personal preference. The multiplicity of interests, which characterized the *Liberator* editors, therefore had a great influence on the artists' work.

MAX EASTMAN (1918-1921)

Eastman regulated the contents as well as the finances of the *Liberator* from March 1918 to December 1921. In his reviews of art, he presented himself as one who had no formal education in art and even had contempt for the art critic, but nonetheless knew what he liked: "I

²⁴ Eastman to Deshon, ALS, 8 August 1919, Max Eastman Papers, and Dell, *Homecoming: An Autobiography*, reissue (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1969), 251.

²⁵ Dell, "Memories of the Old *Masses*," 483-484.

²⁶ Maurice Becker to Ben Goldstein, ALS, 9 July 1970, Ben Goldstein Papers (reel 3957, frame 1149-50), Archives of American Art, New York.

write with a vast uneducation about these matters, but I love some of the paintings so much that even at the risk of offending the more eagle-eyed expert of art, I will make free to say from time to time what I think and feel about them."²⁷ Eastman wrote several essays on artists and art, and yet never fully articulated or proposed a set policy for the type of art to be presented in the *Liberator*. As such, the artwork was a mixed bag consisting of the purely aesthetic reproduction, the comic cartoon, the overtly political illustration, the social satiric drawing, and the portrait sketch. Most all of the *Liberator* covers were non-political and instead conveyed a type of social observation, stylistically representational but non-academic. Because of his eclectic taste, Eastman maintained a tenuous balance between the artistic and the political, which has often been the subject of criticism. Critics with a political agenda insisted he did not create an art for the proletariat; on the other hand, art critics complained of his resistance in presenting experimental modernism. Careful analysis of Eastman's writing on the subject revealed that, in fact, he did have a theoretical preference, one distinctly rooted in American tradition.

Eastman addressed the type of art he felt should not be published by a magazine editor in his essay, "What is the Matter with Magazine Art?" originally printed in the January 1915 *Masses*. He attached great importance to the role of the editor for all decisions pertaining to artistic selection. From the beginning, Eastman was in revolt against the editorial control of the artist in the interest of profit. He felt most magazine editors were not interested in "true art" but instead were economically motivated. Many of the magazines publishing art in America in the early twentieth century were dependent on advertisers, and audience response. They also propagated the sentiments of mainstream culture. Artists, in turn who wanted to sell their pictures were also compromised by the profit motive. The result was a "drab and mediocre semblance of art" and the death of artistic expression. Eastman's main objection to mainstream magazine art was that it "pleases everybody a little and displeases none." Eastman advocated the freedom of

²⁷ Eastman, "China's Paintings," *Liberator* 1, no. 2 (April 1918): 12-13.

artistic expression and celebrated the artist's individuality. This freedom was to be contrasted with the popular mass production of shoddy clichés in other magazines. In addition, drawings were unattractively arranged; they had become mere visual transcriptions, not creative works. Eastman strongly believed that magazine art should not merely accompany an article, and was one of the first editors to insist on good placement and size for the illustration. Eastman argued that the magazine should provide a layout in which the picture would be reproduced as large as possible and in a space that was devoted solely to the needs of the picture rather than the surrounding text.²⁸

While Eastman has often been credited for introducing “Ashcan realism” in the magazine format of the *Masses*, he later confessed that at the time he assumed editorship he had not been interested in literary realism and had not heard of the realistic movement in painting. Realism for Eastman was not necessarily what became known as Ashcan realism. Realism was truth to experience; whether the scene was urban genre or a lyrical landscape, both qualified as truthful experiences. Realism was not to be confused with the type of “photographic realism” prevalent in magazine art where artists essentially became imitators and their works mechanical. Eastman maintained that magazine illustration was completely indifferent to the values either of reality or of art. He objected to the absence of human expression and argued that even when emotions were expressed, they were obvious ones—inoffensive, monotonous and conventional. In the August 1918 *Liberator*, Eastman discussed Stuart Davis' work as exemplifying, “a disaffection with beauty, especially in its more sanitary aspects, and a general revolt against sweetness and light.” Art was to be neither photographically realistic, nor was it to be beautiful. Eastman repeatedly called for the artist to move away from the “knowledge about things toward experience of things, away from abstraction toward concrete perception.” The artist's creative response to individual experience became key to Eastman's evolving theory of art. The editor preferred a type of quasi-

²⁸ Eastman, “What is the Matter with Magazine Art,” *Masses* (January 1915): 12-15. The essay was subsequently published in Eastman, *Journalism Versus Art* (New York: Knopf, 1916).

scientific observation coupled with the artist's expressive response to the experience. The art produced from this combination was not restricted to any one kind of formal execution and accounted for the eclectic mix of subject and style in the magazine, with one major exception-- abstraction.²⁹

Eastman attacked abstraction in three principal essays: "The Cult of Unintelligibility," "Poets Talking to Themselves," and "Non-Communicative Art." Throughout his life he was consistently opposed to both literary and visual abstraction, regarding it a type of "functional insanity," a withdrawal into a world of private values and meanings that was ineffective in communicating to the public. Eastman contended that the artist must experience life and move away from "abstraction toward concrete perception." He thought artists and radicals alike could find meaning for their lives of action through art and when art reflected that life, "its very being [would be] brought to consciousness." Eastman was also opposed to the influence of European modernism on American artists, stating that magazine art of the future "will not be an imitation of foreign monstrosities supplanting the native monstrosities of America." The editor suggested that artists turn to their own American roots: "Art does not mean that the imitation of Germans or Frenchmen is any more inspiring than the imitation of the folks at home...It will not be realism supplanting idealism."³⁰

Notwithstanding the internationalism of the *Liberator*, Eastman's remarks suggest an ethnocentricity, which envisioned a distinctly American art. He felt American artists should cultivate their own experiences and often evoked Walt Whitman. In his review of the work of Stuart Davis, Eastman observed that even though great art and poetry had not yet appeared, there was a mood of reckless experimentation that held promise for the advent of a great native

²⁹ See Eastman, "The Policy of the *Masses*: An Editor's Reflections," afterward to *Echoes of Revolt*, 301, and "Portrait of a City," *Liberator* 1, no. 6 (August 1918): 22-23.

³⁰ Eastman, "Non-Communicative Art," *The Freeman* 4, no. 16 (3 May 1954): 571-572; "What's the Matter with Magazine Art," 12-15; and *Art and the Life of Action with other Essays* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1934), 74 as discussed in Maik, 88-93.

American art and poetry in the tradition of Whitman. For Eastman, art offered the potential for transformation in the American tradition of transcendentalism. Another aspect of American tradition was humorous dissent; laughter was related to what Eastman called the playful spirit of humanity. "Humor had a higher place in America than in other national cultures," wrote Eastman.³¹ His editorial selections for the magazine adopted slang and dialect for captions and often used vernacular satire. Eastman was framing an ideology for the role of art and artists in society and its roots were an American democratic spirit.

Eastman continuously insisted on attaching social significance to artwork. His vision was for the age when artists merged art with propaganda. What Eastman referred to as "art and propaganda" was explained in an essay with the same title:

Only one thing is as stupid as the slogan, 'Art is propaganda': that is the slogan. 'Propaganda has no place in art.' Not only are both these statements false and ignorant of history and unthinking, but they are both effete and anemic, both symptoms of a bewildered culture . . . Art is life itself cherished and communicated; it is heightened consciousness of life.³²

The editor recognized the importance of the illustration to propagate ideas and considered drawings "destined to a high place among the arts because they could be widely distributed and represented the ideal of democracy." He saw art as the perfect means for propaganda and felt that it could and should communicate a specific social message. Propaganda for Eastman, was not an art that was purely didactic, but one which combined an aesthetic element, "that art of its own essence is not propaganda—that is exactly why it is so effective a vehicle for propaganda when thus used." He also felt that socially significant art should extend beyond the scope of the radical publication: "I thought that art would flourish better—and propaganda also carry farther—if it were not always thus used in a revolutionary magazine." Eastman shared the view that America

³¹ Eastman, *Enjoyment of Laughter* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1936). For a further discussion of Eastman and Whitman, see Maik, 75-77 and Marquardt, *Art and Journals on the Political Front*, 216-217.

³² Eastman, "Art and Propaganda," *The Enjoyment of Poetry with Anthology* (New York: Scribners, 1951), 231-232.

was on the verge of progressive change and revolution, and through his theory he asserted the possibility for such hope. Art and propaganda could bring about the transformation. The socialist ideal was the fully developed artist, within society as during the Renaissance, not sequestered as in the late nineteenth century. The basic tenets of proletarian art are rooted in these scattered statements: the unschooled critic; the unsophisticated artist as the source of a grassroots Americana; the reliance on direct experience; the potential of art in the transformation of society; and the elevation of honest, forthright character as the fundamental guideline of art.³³

FLOYD DELL (1918-1923)

Whether bohemian, socialist, revolutionist, artist, editor or novelist, Dell operated as a free and independent being. Dell and Eastman were a good editorial team, and shared a similar orientation toward art, particularly in their mutual distaste for abstraction, the corruption of art by the profit motive, and the importance of individual expression. Dell found Cubist and Futurist work, "ugly . . . silly . . . unintelligible" and condemned an art that he felt was "an assertion that life is a mere chaos." He frequently attacked elitism and cultivated the concept of the incoherence of modern art. Dell was an avid advocate for the liberty of self-expression and assumed in Soviet Russia that artists had the freedom to make their own choices: "In Russia the laws do not legislate for the artists; the artists legislate for themselves." The recent revolution in Russia," Dell noted, "had created a climate in which the artist's discontent with commercial society was more likely to receive an interested hearing than had been the case in the decade around the turn of the century." He continued: "The artist is once more beginning to fulfill his social function and that social

³³ Eastman, "What's the Matter with Magazine Art," 12, and Eastman, TD on Art Young for *New Republic* 25 April 1934, Max Eastman Papers.

function appears now very clearly to consist in elucidating and justifying the discontent of the common man.”³⁴

Unlike Eastman, Dell addressed the changing role of the artist in the newly developing Soviet state in his essay, “Art Under the Bolsheviks,” in the June 1919 *Liberator*, one of the first articles to introduce Soviet cultural life to an American audience. Dell’s essay outlined the plans of the Commissariat of Education for the development of proletarian art in Russia. According to Dell, the Soviet art program was “part of the most far-reaching plan for intellectual emancipation in human history.” While Dell referred to Tatlin, Vesnin, and the Commissar of Art, there was no mention of the experimental nature of Suprematism and Constructivism. He detailed the various programs initiated, from the new museum to the dissolution of its Academy of Art. He commended the Russians for fostering a system whose objectives were to bring art to the people: “It is necessary to understand that in the fiery crucible of revolution the hopes of art have become one with the hopes of mankind.” By contrast, Dell believed America had failed its artists: “We in America, in the midst of our own ‘dead artistic reality’ are so much under the spell of the ‘art for art’s sake’ philosophy that it may be hard for us to understand this.” According to Dell, the Bolshevik state fostered the needs of the artist, “they do not despair of the people, they do not despise nor turn from the people.” He argued that American culture had turned its back on the plight of the people, and that the worker was the foundation “of a genuine proletarian socialist art.” The Soviets were putting into action the bohemian impulse to combine art and politics.³⁵

³⁴ Dell, *Homecoming*, 279-281; Dell, “Psychoanalysis and Recent Fiction,” *Psyche and Eros* (July 1920): 48, as quoted by Clayton, 207. See also, Clayton, xiv.

³⁵ Dell, “Art Under the Bolsheviks,” *Liberator* 2, no. 6 (June 1919): 11-18. According to Susan Noyes Platt, one of the first American writers to discuss the Russian avant-garde art of Suprematism and Constructivism as it was developing in Russia in the late teens and early twenties was Oliver Saylor, a theater critic. In an article in *Vanity Fair* of September 1919, Saylor described the history of the Russian avant-garde. See Platt, *Modernism in the 1920s: Interpretations of Modern Art in New York from Expressionism to Constructivism* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), 118-119.

Even if seemingly contradictory, Dell used the Soviet example to call for an American democratic spirit in art: "A new beginning has been made, and the people . . . are meantime to be the judges of whether art is doing what art must do to be alive—expressing their will, their love, their pity, their hopes and fears, their enthusiasm and their dreams." Citing Tolstoy and Lincoln, Dell insisted that "art must be of and for and by the people!" Dell often evoked democracy in his discussion of culture in the new Soviet state. In his argument about the problems faced by the Commissariat of Education he again summoned democracy: "The second problem to be solved by the art sections will consist not only in evoking in the large masses of the city populations an interest in all things, artistic, not only in the democratization of artistic appreciation, but also in laying the foundations of a genuine proletarian socialist art."³⁶

Both Dell and Eastman sought an American equivalent to the Soviet example and expected a transformation in culture and society; the two being explicitly tied together in the process. As Dell reminded *Liberator* readers, the renaissance was at hand: "We owe, so far as we may be said to owe a revolutionary renaissance to any one individual, the example which Russia amid her agonies has set for us all for the world to follow." Neither Dell nor Eastman proposed any one type of art that would communicate to the masses. Nonetheless, Dell was impressed with Russia's attempt to extend art into all aspects of human life, particularly in the creative use of art and popular culture, not relegated to the realm of fine arts. In this respect, he anticipated an art for the future. According to Freeman, Dell believed that in order for the artists to reach the masses of the proletariat, they would at some time have to resort to the poster, the billboard, the movie and even the radio.³⁷

³⁶ Dell, "Art Under the Bolsheviks."

³⁷ Freeman, *An American Testament*, 245.

CRYSTAL EASTMAN (1918-1921)

While Crystal Eastman shared the editorial responsibilities, she did not address the role of art in her written work for the magazine. She nonetheless was interested in fostering new talent and first introduced Claude McKay as a contributor to the magazine. The bulk of Crystal's articles and editorials for the magazine primarily addressed current political events, freedom from censorship and support of civil rights and feminist issues. She was a devoted feminist and close friends with many prominent suffragists such as Inez Milholland, Madeleine Doty and Ida Rauh. While at the *Liberator*, Crystal appears to have focused most of her efforts on supporting revolutionary Russia. She, however, recognized the marginality of feminist issues among the male-dominated Socialist parties and in the Communist movement, which regarded feminist issues as bourgeois. With regard to woman's place in communism she wrote: "If we should graduate into communism tomorrow...man's attitude to his wife would not be changed." Even though Crystal supported feminist causes, there is no indication that she introduced any new female writers or artists to the magazine. Nevertheless, through her association with feminist circles, she was critical in attracting wealthy and prominent female patrons to the magazine.³⁸

³⁸ McKay's poetry had never been accepted by the *Masses*, but when Crystal read his work in *Pearson's* she invited him to call at the *Liberator* office. See Cook, *Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution*, 25. For information on Crystal's socialist and communist activities, see Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 32. See also Crystal Eastman, "Now We Can Begin," *Liberator* 3, no. 12 (December 1920): 23-24. For a discussion of Crystal's involvement with the National Woman's Party, the Equal Rights Amendment of 1920 and the development of an American intelligentsia, see Stanley Cohen, *Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America* (New York: Oxford Press, 1991).

CLAUDE McKAY (1922)

Like Crystal Eastman, Claude McKay never published any material on the role of the visual artist in the magazine. Through the examination of his writing, poetry and reviews, the image that emerges is of a man who strongly believed in the creative independence of the artist. McKay and Eastman agreed on many theoretical points; both saw the proletarian movement as a means to assure racial equality, both celebrated the individual and self-expression in the creative process, and both sought an amalgamation between art and politics. During McKay's editorship, the magazine presented a broad range of themes associated with African Americans, from the political to the cultural. As one of the key literary figures of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, McKay was interested in new talent and committed to the heritage of African Americans. McKay brought African American achievements in the arts to the forefront of the magazine, as in his December 1921 review of the pioneering African American musical, "Shuffle Along, A Negro Extravaganza." The musical written by Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake, offered proof to McKay that African American artists might soon break through "the screen of searing bigotry put between them and life by the dominant race." McKay's review reminded readers "the American public is dimly aware of a great storehouse of Negro Art in this country."³⁹ The essay called for a self-reflexive art produced through the varied experiences of African Americans. For McKay, the African American artist had to engage, struggle with, and celebrate the polymorphous experiences of the race, a position previously uncharted by the *Liberator's* staff.

McKay actually functioned on two levels as a *Liberator* editor. On one level, he was simply an artist among equals and was accepted as such. On the other level, as the magazine's solitary African American, he brought a greater perspective on the racial question. Even though the *Liberator* was progressive in its attitude toward African Americans, McKay would often have

³⁹ McKay, "Shuffle Along, A Negro Extravaganza," *Liberator* 4, no. 12 (December 1921): 24-26. The importance of McKay's essay is discussed in McKible, 198-99.

to defend the amount of space devoted to racial matters. As such, McKay could not exercise complete autonomy in editorial selections, which may account in part to the absence of African American artists presented in the magazine. Under the scrutiny of Mike Gold's watchful eye, McKay was accused of devoting too much space to cultural, rather than proletarian issues. Despite the restrictions, the *Liberator* continued to feature short stories, poetry and illustrations addressing African Americans. Images, such as Maurice Sterne's tropical scene of Island natives (February 1922) or Niles Spenser's portrait of a "Negro Girl" (June 1922, fig. 9), were unlike earlier illustrations with explicit condemnatory political messages. While McKay may have advocated the working class movement for the African American, the editorial selections, largely apolitical, did not reflect that opinion. In general, the artistic choices during McKay's editorship sought to neutralize racial stereotypes, expose discrimination, and broaden representations of African Americans. McKay always clung to his independence as a literary artist and openly proclaimed his belief that an artist should not subordinate his aesthetic freedom to his political convictions.⁴⁰

MIKE GOLD (1922)

While Eastman and Dell obliquely alluded to the idea of proletarian art, Gold addressed the subject directly in "Towards Proletarian Art," which appeared in the February 1921 issue of the *Liberator* as the last work he published under the name of Irwin Granich. The article was a major document in radical literary theory in the United States and was virtually the first call for the creation of an art distinctly by and for the American working class. The American currency of the term "proletarian literature" can be dated from the publication of this essay.⁴¹ Gold also used

⁴⁰ Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance*, 170. For further information on McKay's editorship, see chapter one and five.

⁴¹ Folsom, 7 & 62. In America, "proletcult" was also discussed in Eden and Cedar Paul's manuscript, *Proletcult* of 1921. The authors defined it "as a fighting culture" based upon the conception of

the term “Proletcult” meaning proletarian culture, an art expressing the experience of the working class. In Russia, Proletkult was the Soviet’s organized attempt to remove the economic and social barriers that repressed proletarian instincts. In 1920-1922, Gold’s concept of the “proletarian” seemed to have been a composite of the humanist view of culture and a more politicized notion that sought to purge anarchist sentiments and capitalistic notions from the minds of the masses.

In his essay, Gold anticipated the cultural revolution following the political one and identified the future of art with the struggles of the working class for a new society: “We are prepared for the economic revolution of the world, but what shakes us with terror and doubt is the cultural upheaval that must come.” Gold assured the reader: “The old ideals must die. But let us not fear. Let us fling all we are into the cauldron of the Revolution.” He argued that previous American artists were spiritually sick, pessimistic, and alienated: “The art ideals of the capitalistic world isolated each artist as in a solitary cell, there to brood and suffer silently and go mad.” Gold equated modernism with aestheticism; as a result he argued for a politically engaged art rooted in the struggle of actual people. Gold called for artists to look toward the life of the Revolution for inspiration:

A great art will arise out of the new great life in Russia—and it will be an art that will sustain man, and give him equanimity, and not crucify him on his problems as did the old.... The artist must turn to the proletariat to overcome the inadequacies of his soul... The soul of Man needs some sure and permanent thing to believe, to be devoted to and to trust.⁴²

Gold not only turned to the newly founded Proletkult in Russia, but also to Walt Whitman as a model for the new proletarian art. For him, Whitman was “the heroic spiritual grandfather of our generation in America” who envisioned a proletarian culture through his elevation of the grassroots of America. For Gold, Whitman, “with his cosmic intuitions and

the class struggle. Its fundamental aim, in the pre-Revolutionary phase, was to “render the worker with both the knowledge and the fighting impetus which would enable them to achieve their historic mission.” See Eden and Cedar Paul, *Proletcult* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1921), 23 & 93, and Aaron, 94.

⁴² Irwin Granich (Mike Gold), “Towards Proletarian Art.”

comprehensions,” dwelt among the masses, and from there drew his strength to intuitively arrive at proletarian art. Gold too sought an indigenous American art and called for artists to return to their common experience: “Its roots must be in the fields, factories, and workshops of American life.” In addition, Gold, unlike most writers of the *Liberator* who focused on the international class struggle, grounded his writing in his immediate circumstances and those circumstances were New York City. The dominant image portrayed by Gold was the poverty and misery of the tenements and sweatshops of New York’s working classes.⁴³

Many of Gold’s theories were residuals of the formative writings on the subject by Eastman and Dell—the quest for a distinctly American art, the importance of art in communicating to the masses, the call for an art relating to the life of reality, the ability of art to transform society, and the disdain for abstraction. In a review of an exhibition of Gropper’s paintings, Gold referred to abstractions as “anti-human” and “mechanistic” distortions, “and at their best, mere ‘decoration.’” Like Eastman, Gold preferred an art that was neither abstract nor photographic realism but instead “expressive.” The most significant departure from Eastman’s theories was Gold’s total disavowal of the notion of the individual. In Gold’s own identification with the proletariat he pushed aside any independent role for the intellectual, arguing that art itself should stem from the masses. “All that I know of Life I learned in the tenement,” wrote Gold, “I am not an individual; I am all that the tenement group poured into me during those early years of my spiritual travail.” Again, the experience of the artist was crucial to proletarian art: “Need we apologize or be ashamed if we express in art that manifestation of Life which is so exclusively

⁴³ Granich, “Towards Proletarian Art.” For an analysis of Gold’s essay as it relates to American literary modernism, see McKible, 1-24 and 189-92. McKible also suggests reading Gold’s essay as a reaction to McKay’s growing prominence as a *Liberator* contributor and editor. For biographical information and analysis of Gold’s work, see Michael Folsom, introduction to *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), and Samuel Sillen, introduction to *The Mike Gold Reader* (New York: International Publishers, 1954).

ours, the life of the toilers?" "What is art?" he asked, "art is the tenement pouring out its soul through us, its most sensitive and articulate sons and daughters."⁴⁴

Gold's essay set the precedent for defining proletarian art in America and defined its most significant traits. These characteristics included: autobiographical identification with the working class, the prediction of an American renaissance, the necessity of the artist's reliance on personal experience, an art that was comprehensible to the masses, an American equivalent to the Russian model, and devotion to the Soviet example. On the last point Gold was prophetic in identifying Proletcult with the Soviet experiment, for it was not clear in 1921 that this artistic viewpoint would gain ascendancy in Russia. By 1926, Gold proclaimed with new confidence that art should be utilitarian and directly relate to the life of the worker: "Art, the Bolsheviks say, is useful or it is nothing . . . Art is no more an idle pastime than science; it is as necessary . . . Our palettes are the public square, our canvasses are the cities." Furthermore, he singled out the cartoon "as a strong weapon, the most direct and powerful one can find" in the proletarian struggle. According to Freeman, however, Gold's approach to the revolutionary movement was still aesthetic and moral rather than scientific and political. Freeman wrote that during Gold's involvement with the *Liberator* he "had absolutely and explicitly opposed the capitulation of art to the stringency of his own politics." Freeman's recollection may partly explain the continued freedom of artistic expression and experimentation exhibited in the magazine during Gold's editorship.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ See Mike Gold, "Change the World: A Venture into Art Criticism: The Abstract Painters and William Gropper," William Gropper Papers (reel 3501, frame 1348-1349), Archives of American Art, New York. The article, a press clipping from Gropper's archive is undated; however, the exhibition mentioned by Gold was held at the ACA Gallery in New York. Gropper held his first one-man show at the ACA in 1936 with consecutive annual exhibits until 1941. See also Granich, "Towards Proletarian Art." Marquardt also noted the "sentiment of Eastman" in Gold's writing. See Marquardt, *Art and Journals on the Political Front*, 217.

⁴⁵ See Gold, "Art is a Weapon" in *Red Cartoons from the Daily Worker, the Workers Monthly and the Liberator* (Chicago: Daily Worker Publishing Co., 1926) and Freeman, *An American Testament*, 234-325. For further information regarding Gold's role in defining proletarian art. See Gilbert, 80-81, and Gold, "Towards an American Revolutionary Culture," *New Masses* (July 1931): 12-13.

While Gold was editor, the *Liberator* continued to combine both the purely aesthetic and the political; however, there were two notable differences: the development of the labor cartoon and the willingness to experiment with a variety of artistic styles. Diversity was realized not only with the introduction of new artists, but with pre-existing artists, notably Gellert and Gropper, who began taking different directions in their art. Gellert began to experiment with abstract techniques of cubism and other modernist variants, and Gropper explored new styles and subjects ranging from the urban landscape to the heroic American laborer. The divergent nature of the artistic selections at this time may have been in part due to both artists' greater input in the editorial decisions. Artistically, the end of 1921 and 1922 were perhaps the best years for the *Liberator* with the appearance for the first time of George Grosz, Wanda Gág, and Reginald Marsh. Along with these additions, the magazine continued to feature the works of artists from the former *Masses* group—Cornelia Barns, Maurice Becker, Boardman Robinson, Maurice Sterne and Art Young.

JOSEPH FREEMAN (1922-1923)

Freeman's first contact with the *Liberator* circle was an enthusiastic letter to Eastman declaring that the magazine had provided a solution for the tormenting problem of how to combine a love of poetry with a passion for revolution. Freeman's ongoing struggle to reconcile the conflict between art and politics governed his professional career and was a crucial component in defining the role of the artist at the *Liberator*. Freeman had a great respect for the staff of artists and writers at the magazine, and considered it one of the only forums for the artist/radical. Dell who had a "convincing way of connecting literature with revolution" was particularly influential to him. When Freeman came on board as editor with Gold in 1922 they both sought a relative freedom for art. In their joint editorship of the *Liberator* they provided and maintained a broad context of possibilities for artists. In his autobiography, Freeman openly

discussed his role as editor, admitting that he and Gold would attach captions to illustrations in order to make them political. The succeeding editors continued the *Masses* and early *Liberator* tradition of adding captions to drawings. One of the main tasks of the two editors was to “find new talent, to develop new revolutionary artists and writers.” During Freeman’s editorship, the *Liberator* introduced several new artists and writers, among them Louis Riback, Reginald Marsh, Otto Soglow and Adolf Dehn. The magazine also attempted to broaden its cultural scope by introducing American readers to Russian culture under the Soviets. The *Liberator* designed a new series, “Culture and Revolution,” promising ten articles by Alexander Chramoff, prominent Soviet director of the new Soviet Theater and Anatoly Lunacharsky, Commissar of Art and Education.⁴⁶

When the *Liberator* was officially turned over to the Workers’ Party in May 1923, two separate associate editorial boards of art and politics were formed. Evidently, the Workers’ Party had little interest in art, “the realm of art, presumably less serious, was left for the artists.” The political editors left artistic matters in the hands of Freeman and Minor. They coordinated the material that came in, planned upcoming issues and suggested themes to contributors in both groups. The dualism between art and politics was markedly apparent for Freeman:

We combined politics and poetry in one publication mechanically while separating them functionally. With little exception, the political editors had no particular interest in art, with little exception the art editors had only the most general unspecified interest in politics. They supported the party in its general program and participated in its special campaigns but ignored the course of political events as a whole. Some even wanted to steer clear of politics altogether; they were communist sympathizers who wanted to retain their roots in literary and artistic circles.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See “Culture and Revolution,” *Liberator* 5, no. 11 (November-December 1922): 38. The *Liberator* published three articles on the Soviet theater by Chramoff: “The Red Cock,” 5, no. 11 (January 1923): 7-8; “Moscow Art Theatre,” 6, no. 2 (February 1923): 15-20; and “The Socialist Theatre in Soviet Russia,” 6, no. 4 (April 1923): 14-16.

⁴⁷ See Freeman, *An American Testament*, 310-311.

The division between art and politics accounts for the continued eclectic artistic selections. Presumably, the artists maintained their independence from party dictates and with little exception, did not address the same issues as the political editors. During 1923 the magazine lacked cohesion between art and text. If the *Liberator* was read, the communist program was persuasive, if merely scanned, the art did not indicate any dramatic change in editorial direction. Frank Walts executed the majority of covers, and while he was a competent illustrator, the deficiency of artistic diversity indicated a lack of concern with art. The covers continued to be non-political throughout the duration of the *Liberator*, in all likelihood due to the desire to preserve the reputation and ensure the readership of the magazine. Even though the covers were non-partisan, inside the magazine a new typography gave dominance to the political articles and less space to the illustrations. While the double-page spread (long a tradition of the magazine) continued, less space was allotted to illustrations, cartoons and reproductions. A new group of labor artists were featured that included Fred Ellis, Don Brown, Julian DeMiskey and Peter Alma. Former *Masses* artists such as Boardman Robinson no longer appeared, and Cornelia Barns and Art Young were seldom featured.

Freeman was disturbed by the new political affiliation of the magazine. For the first time a socialist journal of art and politics was owned and run by a party, not by the artists; a party pledged to the Communist International. In 1936 Freeman wrote that when the *Liberator* was taken over by the Workers' Party: "we felt that one period in American radical literature had closed, and another had opened. The *Masses* and *Liberator* as we had known it since 1913 had died." Freeman corresponded with Gold about the dilemma and Gold told him not to give up "trying for the literary people and the artists," reminding him that the press was not the only avenue for circulating communist ideas. Freeman wrote literary criticism and reviews for the magazine as a temporary solution in his ongoing quest of combining his skill as a writer with that

of politics. For Freeman and his generation, the integration of art and revolution remained unresolved.⁴⁸

ROBERT MINOR (1923-24)

When Freeman and Minor worked together in 1922 at the *Liberator*, Minor was already active in the leadership of the Communist party. Freeman said of him, “from the day he grasped the meaning of the Communist party he gave himself to it without reserve.” According to Freeman, Minor and Reed provided one possible solution to the problem of the reconciliation of art and politics by abandoning art for complete devotion to the revolution. Freeman observed of Minor that he had but one goal, which governed him consistently throughout his life: “not ever was it, pure art, but art with revolutionary content.”⁴⁹ In October 1923 when the *Liberator* moved its offices to Chicago, Minor became sole editor of the paper. Ironically, for the first time in its history, the editor of the *Liberator* was an artist and that artist was a devout party member, whose dedication to communism was greater than his interest in art.

Minor was one of the earliest and most consistent advocates for the rights of artists. Before and after his indoctrination into communism he was repeatedly opposed to the concept of art as a commodity. When discussing an incident between an owner of his drawings and himself, he wrote: “Someone in matter-of-fact conversation said that certain drawings that I had made were his property.” Minor “flew into a rage” at the idea that someone would claim ownership of his work: “My hand made that; my fingers—my fingers tingled to the joy of shaping those

⁴⁸ Freeman, *An American Testament*, 310-311, & 324. Recognizing the gap in American understanding of Soviet culture, in 1930 Freeman would directly address culture and politics in *Voices of October: Art and Literature in Soviet Russia* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1930). Even though Freeman focused on literature, he celebrated Soviet culture and its ability to transform and integrate every aspect of life: “The Communists proceed on the conviction that the struggle of economic classes determines not only the nature of political and social institutions, but also philosophy, literature and art.” Quoting from Marxist sources, Freeman rejected the notion of the “aestheticism” of art; art was part of the political and economic activities of a society and every artist was a participant of the class struggle.

⁴⁹ Freeman, *An American Testament*, 305-307.

lines—and this impudent cannibal dares to put a claim upon it!” Minor would later elaborate on the notion of possession, declaring art to be the property of mankind since the best art spoke from a common universal experience. In a review of an exhibit of drawings by Boardman Robinson, titled “Man, X His Mark,” Minor moved away from the notion that art was a personal expression of the artist. Instead of the artist’s signature, “X” came to symbolize the artist’s identification with mankind—art and mankind became one and the same. For Minor, art was being corrupted by a capitalist market that produced an art that had become, “the fake Mark of Man.” Illustrations in magazines and newspapers which he called, “the Daily Lie,” the Weekly Smirk,” and “the Monthly Cash” particularly vexed Minor. In the drawings of Robinson, “Mankind makes His (X) Mark again” because he was able to capture what Minor called, “the fight of forces.” “The fight of forces” was the artist’s response to a universal expression of mankind’s struggle with life. “That is the only theme an artist ever knew,” wrote Minor, “no picture was ever painted to any other theme, no poem was ever written to another, no music ever came from any other inspiration.” By 1928, the “fight of forces” would become an expression of class warfare, for this was “the mightiest struggle in the history of mankind.”⁵⁰

In 1924 the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern formally recognized art as a weapon in class warfare. In Minor’s 1925 article, “Art As a Weapon in the Class Struggle,” he compared a capitalist journal to a Bolshevik journal. Reminiscent of Eastman’s 1917 article on “What’s the Matter with Magazine Art?” Minor too believed the artist was “prostituted” by the profit motive, but the culprit was no longer the bourgeoisie; it was now “the capitalist press.” According to Minor, capitalism, in its necessity to shut off, smother and obscure the meaning of life, became “a nightmare to the artist.” The only solution for the artist was “Communism, which has no such necessity, becomes a beautiful prospect to the artist who dares to look upon it.” For Minor,

⁵⁰ Minor, “The Paintings of William Sanger,” *Liberator* 3, no. 1 (January 1920): 43-44, “Man, X His Mark (Comment on an Exhibit of Drawings by Boardman Robinson),” *Liberator* 5, no. 4 (April 1922): 20-21, and introduction to *Red Cartoons from the Daily Worker, 1928* (New York: The Daily Worker, 1928).

communism was the purifier for the artist, the only way in which he would become part of a communal experience and in turn express his creative impulses. Further, communism would enrich the artist's basic character of expressing life's experience. Minor defined propaganda as "any expression of a concept of the universe, when there are two concepts in rivalry." The two concepts in rivalry were the capitalist and revolutionary press, and thus both were engaged in propaganda. Minor argued that propaganda was crucial to the revolutionary cause and suggested to the communist press that they "must develop a clearer appreciation of this." Minor claimed that workers placed a higher value on art than did the "cultured classes," warning communists that the capitalist understood the enormous potential of propaganda.⁵¹

For Minor, magazine illustration was the most effective means by which the artist could communicate to the masses and he privileged the cartoon above all other forms of art. During his editorship, themes of labor and aggressive affronts to capitalism were favored over the generalized social content drawing. As editor, he introduced the labor cartoonists, Fred Ellis and Alfred Freuh to the staff. While the art remained both political and nonpolitical, there was a shift in tone toward politicized images with a specific party line agenda. In addition, the size and quantity of illustration was reduced as a result of the dominance of politicized text. Despite his Communist position, Minor had a great deal of respect for the role of art and artists writing: "The essential characteristic of true art is exactly this: that it brings an incoherent mass of facts into a unified concept. Even the smallest good cartoon or verse does this."⁵²

Eastman's 1917 essay, "What's the Matter With Magazine Art?" and Minor's 1925 article, "Art As a Weapon in the Class Struggle" demonstrate the contrast in editorial direction from the early to the late *Liberator*. While Eastman struggled to define the role of art, which favored the artist's truthful expression of experience, and resulted in an eclectic quasi-realism,

⁵¹ Minor, "Art As a Weapon in the Class Struggle," *Daily Worker*, 22 September 1925.

⁵² Minor, "Art As a Weapon in the Class Struggle."

Minor dismissed all ambiguity. Art had but one objective—to serve the proletariat and to relate directly to the class struggle. The subjective experience of the artist was inconsequential to the greater goals of propaganda. Eastman's concept of art reflected the bohemian disregard for convention that embraced individuality and freedom for the artist. Minor's theories, on the other hand, were directly correlated to the newly developing communist ideologies. Eastman's social scenes were eclipsed by caustic, partisan commentary.

SOVIET ART POLICY

What was the newly formed Soviet government's position on art and did it have any bearing on the *Liberator*? Following the October revolution of 1917 there was a period of relatively free experiment in art and art theory. The major concerns of the party with regard to art in its early phase was the relation of the new Communist culture to the past, the relation of Communist culture to the masses, the relation of Soviet nationalism to Marxist internationalism and what constituted revolutionary art. Because the government's prime concern from 1918 to 1921 was to consolidate the Revolution and successfully fight the Civil War, the amount of time devoted to artistic questions was severely limited. Furthermore, literature always took dominance in party cultural affairs.⁵³

Many artists and theoreticians insisted that only new and revolutionary art forms and techniques, removed from the bourgeois past, could emphasize the new revolutionary spirit. For this reason, the machine was glorified as the symbol of progress and as the product of new technical achievements. The proposed monument to the Third International designed in 1919 by Vladimir Tatlin reflected the dynamic movement, utilitarianism, technical innovation and progress in art that expressed the newly formed Bolshevik party and utopian revolutionary action. Western European experimental art--Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism contributed in varying degrees to the various art movements within Russia. In Russia, the most important experimental art was Suprematism, and even more influential in the early 1920s was Constructivism.

Lenin believed that one of the most important cultural tasks of the new Soviet state was to bring literacy to the majority of illiterate masses. The man charged with that task was Lenin's Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky, who was largely responsible for education and culture. The early policy of Lunacharsky was to encourage abundance in art production, art

⁵³ Egbert, 88. See also Lee Baxendall, *Marxism and Aesthetics, an Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Humanities Press, 1969).

expression and art education. The May 1919 *Liberator* published Lunacharsky's "Education Under the Bolsheviks," a summary of his task as the Commissariat of Public Education. In it, Lunacharsky described the need for a "radical reform system" extending into science, film, music, literature and art. Independent of the party and the government, Proletkult cultural and educational organizations were set up under Lunacharsky in Petrograd in November 1917. The People's Commissariat for Education and the Main Politico-Educational Committee were both part of the Proletkult. Proletkult was specifically organized to create proletarian art forms and a culture that would reflect the values and aspirations of the proletariat. It promoted working-class education and the emergence of a proletarian intelligentsia, arranging classes for adults, organizing schools, studios, clubs, theaters, and publishing numerous journals. Lunacharsky was sympathetic to avant-garde experimentation, as well as more traditional formal approaches, striving to foster the image of a new society in the making. He sought to define the art of the proletariat as one, which was "little inclined toward individualism," but rather one that stressed a universal art "interwoven with technology and labor." Lenin at first relied on Lunacharsky to maintain the independence of the Proletkult circles, but in October, 1920 he moved to bring them formally under party control.⁵⁴

Lenin admitted his lack of artistic knowledge and his neglect of art. He did not approve of modern movements, finding abstraction unintelligible. In 1920 Lenin stated his disapproval of modern movements: "I cannot value the works of expressionism, futurism, cubism and other isms as the highest expressions of artistic genius. I don't understand them. They give me no pleasure." He maintained that art, like all aspects of culture were rooted in the past and that modern trends

⁵⁴ Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Education Under the Bolsheviks," *Liberator* 2, no. 5 (May 1919): 19-24, and "Proletariat Culture," *Survey Graphic* 6 (March 1923): 691-3, reprinted in Suggs, 61-2. A resolution was believed to have been written by Lenin for endorsement by the Proletkult Congress on October 1920 which sought to bring the Proletkult under the wing of the Communist Party. See Suggs, 48-49. For further information on Lunacharsky's role, particularly in Soviet journals, see Christina Lodder, "Art of the Commune: Politics and Art in Soviet Journals, 1917-20," *Art Journal* (Spring 1993): 25. For a complete discussion of Soviet art see, Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

were too far removed from history. Lenin was inclined not only toward utility, but also toward realism in art. To him works of art were valuable insofar as they belonged to the masses and were understood by the people. "Art belongs to the people," he said: "It must have its deepest roots in the broad mass of workers. It must be understood and loved by them. It must be rooted in and grow with their feelings, thoughts and desires." Even though Lenin was opposed to abstraction, he did not think art should be mere photographic transcriptions of the existing world. He believed that art should both inspire and educate the masses and serve a social and party purpose as propaganda. He recognized the importance of propaganda manifested in great inscriptions, newspapers, and particularly the motion picture.⁵⁵

Unlike Lenin and Stalin, Trotsky had devoted time to the study and criticism of literature and art. In 1924 Trotsky published *Literature and Revolution*, which remains the most thought provoking definition of the problem of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics. In it, he defined the place of art in a revolutionary society as one of relative freedom. Trotsky argued that art should maintain contact with the cultural past and believed that a socialist art would flourish once the revolution was complete. He cautioned against a special proletarian culture and a special proletarian art. Trotsky felt that proletarian art would never actually exist because the proletarian regime itself was only transient and a step toward a classless society. While Trotsky, like other Marxists, felt that art should serve social ends, he also firmly maintained that it should not be judged by its social usefulness, as Lenin had implied, but by its own law, the law of art. Further, Trotsky did not believe art should be controlled by the party, "the domain of art is not one in which the party is called upon to command. It can and must protect and help it, but it can only lead it indirectly." Trotsky embraced modernism, maintaining that art could withstand diversity and varying forms. He approved of Tatlin's Monument to the Third International, of the modern style in architecture and corresponding avant-garde styles. For him the innovative use of new materials and forms of

⁵⁵ Lenin's quotes and observations concerning art are discussed in Clara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (New York: International Publishers, 1934), 12-13.

the Constructivists, which sought to break with traditional techniques, offered an excellent expression of the dynamism and progress of the Russian Revolution. Trotsky, unlike Lenin and Stalin, considered abstract forms of modern art capable of expressing the spirit of the Marxist revolution.⁵⁶

By 1920 when art had come increasingly under the control of the Comintern, many artists including Vasily Kandinsky, Naum Gabo, and Anton Pevsner who believed in the independence of art left Russia. The modern movement in art began to be perceived as too individualistic in temper, too separated from the masses and fundamentally bourgeois rather than proletarian. After the departure of many leading modernists, art soon became less abstract and experimental. The "revolutionary" freedom of art was subordinated to the idea that the dictatorship of the proletariat should dictate also to art and that art must follow the party line. Soon clashes within the Communist party arose over the question as to just what kind of art was best suited to the Russian Marxist ideology.⁵⁷ Because it fit well with Marx's materialistic philosophy, realism became the one form of art most easily approved. As a result of Lenin's rejection of modernism, many American Marxists had little interest in radically new developments in literature and art.

As early as October 1921, the Executive Committee of the Comintern officially began recognizing the value of visual arts for propaganda and issued a circular to all parties of the Third International stating:

The common worker values especially a successful expression, a well-deserved biting mockery of the adversary. A good caricature, which hits the spot, is certainly better than a dozen difficult, boring, so-called 'Marxist' articles. Our newspapers must carefully seek out people who understand how to serve the proletarian revolution with a pencil in hand. One must present more often drawings and

⁵⁶ Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, translated from the Russian by Rose Strunsky (New York: International Publishers, 1925), 218. See also, Paul N. Siegel, *Leon Trotsky on Literature and Art* (New York: Path Finder Press, Inc., 1970). After Lenin's death, Stalin would have Trotsky expelled from the party in 1928. Trotsky and his followers were accused by Stalinists of being supporters of "art for art's sake." Even among the American supporters of Trotsky, it would have been suspicious for a party loyalist to cite Trotsky in any connection. See Egbert, 62-63.

⁵⁷ Egbert, 53.

caricatures that often animate the newspaper editions and clarify in the most everyday form what there is to clarify.⁵⁸

After the Executive Committee of the Comintern issued its circular endorsing the use of drawing and caricature as a means of understanding the proletarian revolution, illustrations were deemed more immediately intelligible to the workers than the complexity of political and theoretical writing. In addition, easy messages, particularly forms of popular entertainment began being recognized as powerful forms of communication. The party press began to regularly feature illustrations from that time forward, signaling a shift in the party's previous resistance to artistic contributions to its newspaper. In 1922 a group in Russia known as "artists of the Revolution" issued a manifesto, which stated:

It is our duty to mankind to perpetuate the revolution, the greatest event in history, in artistic documents. We render a pictorial representation of the present day: the life of the Red Army, the life of the workers and peasants, the leaders of the Revolution, and the heroes of labor.⁵⁹

The Russian government was now moving toward a clearer understanding of the type of art they felt suited the needs of the Proletariat State. However, there were yet to be any explicit directives given to party members. At the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern held in Moscow from June 17 to July 8, 1924, art as a weapon in the class struggle was formally recognized, thereby establishing the importance of propaganda for a working-class culture with collectivist values. Communist party members in Russia and throughout the world were expected to follow the party line in matters of politics, as well as culture.

Immediately following the Revolution, few Americans, including Communists, understood Russia, or for that matter, the Russian language. The direct influence of Soviet

⁵⁸ Reprinted in Barbara McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 92.

⁵⁹ As cited by Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, "Art Under Totalitarianism," *The Contemporary Scene, a Symposium, March 28-30, 1952* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1954), 49-64. Lehmann-Haupt does not identify "artists of the revolution," nor does he provide any further information. See also Jane Clapp, *Art Censorship: A Chronology of Proscribed and Prescribed Art* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1972), 209 and McCloskey, 92.

Russian art theory in the United States was not from the original Russian sources, but from translations into English. In addition, there were relatively few directives regarding art emanating from Russia until the mid-1920s. While the party randomly offered suggestions pertaining to art, the first official policy was the 1924 directive declaring art as a weapon in the class struggle. Even though Minor did not articulate the precise terminology of “art as weapon” until his September 22, 1925 article in the *Daily Worker*, he independently arrived at the same conclusion as the Comintern, evidenced by his April 1922 article, “Man X His Mark.” Despite Minor’s shared theoretical position, Comintern art policy was never mentioned by any of the *Liberator* editors. Village radicals were aware of Proletkult and reacted with excitement to the importance placed on the support of the arts in Soviet Russia. In addition to Dell’s article on the cultural programs initiated by the Soviets, Reed sought out Lunacharsky while in Russia and was introduced to the programs for new schools, and visited a Proletkult center. According to his biographer, Reed was impressed by avant-garde graphics.⁶⁰ While the *Liberator* staff was aware of the Proletkult movement and sought to define a proletarian art for American society, evidence indicates that the Comintern did not directly affect the editorial policy of its individual editors. At the *Liberator*, as Freeman verified, the party stayed out of matters pertaining to art. When the Workers’ Party assumed editorial control, the matter of art was left to the artists, as Freeman explained: “On this point the party had no policy now. It was too busy with immediate organization tasks to pay much attention to the so-called cultural front.”⁶¹ Because Lenin, nor the Comintern formulated an organized and detailed philosophy of art, there existed no clear party line which could be followed by the communists, whether in Russia or in other countries,

⁶⁰ Robert A. Rosenstone, *Romantic Revolutionary: A Biography of John Reed* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 363.

⁶¹ Freeman, *An American Testament*, 300.

including the United States.⁶² It appears that Marxism, in general, rather than any specific Soviet or Leninist policy played a role in shaping the editors' theoretical dispositions toward art.

The various editors and artists of the *Liberator* were attempting to define an art for the masses, independent of party line. Many of their theories were strongly reminiscent of a generalized Marxist philosophy, and quite naturally similar to those ultimately adopted by the Soviet Union. Emphasis on the masses was sympathetically received by many Americans, including many artists, some of them Communists or Socialists who came to believe that most American art had lost touch with the everyday realities of American life. For Marxists in America, art could not be separated objectively from politics. These Marxist theorists were particularly interested in artistic media which best lent themselves to propagandizing to the masses, such as newspaper cartoons, murals, architecture, monumental sculpture, the theatre, motion pictures, and pageants. While some issues were emphasized or de-emphasized, depending upon the individual editor, for the most part, *Liberator* editors were in agreement with a generalized Marxist orientation. Artists faced the question of the relation of art to social radicalism and the problem of achieving adequate originality while still retaining an understanding of the masses.

The theoretical writing of Eastman, Dell, Gold and Minor formed the ideological basis of socially relevant art of the 1930s. In Eastman's essay, "What's the Matter with Magazine Art?" of 1915, he rejected art as a commodity, challenged the concept of beauty in art, called for an art to communicate to the masses, and urged the artist to return to a native American tradition. In his successive essays on art, Eastman discarded abstraction as "non-intelligible," recognized the ability of drawings to serve the ideal of democracy, maintaining that the fully developed artist should work within society propagandizing socialist ideals. In Dell's writing on artistic expression, he consistently defended a "democratic spirit" in art and suggested popular venues for

⁶² Egbert, 51.

art to reach the masses. In Gold's seminal essay, "Toward Proletarian Art," he introduced the concept of proletarian art, identified the struggles of the working class for a new society, rejected the alienation of the artist engaged in art for art's sake, and also evoked Whitman's grassroots American tradition. Minor upheld the concept of "art as a weapon" in the class struggle, stressed the identification of the artist with the working class, and insisted upon the necessity of revolutionary artistic propaganda.

Even though the ideas of proletarian art and propaganda art were introduced or intimated in the *Liberator*, the visual imagery of the magazine reflected its commitment to artistic self-expression and experimentation regardless of style or content. The editors desired to make their socialist ideology appealing and relevant to American life and their major emphasis was to relate socialism to the tenets of true democracy. The seemingly unnatural correlation between socialism and democracy became a key element in the *Liberator's* campaign to create a climate receptive to the socialist transformation of American life. Patrons, sympathetic to socialist ideas did not find the material perpetuated in the *Liberator* subversive or anti-American. Socialism and Communism had a fluid definition at the time and were based on individual application. The *Liberator* editors suggested that socialistic transformation in United States would be different, based on the specific need and condition of American society. Despite the wide range of subjects and styles promoted in the magazine from the quick sketches of Robinson to the cubist lines of Gellert—accurate communication of an idea was the determining objective. During its publication, the magazine attempted to reconcile art and politics, encouraging experimentation and innovation in hopes of fostering an indigenous American culture. The artists and patrons who contributed to the magazine did not dispute these objectives but instead comprehended the need for a magazine that proposed both an art committed to socialist causes and alternative systems of government.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ARTISTS

*"For my part, I find it difficult to understand the man, calling himself an artist, who is satisfied with things as they are. The beauty and wonder (old, old words) of the external world forever compel and attract; but I find it impossible to be content with contemplating it in the midst of so much poverty and so many lies . . ."*¹

The *Liberator* contributors were a diverse group of artists who came from different educational, cultural, geographical and economic backgrounds. The illustrators consisted of those who were exclusively graphic artists and those that expanded into the realm of painting and other mediums. Many artists were the leading illustrators of their time, freelancing for several different publications, ranging from the newspaper to the art and literary magazine. Among the scores of artists who appeared in the publication, the list ranges from the most internationally prominent such as Stuart Davis, George Grosz, Robert Henri, Käthe Kollwitz, Reginald Marsh and Diego Rivera to the unknown and obscure such as Don Brown, William S. Fanning, and Frank Walts. Artists were drawn to the *Liberator* because of their artistic revolt against academic art and their support of some form of socialist reform. Each illustrator was forced to recognize the limited social role for expression provided the artist in America. Editors who dictated the style and content of illustrations dominated the magazine and newspaper industry. The graphic illustrator faced the problem of being an artist, selling his art on the market and being a political being. The *Liberator* afforded artists a more experimental vehicle of artistic expression and also provided a venue for leftist political views. Since artists were barely paid for their efforts, their motivation stemmed from a dual desire to publish their drawings in a forum that departed from the mainstream magazine illustration, and express their social concerns.

¹ Robinson, "A Letter from Boardman Robinson," *Liberator* 5, no. 7 (July 1922): 29.

A definitive profile of the *Liberator* artist would be incomplete and virtually impossible to compile as information on many obscure artists who participated in the publication is unknown, pseudonyms often used, first or last names omitted and, at times, artist identification not included.² In addition, many artists appeared but once in the magazine and made no lasting impact on the publication or its contributors. (In the case of the relatively unknown artist, the *Liberator* and little magazines of the early twentieth century become the best and only source for their recognition.) Despite the lack of information on some artists and their disparate backgrounds, a broad description of the *Liberator* artist can be determined if one turns to its list of contributing artist editors. The artists who appeared as contributing editors during the *Liberator's* seven years of publication included: Cornelia Barns (1888-1941), Maurice Becker (1889-1975), Don Brown (dates unknown), Kenneth R. Chamberlain (1891-1984), Fred C. Ellis ((1875-1939), Hugo Gellert (1892-1985), Lydia Gibson (1891-1964), William Gropper (1897-1977), Julius J. Lankes (1884-1960), Robert Minor (1884-1952), Boardman Robinson (1876-1952), Maurice Sterne (1878-1957), Franks Walts (dates unknown), Clive Weed (1884-1936), and Art Young (1866-1943).

The majority of artist contributors were American born, New York based illustrators who came from middle-class backgrounds. Even though most artists were born in the United States, some emigrated from European countries or came from first-generation immigrant families. Regardless of their background, the bulk of artists shared an interest in the plight of the masses and socialist causes. Because of this commitment, *Liberator* artists were not commercially driven, and as such sacrificed lucrative careers. Steady employment was scarce and many artists were in severe financial straits. The majority of illustrators turned to freelancing and contributed their drawings to several different publications; and what was most often the case, clashed with

² Many artists who appeared in the *Liberator* are not listed in the standard genealogical or bibliographic sources, i.e., *Bénézit*, *Thieme-Becker*, *Mallett's Index of Artists*, *Who's Who in American Art*, *Who Was Who in American Art*, *Who Was Who in New York*.

editorial policies. In contrast, successful cartoonists such as Gropper, Minor, Robinson and Young were hired by several papers to express their own opinions.

While sympathetic to socialist causes, relatively few of the contributors were politically active nor were they members of any left-wing political party. Of the small number of artists who were politically active, some ran for public office (Young and Minor), while others took leading roles in political artists' organizations (Hugo Gellert and Stuart Davis). As a result of their association with the left, many of the more politically engaged artists were subject to severe government harassment, government censorship, and, in some, cases, imprisonment. As pacifists and opponents of the war, John Barber and Adolf Dehn were imprisoned as conscientious objectors. To escape the oppressive wartime environment and subsequent hostility to radicals, others fled the country. Becker avoided his prison sentence by going to Mexico. Gellert too, fled to Mexico to avoid the draft and Gropper under investigation by Department of Justice Agents, took respite in Cuba. Others resorted to submitting their illustrations under pseudonyms; such was the case for Kenneth Chamberlain (alias Russell) and Boardman Robinson (alias Michael North).

Because artists came from such diverse economic backgrounds, some were self-taught, others formally trained in academies in both Europe and America, and others studied with a single artist. As discussed in chapter one, the Ashcan school led by Robert Henri and John Sloan influenced many New York artists. Several contributors also came under the influence of George Bellows and Henri at the Modern School in Stelton, New Jersey and its New York affiliate, the Ferrer Center. Henri was responsible for introducing many American artists to Honoré Daumier and reportedly pinned reproductions of the French artist's cartoons to the walls of his classroom. To those in Henri's classes, Daumier was the supreme chronicler of real life unafraid to explore the corrupt forces of society.³

³ Initially, Daumier became well known because of the many Americans, who traveled back and forth from Paris after the Civil War and in the early twentieth century. Henri introduced many Americans to the French artist. See Francine Tyler, "The Impact of Daumier's Graphics on American Artists: c. 1863-c. 1928," *Print Review* 11 (1980): 109-126. See also Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 129.

Both American political cartoonists and realist artists in the early twentieth century came under the influence of Daumier. The tradition of social protest which had its origins with the British, most notably William Hogarth, was carried on most effectively in nineteenth century France by Daumier, whose work appeared in *Le Charivari* (1833-1937), a weekly satirical review. Daumier's influence went beyond a stylistic model to provide a spiritual example for graphic artists concerned with social justice. For the political illustrator, Daumier's work transcended the distinctions between cartoon, fine art, realism, caricature, and social satire. Many graphic artists responded to his use of the coarse lithographic crayon, and the expressiveness of Daumier's draughtsmanship. Whether through association with Daumier's example, or through qualities inherent in the medium itself, the crayon drawing developed into a language associated with social concern.⁴ After Daumier's death, Jean-Louis Forain and Theophile Steinlen carried on the tradition of using crayon for images sympathetic to the working class. Their work appeared in *Le Rire* (1894-1940) and *L'Assiette au Beurre* (1901-22). Steinlen portrayed powerful depictions of laborers and Forain attacked the hypocrisy of the dominant class.

Not only was the *Liberator* artist responding to the French social protest illustrations, but also to those in German political journals. Prior to World War I, *Simplicissimus: Illustrierte Wochenschrift* (1896-1967, fig. 4), and *Jugend* (1896-1940), both published in Munich, featured satirical drawings that commented on current political events, society and the arts. These publications featured the work of leading contemporary artists such as Käthe Kollwitz, George Grosz, and Lovis Corinth. After the war, Berlin became the center of politically aware avant-garde journalism with publications such as *Die Aktion* (1911-1932) and *Die Neue Jugend* (1916-17).⁵ *Die Aktion*, a leftist weekly, became the focal point of anti-war sentiment among artists and published the drawings of Otto Dix, George Grosz and Ludwig Meidner. Censors banned *Die*

⁴ Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 132.

⁵ Paul Hogarth, *The Artist as Reporter* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1986), 122.

Neue Jugend published by Wieland Herzfelde and designed by his brother John Heartfeld after six issues because of its subversive anti-militaristic stand. The magazine, nonetheless, managed to introduce the drawings of George Grosz, whose earliest portfolios, *Erste George Grosz-Mappe* and *Kleine Grosz-Mappe* were published by Malik Verlag in 1917.⁶ Grosz became the spiritual descendant of Daumier for the new artists of the *Liberator*, particularly John Barber, Adolf Dehn, and William Gropper. Grosz's thin linear style and satirical subjects provided a model for radical artists seeking to expose hypocrisy and capitalist exploitation.

Even though several of the *Liberator* contributors drew direct inspiration from European leftist art, particularly that of Daumier's crayon technique and Grosz's expressive linear style, few foreign publications offered entirely appropriate models for commentary on American society. Illustrations in foreign magazines were the product of a different artistic, political and cultural sensibility. Throughout its various manifestation, one of the consistent features of the *Liberator* editors' decisions was to advocate an art based on a distinctly American experience. While artists turned to European sources for inspiration, the syntax remained essentially American. In a contemporary *Vanity Fair* article of 1922, Willard Huntington Wright argued that in the haste to honor European artists, American illustrators had been neglected. The author singled out Bellows, Gropper, Robinson and Young "among the men who have achieved proficiency and individuality in caricature in the United States, yet who have failed to receive their due."⁷

⁶ Malik Verlag, the publishing enterprise established by Herzfelde, banned in 1917, was revived in 1919 to publish a series of journals and miscellaneous publications including *Jedermann sein eigener Fussball* (1919), *Die Pleite* (1919-1920), and *Der Gegner* (1919-1922). *Jedermann sein eigener Fussball* published only one issue before it was banned. *Die Pleite* was a bi-monthly supplement to *Der Gegner*, edited by Grosz and Herzfelde. *Der Gegner* was a satirical monthly review, edited by Julian Gumperz and Herzfelde. Malik Verlag, under the editorship of Herzfeld, maintained its publishing activity independently of Communist support throughout its existence. See Hogarth, Appendix I, 183-185 and McCloskey, 89-90.

⁷ See Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 127 and Willard Huntington Wright, "America and Caricature," *Vanity Fair* (1922): 55, William Gropper Papers (reel 3501, frames 1399-1400), Archives of American Art, New York. Wright (1888-1939) was an author and critic who also used the pseudonym S.S. Van Dine for his detective novels. In addition, he was the brother of artist, Stanton Macdonald-Wright.

In America, with the surge in number, quality, and popularity of illustrated magazines, the first quarter of the twentieth century was a golden age for cartoonists. In the late nineteenth century America's leading political cartoonist had been Thomas Nast (1840-1902). Nast, who drew for *Harper's Weekly*, became the first major American figure in the area of political and social graphic art. His work combined the pen-and-ink linear style of the English illustrators with the satiric commentary of the French illustrators. According to Paul Hogarth, *Harper's Weekly* (1857-1916) was the most successful American illustrated paper, best known for its reportorial illustrations of the Civil War. The Austrian-born Joseph Keppler (1837/8-1894), who was both a publisher and illustrator, continued in the tradition of Nast when he joined the staff of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* in 1872. He went on to publish the German language *Puck* (1877-1918) in 1877, making it an English language paper the following year. *Puck*, primarily a magazine of political opinion, became the first long lasting American humor magazine whose popularity continued until the 1880s.⁸

From about 1860 until the 1880s, printing techniques were limited to wooden engravings favoring detailed drawings with crisply defined contours in the tradition of Thomas Nast. By the 1870s wooden engraving was replaced by the photoengraving technique, which revolutionized magazine art. The drawing was now done with a soft pencil or lithographic crayon on grained paper; Daumier's technique was the prototype. The process was expensive and most American printers preferred a faster and cheaper method. The *Masses* was the first American magazine to use the coarse crayon technique. Robinson and Minor independently arrived at a cheaper process for reproducing crayon drawings on type-compatible metal plates in 1911 or 1912. Both artists achieved considerable fame for founding a new school of cartooning and were soon among the

⁸ Hogarth, 183. Nast's career as an artist-journalist began with the establishment of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* newspaper in 1855. For further information on Nast, Keppler, and American nineteenth century magazine illustration, see Hogarth, 23-24; Maurice Horn, ed., *The World Encyclopedia of Cartoons*, vol. 1 (New York and London: Chelsea House Publishing, 1980); Ralph Shikes and Steven Heller, *The Art of Satire: Painters as Caricaturists and Cartoonists from Delacroix to Picasso* (New York: Pratt Graphics

best-paid newspaper illustrators in America. The desired effect was a stylistic attack in the tradition of European graphic protest on academic technique. Eventually, the crayon technique came to dominate American political cartooning; however until the 1920s, the style had been associated with the left.⁹

Prints and the graphic medium historically held deeply set social implications and allowed for its mass production. Until the 1930s scant attention had been paid to the American graphic arts. Carl Zigrosser, the Director of the Weyhe Gallery in New York from 1919-1940, and an important promoter of American printmaking was among the first to exhibit the prints and drawings of *Liberator* artists in the 1920s. The Weyhe Gallery was a recognized venue for the promotion of some of the most politically controversial left-wing artists of the time and became part of the contemporary Print Group formed in 1933 to supply good affordable art to the public. According to Zigrosser, the 1920s were “an opportune time” for print collecting owing to postwar conditions and the favorable exchange of the American dollar. He considered the inter-war years “the most exciting and important in our art history, for during it has occurred the transition of American art, at least as far as the graphic arts are concerned, from provincialism to the beginnings of a national school.” Among the artists who exhibited at the Weyhe were Dehn, Gág, Lankes, Lozowick, Marsh, Robinson, Sterne, and Young. The gallery also featured Robinson and Sterne among other American printmakers in its portfolio, *Twelve Prints by Contemporary American Artists* (1920). The portfolio was not a financial success; however, it was among the first of its kind to recognize the accessibility of the print and to offer affordable originals to the general public. Zigrosser was not a revolutionary, but he was sympathetic to socialist causes and sought to appeal to and educate the general public on the creative arts through printmaking. The

Center and Horizon Press, 1984), 304; Steven Smith et. al., *American Book and Magazine Illustrators to 1920* in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 188 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1998); and Tyler, 113-114.

⁹ For a concise discussion of the history and technique employed by artists in American magazine illustration, see introduction to Fitzgerald, 6-9. Although neither the exact dates nor the precise details of

Weyhe Gallery not only served as a center for American prints, encouraging the artist by creating a market for their work, but also promoted graphic art from Europe.¹⁰

To obtain a better understanding of the stylistic and ideological diversity of artists, as well as their disparate backgrounds and interests, Boardman Robinson, Robert Minor, Lydia Gibson and William Gropper will be examined in greater detail. These artists were all listed as contributing editors and were staff members through most of the run of the publication. Robinson represents the older generation of artists whose social protest illustration stemmed from the *Masses* tradition and continued on a more radical strain at the *Liberator*. Minor serves as an example of the left-wing political artist-activist who sought to define art and propaganda on the pages of the magazine. Gibson serves as an example of the large presence of female illustrators whose choice of subject and style contrasted with her male counterparts, broadening the scope of the magazine. And finally, Gropper best demonstrates the new generation of illustrators who

their modifications have been established, it seems that the two cartoonists had arrived at independent solutions by 1911 or 1912. See Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 131-133.

¹⁰ Zigrosser, *The Artist in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), viii, and *A World of Art and Museums* (Cranbury, NJ and London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1975), 36-39. Carl Zigrosser (1891-1975) was educated at Columbia University in New York, was hired in 1912 as a researcher for Keppel & Company, a gallery specializing in fine prints. In 1917 he edited *Modern School Magazine*, published at Stelton, New Jersey and while there took classes and taught. That same year he joined the staff of Weyhe Gallery. After his involvement with the Weyhe Gallery he would continue to promote American graphic artists as the Curator of Prints and Rare Books at the Philadelphia Museum of Art from 1941-1963. See Zigrosser, *My Own Shall Come to Me: A Personal Memoir and Picture Chronicle* (Haarlem, Netherlands: J. Enschede en Zonen, 1971), 69-70. See also Allan Antliff, "Carl Zigrosser and the Modern School: Nietzsche, Art and Anarchism," *Archives of American Art Journal*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1994: 16-23. For a discussion of Zigrosser and the importance of the Weyhe Gallery in the promotion of prints in America, see Reba White Williams, "The Weyhe Gallery Between the Wars, 1919-1940 (Interwar Period)" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1996) and Williams, "Greetings from Weyhe," *Print Quarterly* (December 1993): 408-412. According to Williams, Dehn, Robinson and Young were featured for the first time in a group summer exhibition some time during the years 1919 and 1922. Robinson was featured in a solo exhibit in 1924, Lankes in 1924, Marsh in 1928, and Young in 1928. Dehn was a frequent exhibitor at the Weyhe and had solo exhibits beginning in 1923, continuing until the demise of the Gallery in 1940. See Williams, "The Weyhe Gallery Between the Wars," 382-446. In 1922 the Weyhe Gallery also published a print brochure titled *The Living Artist*, which included Dehn, Robinson, Sterne and Young.

combined social commitment with stylistic experimentation to ultimately depart from the *Masses* tradition.

BOARDMAN ROBINSON: 1876-1952

Boardman Robinson best illustrates the artist of the social protest drawing from its development on the *Masses* to its transition with the *Liberator*. Robinson's commitment to socialist causes without any explicit partisan affiliation characterizes the early illustrators of the magazine. The artist was born in Somerset, Nova Scotia, immigrated to the United States in 1894 to pursue artistic training at the Massachusetts Normal Art School in Boston. Initially, Robinson had aspirations of becoming a sculptor and traveled to Paris in 1898 where he attended the Académie Calorossi, the Académie Julian, and Jean Léon Gérôme's class at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. The artist's classical training, adeptness at figural representation and understanding of the human anatomy would later be evident in his career as an illustrator and painter. In Paris, he was introduced to Sally Senter Whitney, whom he would marry in 1903. Sally Whitney was a San Francisco sculptor who was studying with Rodin. Robinson returned to the United States in 1900, to eventually settle in New York in 1904. While in New York, the artist abandoned his studio work as a sculptor and began employment as a field investigator for the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor. During this time Robinson became involved with socialist issues, particularly the problem of social inequity. His experience with the plight of the poor and subsequent commitment to social welfare would govern his creative career.

Even though Robinson abandoned sculpting, he remained an artist and turned to magazine illustration. He began his professional career in the field of magazine art in 1906 as the art editor of *Vogue*. The position lasted only one year and Robinson went on to join the staff of the *New York Morning Telegraph* as editorial cartoonist. Early in his career as a cartoonist, the artist was recognized for his exceptional draftsmanship and ability to convey meaning with as few lines as possible. By the time Robinson left the *Morning Telegraph* to work for the *New York Tribune* (1910-1914), his work was nationally renowned. In addition to his employment at the *Morning Telegraph*, Robinson also began his long and illustrious career as a freelance illustrator

for a variety of magazines and newspapers including *Bookman* (1895-1933), *Collier's* (1888-1957), *Dial* (1881-1929), *Good Morning*, *Harper's Weekly* (1857-1916), *Metropolitan Magazine* (1911-1924), *New York Call*, *New York Herald*, *Puck* (1877-1918), *Leslie's Weekly Gazette* (1855-1922), *Toiler* (1922), *Playboy* (1919-1924), *Saturday Evening Post* (1821+), *Scribner's* (1887-1939) and *Worker's Monthly*.¹¹ During this period of prolific illustration of 1907-1923, Robinson established his reputation as one of America's leading political cartoonists; and, in addition became fully committed to socialist and even radical causes. As a direct result of his opposition to the war and increasingly socialist views he was forced to resign from the staff of the *Morning Telegraph*. Despite the setback, Robinson continued his political protest cartoons as a free-lance illustrator and began adopting the pseudonym "Michael North" or "Mike" in some conservative publications to protect his career.¹²

The artist began submitting work to the *Masses* in 1912, and quickly became part of its bohemian circle. He was among the many *Masses* artists to exhibit at the Armory Show, submitting three drawings and two cartoons. In 1915 Robinson and his wife were among the group of intellectuals and artists from the *Masses* circle who moved to Croton-on-Hudson, where younger artists such as Adolf Dehn and Wanda Gág were frequent visitors. John Reed and Robinson became lifelong friends, and in 1915 traveled to Russia as representatives for *Metropolitan Magazine*. The trip brought the two men close to arrest and death, and reinforced

¹¹ Dates in parenthesis refer to the publication dates of the magazine. In the case of daily newspapers, dates are omitted. *Playboy: A Portfolio of Art and Satire* began in 1919 under the editorship of Egmont Arens (1889-1966) in New York. The small art magazine predominantly published works by living artists from both Europe and America. In addition to Robinson, the publication featured the work of *Liberator* artists Stuart Davis, Adolf Dehn, Hugo Gellert, William Gropper, Robert Henri, and Maurice Sterne. Arens was also the owner of the Washington Square Book Shop, which served as an exhibition venue for several artists associated with the *Liberator*. Later in his career, he became an advertising executive and designer. See *Playboy: A Portfolio of Art and Satire* (New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1967) and Egmont Arens, Obituary, *New York Times* 2 October 1966, 87.

¹² According to Dehn who was living with Robinson at Croton in June 1920, Robinson adopted the name "Michael North" because he refused to attach his real name to a work of art that the editor of *Metropolitan* required from him. Subsequently, Robinson was paid less for the illustration. See Dehn to Emily (mother), ALS, 27 December 1917, Adolf Dehn Papers (reel 2938, frames 130-131), Archives of American Art, New York.

Robinson's opposition to the war and his commitment to social causes. This first-hand collaboration would result in *Cartoons of the War* (1915) and Reed's *The War in Eastern Europe* (1916). The war drawings would later be exhibited at the Thumb Box Gallery in New York in 1919. At the *Masses*, Robinson, along with Minor became listed as contributing editors after the "artist quarrel" in 1916, helping to usher in a more politically relevant art. During the *Masses* trial, one of Robinson's cartoons, "Making the World Safe for Democracy," was offered as an exhibit in violation of the loosely interpreted Espionage Act. The artist was now fully entrenched in devoting his art to the service of social causes. When the *Liberator* was established in 1918 he joined its staff as a contributing editor.

At the *Liberator*, Robinson was a valued cartoonist, the bulk of whose work dealt primarily with topical political issues and was often selected for the desirable double-page spreads. Robinson was not merely a contributor to the magazine, but also selected its artwork.¹³ Even though he was listed as a contributing editor until the demise of the publication, he was an active and prominent member of the *Liberator* staff only until 1922. The majority of the artist's work for the *Masses* attacked capitalism; however, at the *Liberator* this translated into contempt for Allied powers who threatened the new Soviet state. Robinson's cartoons for the magazine consistently indicated an unwavering support for Soviet Russia. While never a member of either the Socialist or Communist party, his illustrations were in complete alignment with the editorial policies of the *Liberator* in its early years.

The March 1918 inaugural issue includes Robinson's "An Interruption," which centers on a group of male figures labeled "Big Business," "Privilege," and "Allied Leaders." Among the Allied leaders are Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and President Wilson. A giant hand titled "Bolshevik," forcefully rips upward from the ground, disrupting the astonished group. Through

¹³ Dehn to Emily 22 December 1917, ALS (reel 2938, frames 118-125) and March 1919, ALS (reel 2938, frame 513), Adolf Dehn Papers, Archives of American Art, New York.

the use of scale distortion and drama, Robinson announces the arrival of Bolshevism in an unsuspected world of assumed corruption and power. As the featured double-page spread for the premier issue, the drawing adheres to the excitement generated by the Revolution. Two years later, the Allied forces once again appear as unsuspecting opponents in the February 1920 double-page spread, "Checkmate Gentlemen!" (fig. 10). Lenin, in a relaxed, confident pose holds a cigarette while playing chess with the three Allied powers—Wilson, Clemenceau and Lloyd George, who in contrast, appear completely baffled and in disarray. On the upper left is written: "There are just two moves they can make—war against Russia which will mean revolution, at home; peace with Russia, which will mean the spread of Soviet principles throughout the world." → By 1920 communism was perceived as a major threat to the European powers whose intervention tactics, though debilitating to the Soviets, were ineffective in preventing international Bolshevik support. As one of Robinson's most reprinted images, it succinctly crystallizes the dilemma of the moment.

While the editors attached captions to some illustrations, it seems unlikely that this was the case with Robinson. His illustrations and captions were always unified and often relied upon titles and further identifying script to be understood fully. Robinson's cartoons are meant to be "read." The propensity for appending script to illustrations was a tradition of the *Masses* and used frequently, particularly by Robinson and Young. After 1922, even though captions were still employed by cartoonists, other written text begins to wane in favor of direct visual impact. While Robinson's stylistic technique appears quickly executed, attention is paid to likeness, characterization, gesture and selected details. Composition is strongly recognized, not only in terms of formal structure, but also content and meaning. Anger or cynicism rarely appears in a Robinson illustration; instead the strength lies in its clarity, forthright and often original narrative.

The artist classified his cartooning period into phases of development with the early and formative years those when he came under French influence. Of all the political cartoonists, Robinson used the French graphic style most successfully. Robinson broke from the older pen

and ink tradition of cartooning and developed a style based on Daumier and the French satirists Forain and Steinlen. His crayon drawings were sketchy, powerful and realistic. Contemporary critics recognized Robinson's assimilation of Daumier's style and claimed that his cartoons were more frequently reproduced "in European papers than those of any other American artist."¹⁴

Robinson considered Daumier a truthful and highly skilled artist and while in Paris in the 1890s he bought Daumier's lithographs. He wrote of Daumier:

There was no false thing in him. He was a romantic true; but he dealt structurally with that which he knew. There was a man! He went right at form, working as one does in modeling. His drawing came, daily, directly and hot off his mind. Here is another example where one cannot separate the man from the crafts; Daumier was a great man. His drawing is frequently calligraphic; he seems to achieve the form and the symbol at the same time. He painted as a draftsman.¹⁵

Robinson's sketchy, unkempt lines echo Daumier's late, loose drawing style, but his work has neither Daumier's control nor his insight into human behavior.

Robinson was well educated in art and studied the masters. He admired the controlled drawings of Rembrandt and Michelangelo, considering that between them they covered "the whole gamut of expression in draftsmanship." For Robinson, Goya "was one of the first, if not the first, who released draftsmanship to modern expressionism." Robinson's training, preferences and influences in art were fundamentally traditional and ultimately determined by a strict academic foundation. Like his editors, Robinson distrusted European abstraction. While finding a "nobility" in Picasso, Robinson contended that consciously used technique and expression for its own sake was "hardly enough." In a lecture delivered in 1936, he stressed the importance of the art of the past and was pleased that Regionalism was replacing "the weak, imitations of European Cubism, Post-Impressionism, and Expressionism." Despite his reservations of European

¹⁴ "A Dozen of the Most Distinguished Illustrators," *Vanity Fair*, (August 1915), as quoted in Christ-Janer, 26.

¹⁵ Robinson's "notes on artists" were compiled when he was an instructor at the Arts Students League and Colorado Fine Arts Center and published in Christ-Janer, 58.

movements, Robinson was not an adherent of strict academic restraints and was pleased that modernist experimentation had liberated the American artist. In the tradition of *Liberator* editors, Robinson too was an exponent of a distinctly American art and maintained “art is best when it is native.”¹⁶

Robinson’s style was inextricably linked to his political beliefs and the grease pencil technique was well suited to the type of spontaneity and emotion necessary to convey the ideas of his narratives. “The best political cartoons often grow out of a sense of indignation,” wrote the artist. “They express one’s reaction from the meanness and futilities of life, one’s feelings of resentment at social wrong and oppression.” His work showed contempt for hypocrisy and distrust for those in power. Time and again, whether Robinson was attacking the Allied powers, warmongers, capitalists or the press, he continually returned to the underlying theme of inequality. For this reason, his illustrations, while topical and specific, also denoted universal characteristics: “I make cartoons ridiculing the famous twins, Folly and Oppression,” wrote Robinson.¹⁷

“Folly and oppression” were demonstrated in Robinson’s double-page spread for the August 1921 issue of the *Liberator* (fig. 11). A female laborer whose sleeve is labeled “Communism” is laying bricks as she constructs a wall. She turns to another woman who is labeled “Capitalism,” dressed in an elaborate but dated costume, rummaging through hatboxes and says, “You can’t do it in those clothes, you know.” Between the two women, a knoll is labeled, “Rebuilding Civilization.” Even though the two figures represent Communism and capitalism, they embody common elemental characteristics—those that have, who are merely

¹⁶ See Christ-Janer, 58, and Robinson, “Regionalism in Art,” *Colorado College Bulletin: Four Lectures on the Fine Arts* (Colorado Springs College Publications: March 1936), 23-31.

¹⁷ Robinson, as quoted by Charles Press, *The Political Cartoon* (Rutherford, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981), 281, and “A Letter from Boardman Robinson.”

concerned with material possessions and those that have not, who work to create a better existence.

Robinson was the sole artist of the *Liberator* to use the female as a representation of communism and the Soviet state. He had also employed the female as Russia in an earlier work of August 1918 titled, "Soviet Russia" (fig. 12). In the drawing, the female is an allegory whose gesture and bare breast is reminiscent of Delacroix's female heroines. The woman brandishes a sword in one hand and holds a torch in the other hand. Howling wolves and a snake surround her, ready to attack; she, however, appears triumphant. Russia as the female, and the surrounding animals as the Allied capitalist forces are made clear, even without text. The drawing is one of the rare examples by the cartoonist that does not rely on captions or identifying labels. Personifying Russia as a woman was perceived by the general public as less threatening, as well as keeping with traditional iconography.¹⁸

Robinson's message of social inequity on a more universal level extended into the realm of biblical subjects. The artist began to paint and draw religious themes between the years 1916-19 and had his first one-man show of religious drawings at the Knoedler Galleries New York in 1919. The May 1918 issue includes "Lot's Wife" and "The Temptation." Both scenes relate to the concept of corruption and were metaphors for capitalist greed and avarice. The July 1920 issue again features a religious scene of social significance. The drawing depicts Christ informing a rich man to give all his worldly possessions to the poor. The underlying message is the artist's condemnation of the wealthy capitalist. *Masses* illustrators frequently employed the use of Christ as a universal metaphor for the working class. At the *Liberator*, with the exception

¹⁸ In Nickle's discussion of *the Liberator's* efforts to humanize Soviet Russia, she stated that females appeared literally more attractive: "Identifying the revolution with a female form helped to make it less threatening, and to label it, quite literally as 'attractive.'" See chapter, "Red Women: Gender and the Reception of the Revolution," 111-140.

of Robinson, the image of Christ was no longer used.¹⁹ Illustrators instead turned to the reality of the workingman. At times, historical figures assumed the role of the working class hero; such was the case with Abraham Lincoln. Robinson's often-reproduced portrait of Lincoln for the February 1919 cover serves to reveal the artist's skill as a portraitist and conveys his admiration for Lincoln as liberator of the oppressed and voice for the masses (fig. 13). The artist's compassion for the downtrodden and concern for social injustice repeatedly took on deeper significance in his choice of subjects.

For Robinson, the artist's task was to go beyond the purely aesthetic and address the concerns of society. In the July 1922 issue of the *Liberator*, Robinson posed the question: "Should an artist be a propagandist?" His response was: "I don't think there is any should about it. Everybody is a partisan and to some extent a propagandist of what he likes. If he likes what he thinks to be the truth then he is very apt to be a propagandist of it." The nature of art itself carried meaning and critique: "The very conditions of his craft make him criticize whatever he looks upon . . . As to this propaganda business—the artist is not merely the adorer. He is also the critic." Robinson's notion of propaganda was broad enough to include any type of art, whether it was a still life or political caricature; whatever the subject or style, art had to deal with life. The withdrawal into the world of private contemplation was incomprehensible to him: "For my part, I find it difficult to understand the man, calling himself an artist, who is satisfied with things as they are . . . I find it impossible to be content with contemplating it in the midst of so much poverty and so many lies."²⁰ Robinson felt artists could not turn their backs on the social problems they witnessed or experienced and were thus compelled to use their craft for social improvement.

¹⁹ Ironically, after it was discovered how many religious subjects Robinson drew, the charges against him were dropped at the first *Masses* trial. See Christ-Janer, 30.

²⁰ "A Letter from Boardman Robinson," 29.

Despite his reputation as a political cartoonist, Robinson was barely making ends meet: by 1919 he decided to teach drawing and pictorial design at the Art Students League, working for the League sporadically from 1919 to 1930. As an instructor, Robinson was influential to the next generation of artists that included Alexander Calder.²¹ In the spring of 1922 Robinson left New York to join the staff of *London Outlook*, a supposedly left-wing publication as political cartoonist. *London Outlook*, was actually a bourgeoisie publication and the artist departed after only a couple of months. On his return to New York in 1923 he gradually left the sphere of partisanship and cartooning and turned to painting. His long career as a cartoonist of contemporary social and political scenes had come to an end. Occasionally, he submitted drawings to the *New Yorker* and the *New Masses*, but primarily he focused on painting. By 1922 with John Reed's death, Eastman's departure from the *Liberator* and the gradual erosion of the former *Masses* circle, Robinson withdrew to pursue his own personal goals.

During the mid-1920s the artist also experimented with fresco and mural painting, to become an early pioneer in the revival of fresco technique in America.²² From 1926 to 1929 Robinson painted ten murals on the history of commerce for the Kaufman Department Store in Pittsburgh, which won him the Gold Medal of the Architectural League of New York. Prior to their installation, the murals were exhibited at the Art Students League. In 1930 Robinson moved to Colorado Springs to accept a position as instructor at the Fountain Valley School and the Broadmoor Academy, which eventually grew into the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, of which he became its Director. Robinson continued his mural work, painting two frescoes for the Fountain Valley School in Colorado Springs (completed in 1931), and "The Five Arts," a series of five frescoes for the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center (1936). As part of his work for the

²¹ See Joan M. Marter, *Alexander Calder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 16. Marter claimed that Calder's drawings were indebted to Robinson, particularly in their linear expression.

²² Robinson's first fresco, *Excavation* (1926) was followed by *Sermon on the Mount* (1928). See Christ-Janer, 101.

Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP), Robinson completed *Colorado Horse Sale* for the Englewood Post Office in Colorado in 1940. In addition to his work in Colorado, Robinson executed a mural of an allegory of the progress of the machine for Radio City at Rockefeller Center in 1932, and “Great Figures in the History of the Law” for the Department of Justice Building in Washington D.C (1937). Robinson also turned to book illustration in the 1930s, contributing to special editions of *The Brothers Karamazov* (1933), *The Idiot* (1935), *Spoon River Anthology* (1942), *Moby Dick* (1943), and *Leaves of Grass* (1944). During this time, he exhibited regularly and in 1946 a retrospective exhibit of his work was held at the Kraushaar Gallery in New York. In tribute to its former director, the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center organized a 1997 exhibition of his drawings, cartoons and murals spanning his entire career.²³

Robinson’s innovative drawing technique was recognized early in his career and as such he was highly influential on the next generation of illustrators. Oscar Cesare of the *New York Sun*, Clive Weed of the *New York Evening Sun* and Rollin Kirby of *Harper’s Weekly* all acknowledged his influence. Adolf Dehn, who was a pupil and friend of Robinson wrote: “I am still able to say that no artist is his superior as a draftsman and that he is one of the great artists of our time. My first hero is still a hero.” Robinson was one of the first American illustrators to believe that drawing could rise to the level of high art and that it should be treated as seriously as painting. Throughout his life and career the artist devoted his craft to public welfare through his political drawings, mural paintings, teaching and support of left-wing artists’ organizations.²⁴

²³ The Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center was built in the mid-thirties. Robinson’s frescoes were located at the most prominent space at its entrance. See Christopher Wilson, “A Unique Opportunity: John Gaw Meeth and the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center,” *A History and Selection From the Permanent Collection* (Colorado Springs: 1986): 27-28. For contemporary public response to Robinson’s murals, see “Murals in Department Store Tell History of Commerce,” *New York World*, December 1929 and Paul Parker, “Post Office Mural for Englewood, Colorado,” *Parnassus*, XII (October 1940): 29. See also, Henry Adams, *Boardman Robinson: American Muralist & Illustrator, 1876-1952* (Colorado Springs: Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 1997).

²⁴ See Press, 283-284 and Dehn, “Boardman Robinson: The Artist,” in Christ-Janer, 76-78. Dehn’s admiration for Robinson is evident as early as 1918 when he wrote, “he is so far above the average illustrator and cartoonist that of comparison is sacrilege.” See Dehn to Viola, 26 April 1918, ALS, Adolf Dehn Papers (reel 2938, frames 304-309), Archives of American Art, New York.

ROBERT MINOR: 1884-1952

Robert Minor best represents the politically active artist and proponent of art and propaganda at the *Liberator*. He also serves as an example of the Communist affiliation and editorial direction of the magazine in its later years. Further, as an artist for both the *Masses* and the *Liberator*, Minor demonstrates the pedagogical differences between the two magazines. Minor was born in San Antonio, Texas, of middle-class parents who were unsuccessful lawyers and lived most of their days in poverty. He dropped out of school when he was fourteen and took a series of odd jobs that included carpentry work, migratory farm work, railroad construction, machine shop technician and messenger for Western Union. These early work experiences shaped Minor's orientation toward the plight of workers and the dichotomy between the rich and poor. Despite his seemingly random work record, Minor eventually gravitated toward the creative arts. While Minor admitted that he could not recollect the exact incident that drew him toward art, he did recall that while passing a sign-painter's shop he noticed a painting that inspired him. Shortly afterward, he became the sign-painter's apprentice and taught himself to draw.²⁵

Minor began his professional career in 1904 when he was hired as an assistant stereotypist, handyman, and later cartoonist for the *San Antonio Gazette*. The position only lasted a year but served to introduce Minor to the field of magazine illustration. In 1905 he moved to St. Louis and secured a position on the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. At the *Post-Dispatch* Minor began experimenting with grease crayon and developed the technique for reproducing crayon line on an engraver's plate for which he became nationally renowned. It was not long before he was promoted to chief editorial cartoonist. While in St. Louis, Minor came under the influence of Dr. Joseph Kaplan, a left-wing socialist physician who was treating him for failing hearing. Kaplan

²⁵ See Philip Sterling, "Robert Minor: The Life Story of New York's Communist Candidate for Mayor," *Daily Worker*, 12 and 15 September 1930, and Orrick Johns, "Robert Minor, the Man," *New Masses*, 28 August 1934, 16-17.

became a mentor to the young artist, introducing him to art, literature and socialist philosophy. In 1907 Minor joined the Socialist Party and subsequently began his life-long crusade for the rights of the masses.

By 1911 Minor was recognized as one of the highest paid and most respected cartoonists in the nation. Ralph Pulitzer, editor of the *New York Evening World* offered him a position at a higher salary. Minor, who had no formal training in art, refused because he wanted to study in Paris. Pulitzer offered the artist a year's leave and financed his trip to Paris, not as a correspondent, but as a future employee. In 1912 he enrolled at the Académie Julian for about three months, but became disillusioned by the strict academic practices and the emphasis on gainful profit for the artist. Minor wrote of the art academies in Paris:

To my bewilderment I found that the 'art schools' have not the slightest interest in art, but concern themselves solely with teaching men the way to make money, which I already knew. They have exactly the same motives as the sign painters' shop in Texas . . . I could not associate with the foul bourgeois [bourgeoisie] in the art academies.²⁶

Minor spent most of his time at the museums, admiring the work of Daumier, Delacroix, Goya, and Michelangelo. Initially, it was Dr. Kaplan who introduced Minor to the work of Daumier and Goya but while in Paris, Minor frequented anarchist and bohemian circles and once again came into contact with the work of Daumier. He was also introduced to the work of cartoonists in anarchist publications such as Steinlen and Forain. For Minor, Daumier epitomized the artist who translated moral outrage into passionate drawings. He wrote of Daumier's work: "It tells you to love and hope—yes, and to hate them that don't love. It tells you to live and breed and fight; and maybe, to die."²⁷ Daumier's *Modern Galilée* (1834), a drawing of a prisoner in a cell was kept on Minor's wall and in 1923 he produced a print, *Death Cell: Sacco and Vanzetti* with a similar composition and emotional impact (fig. 14). In addition to the French school, Minor also

²⁶ Minor, "How I Became a Rebel," *The Labor Herald*, July 1922, 25-26.

²⁷ Minor, "Man X His Mark."

continued to admire the work of the Americans, Thomas Nast and Art Young. For Minor, art was never separate from his political convictions and while pursuing a career as an artist, he also expanded his understanding of radical political theory. While in Paris, he was introduced to the French syndicalism movement.²⁸ Syndicalists viewed labor unions, not political parties, as the instrument of revolution. Further, they envisioned the post-revolutionary society as one in which workers' unions, not the government would control society. By extension, the anarcho-syndicalists sought the complete annihilation of the political state. Upon his return to the United States in 1913, Minor broke with the Socialist Party to become an anarcho-syndicalist.

The time between Minor's return to the United States until 1919, when he joined the Communist Party, was a life-altering period in the artist's life. Shortly after his return to New York in 1914 he began working for *The New York Evening World* and also began attending Henri's classes at the Ferrer Center. The Ferrer School named after the Spanish educator and anarchist, Francisco Ferrer was a forum for experimentation in art and a center of liberal thought. Among the artists who attended were Peggy Bacon, John Barber, Stuart Davis, William Glackens, William Gropper, George Luks, and Man Ray. It was not long before art and politics once again collided for Minor. In 1915 *The New York Evening World* shifted its anti-war position to one favoring the Allies. The cartoonist's political opinions clashed with the newspaper: "I was ordered to begin turning my cartoons to the allied side. I quit and went over to the *New York Call* where I thought I could make revolutionary cartoons," wrote Minor.²⁹ Although he had broken with the Socialist Party, Minor continued as a political cartoonist for the socialist daily, the *New York Call* where he worked from 1908 to 1923 and made speaking tours under its auspices. He

²⁸ The name syndicalism derives from the French word for labor unions and was a powerful radical movement in Europe, particularly in France, Italy and Spain. Syndicalist attitudes permeated much of the revolutionary left in America. The merging of syndicalist and political socialist concepts appealed to American leftists who identified syndicalism as an embodiment of the IWW revolutionary tradition. See Klehr, *The American Communist Movement*, 13.

²⁹ Minor, "How I Became a Rebel," 25-26.

also submitted work to other radical publications such as Emma Goldman's anarchist monthly, *Mother Earth* (1906-1917), *Blast* (1916-1917),³⁰ *International Socialist Review* (1900-1918), *Spawn* (dates unknown), *Melting Pot* (1913-1920), and IWW publications. In 1915 he began contributing to the *Masses* and joined its staff in June 1916, along with Robinson.

Minor was both a war correspondent and illustrator for the Newspaper Enterprise Association; he was sent to the eastern front in 1915 and the following year to the Mexican border to cover the skirmish between the United States army and Pancho Villa's forces. Before reaching Mexico, he stopped in San Francisco in August 1916 to organize a defense committee for Tom Mooney and four other defendants accused of planting a bomb at a Preparedness Day parade in July. While there, Minor met the artist and poet Lydia Gibson who was also working on Mooney's defense. Even though Minor and Gibson would eventually marry in 1922, at that time they both went their separate ways. Minor resumed his overseas correspondence and with the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918, once again traveled to Europe as a correspondent for the Newspaper Enterprise Association and several other papers including the *Liberator*. The artist first went to Germany, where he witnessed the Spartacist revolt and later traveled to Russia where he became one of the first Americans to meet and interview Nikolai Lenin. Before returning to the United States, he stopped in Paris where he met Mary Heaton Vorse, the well-known labor writer and contributor to both the *Masses* and *Liberator*. Vorse (also on post-war assignment in Europe) and Minor began a three-year relationship that ultimately led to a 1921-marriage ceremony in the Soviet Union. The marriage was not recognized as legal in the United States and the couple soon parted.³¹

³⁰ *Blast* was also the title of a London art review of 1914-15, edited by Percy Wyndham Lewis.

³¹ See North, *Robert Minor: Artist and Crusader*, 97 and Dee Garrison, *Mary Heaton Vorse: The Life of an American Insurgent* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 181. See also, Mary Heaton Vorse, *A Footnote to Folly: Reminiscences of Mary Heaton Vorse* (New York: Arno Press, 1980).

While in Paris, Minor was abducted by French authorities in the summer of 1920 and taken to Coblenz, an American Allied military base where he was arrested and accused of spreading Bolshevik propaganda among American troops in Germany. He was charged with treason, held in solitary confinement and faced a death sentence. Meanwhile, labor circles in England, France and Italy launched a campaign to save Minor, the man who had championed Tom Mooney. Minor was released without explanation on July 8 and shortly afterward returned to the United States.³² Minor's intrigues would be reported in detail on the pages of the *Liberator*. Upon his return home in 1920, he renounced anarchism, joined the Communist Party and went on a national speaking tour to denounce American military intervention against the Soviet Union. He traveled most of the way under the surveillance of Department of Justice agents. By this time, Minor was a visible and highly active party member and in 1921 and again in 1926 was one of the American representatives to the Comintern.

Minor was a writer, illustrator and editor for the *Liberator*. He was co-editor in March 1921, an editor in January 1922, executive editor in December 1922, owner in May 1923, and the sole editor of the publication in January 1924. In addition, during these years Minor also submitted illustrations to Young's *Good Morning* and regularly contributed writing and art to the *Worker's Monthly*, the labor party magazine. The entire output of Minor's artwork for the *Liberator*, even before his conversion to Communism, communicated his total condemnation of the capitalist system and his championing of the masses. The artist was without equal in his aggressive portrayals of oppression and injustice, leading to a consensus among scholars that he was the most political of all illustrators. While quantifying political orientation is ultimately

³² Lincoln Steffens claimed to have played the major role in the effort to win Minor's release. Steffens approached Colonel Edward House, President Wilson's close friend in Paris. He convinced House that if a well-known radical like Minor were executed, the backlash would jeopardize Steffens and House's plan to win a general amnesty for all the political prisoners being held in the United States. In early July, the *New York Times* discovered the political influence exerted in the Minor case. It began a counter campaign to ensure Minor's conviction. The *Times* kept up its front-page editorial crusade against Minor through the fall of 1919. The Senate Judiciary Committee held a special investigation to inquire into the proceedings of the Minor arrest. See Garrison, 145-6.

arbitrary, what distinguished Minor's work was his unmatched indignation, translated in memorably powerful images, often brutally violent in both content and style.

Typical of Minor's work for the magazine is the August 1922 double-page spread entitled, "The Knight of the Round Belly," which portrays a knight on a horse carrying a shield reading, "Supreme Court"(fig. 15). On his upraised spear is a row of pierced, severed, bleeding, and tortured bodies. With minimal identifying script and no caption, Minor conveyed the atrocity of injustice and his outrage toward the American government, which at the time was persecuting alleged radicals. Similarly, Minor expressed his moral indignation at the United States Labor Board for exploiting its workers in the December 1922 double-spread illustration, "The Dying Wage" (fig. 16). A group of broken down, starving skeleton-like laborers walk near a railroad track; some have died and collapse on the ground. Above them in a distant landscape, and moving to the foreground is written, "Capitalism no longer feeds its slaves, the living wage leads to communistic ruin—U.S. Labor Board." This work relates to Minor's article, "We Want a Labor Party" which ridicules the American Federation of Labor's ineffectiveness at representing the worker and instead demands a legitimate labor party for the working class.³³

While repeatedly likened to Daumier by *Masses* scholars, Minor lacks the subtle wit and nuance of the French cartoonist. In emotional impact, direct almost violent condemnation of corrupt systems, he is closer in spirit to Goya. With the exception of Daumier, Minor never wrote of his artistic influences; however, Goya was mentioned as one of the artists he admired.³⁴ The artist was similar in temperament to Goya in his refusal to compromise his art in favor of the audience's sensibility, and in exposing corruption and other vices in all their violent and ugly manifestations.

³³ Minor, "We Want a Labor Party," *Liberator* 5, no. 11 (November- December 1922): 13-17.

³⁴ See Fitzgerald, 80-81 and North, 59.

Minor's artistic style at the *Liberator* was not different from his style at the *Masses*. The artist's work was always representational-- appearing as if quickly executed with emphatic strokes and drawn as if slashing the page. He developed a cartooning style, replacing crosshatches and employed the bold, black and shaded stroke of the lithographer's crayon. Each stroke evoked the emotional tenor of the cartoon's message, almost always demanding the viewer's attention in its expressive urgency. Captions or script were carefully and minimally selected. His compositions were condensed for maximum impact and contained dynamic movement and emotional intensity. He never painted and his work never appeared on the covers. There was no color in Minor's artistic idiom; he preferred the stroke of the pen and lithographic crayon to convey his only subject--defending the plight of the working class.

Even before Minor entered the world of Communism, his singular vision was evident in 1912 to a critic who heralded the cartoonist's "keen insight into the point of view of the masses, and constant watchfulness for a place to charge with a lance some current wrong." In his analysis of Minor's work, Fitzgerald recognized the artist's "brilliance" lay in the feeling of dramatic conflict of opposite elements, almost always drawing two social types--the oppressor and oppressed. However, Fitzgerald argued that Minor's *Masses* cartoons were far superior both in content and style to those in the *Liberator*. Fitzgerald claimed that at the *Liberator*, the "old sense of dramatic conflict" between "oppressor and oppressed" was replaced by "underdogs more than victims, without the tremendous force evident in earlier *Masses* drawings." This deterioration, according to Fitzgerald was brought about because of Minor's Communist political agenda. While true that many of Minor's illustrations propagated a specific party program, this did not diminish the quality or impact of his drawings. On the contrary, the *Liberator* drawings not only continued to expose the disparity between oppressor and oppressed but also reached new

dramatic heights in their absolute clarity of purpose. Gone was the oblique and sometimes ambiguous reference evident in many of Minor's work for the *Masses*.³⁵

Two of Minor's most memorable and frequently reprinted images, "At last a perfect soldier" in the July 1916 *Masses* (fig. 17) and "Prometheus Bound" in the June 1924 *Liberator* (fig. 18) demonstrate the ideological difference between the artist's work for the two magazines. In the *Masses* illustration, a giant headless male stands before an Army Medical Examiner who says, "At last a perfect soldier!" The image is a parody of the massive recruitment effort by the United States government during World War I. In "Prometheus Bound" an over-scaled muscular male figure, identified as "German Labor" is bound by chains to a boulder. Two well-dressed capitalists casually look up with indifference as one says to the other: "Morgan: 'Keep him tight, Dawes; if he gets loose, it's another Soviet Republic.'" The Dawes plan, enacted in April 1924, solidified German relations with the European capitalist nations and the United States. The illustration is a response to the recent elections in Germany where it was reported that the Communist party was gaining momentum to the chagrin of capitalists preparing a coup d'etat. Both works are dramatically rendered and convey the conflict of opposites. The over-scaled figure or giant, frequently used by Minor and a technique reminiscent of Goya, refers in both cases to power and strength; but in "Prometheus Bound" it becomes an allegory. The *Masses* cartoon relies on the satirical caption to be effective. By contrast, the *Liberator* cartoon stands alone as a narrative of human struggle and in fact, when reproduced in other texts, merely the bound image is reproduced, rather than the entire drawing. In "Prometheus Bound," Minor's more abrasive portrayal betrays his rage and single-minded purpose. At the *Masses*, Minor's images were a generalized indictment of the bourgeois system, at times, producing a vague and impotent villain. At the *Liberator* Minor directed his assault almost exclusively at capitalist oppressors and they were portrayed as callous and detested enemies.

³⁵ See "The Cartoon as a Means of Artistic Expression," *Current Literature* 52, no.4 (October 1912): 463 and Fitzgerald, 100.

The laborer assumed new meaning for Minor at the *Liberator*; he was no longer an anonymous worker subject to the whims of his oppressor, but a potent force to be recognized. Ultimately, for Minor, the laborer came to symbolize Communism itself. The undulating giant body in "Prometheus Bound" will soon rip free from his chains, just as the Communist party in Germany was threatening to win the majority. Similarly, the over-scaled, muscular, exploited, but powerful laborer is again used in the August 1924 issue, "We All Stand for American Institutions." In this instance, chained laborers carry on their backs a huge slab consisting of corrupt American businessmen and politicians. The image implies that when labor rises from its subjugation the entire American system of corruption will tumble. The explicit reference to communism and the laborer is best represented in Minor's double-page spread, "Labor Gets Up: The Federated Farmer-Labor Party Is Formed in Chicago" of August 1923 (fig. 19). A giant figure, representing the "Farmer-Labor Party," is tied to the ground by ropes. The use of the bound giant figure is reminiscent of Gulliver in Jonathan Swift's eighteenth century classic *Gulliver's Travels*, which many scholars have read as a political satire on Queen's Anne's reign in London.³⁶ Tiny figures flay about, as the giant is about to break free from the ropes and rise up. There is an optimism attached to Minor's labor cartoons that seems to suggest, despite the continuous struggle, the laborer/communism will prevail to ultimately rise up as the victor against his oppressor, the capitalist system.

After the merger of the *Liberator*, Minor began contributing articles and illustrations to the *Daily Worker*, a Communist newspaper founded in 1924. In 1928 he became its southern editor and remained so until 1945. Minor fell into disfavor with Moscow in 1945 when Earl Browder was demoted and later expelled by the party; nevertheless, he continued his activities as a communist and remained listed as an editor.

³⁶ For a full discussion of the general political thought and European history that went into the making of *Gulliver's Travels*, see F.P. Lock, *The Politics of Gulliver's Travel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

Minor, a loyal party member and one of the most accomplished scholars of Marxism in the movement had an unusual aptitude for language, studying Russian, German and French books in the original. He was one of the American representatives to the Comintern in 1921 and again in 1926. On two occasions he became Acting General Secretary of the CPUSA, considered the most important party position in the United States: in 1928 in the absence of Jay Lovestone and in 1941 after Earl Browder was imprisoned for passport fraud. He also was the chairman for the Defense Committee of Civil Rights for Communists around 1939-1940. In New York, Minor ran for public office on the Communist ticket in 1932 for governor, in 1933 for mayor and in 1936 for United States senator.

Minor's highly visible role in the Communist movement and radical activities resulted in repeated arrests, earning him the nickname, "fighting Bob." In addition to his imprisonment for treason described earlier, Minor was among forty party leaders hunted by the Bureau of Investigation and the Michigan police authorities for "unlawful assembly" on August 22, 1922 at a meeting of Communist leaders at Bridgeman, Michigan. In March 1930 he and other party leaders, were arrested during a New York Union Square protest march for the Unemployment Council set up to investigate the stock market crash. Minor served six-months of his three-year sentence and while imprisoned collapsed from appendicitis, was released, and spent more than a year recovering at his wife's estate in Croton. Other arrests included a 1929 libel suit against the editors of *Freiheit* and the *Daily Worker*; in 1933 for leading a Furniture Workers Industrial Union picket line; a 1936 "'picketing scrimmage"; and in 1938 for yet another demonstration. Minor had suffered a coronary occlusion in 1948 and by the late 1940s with his health deteriorating he withdrew from active participation in political activities. He eventually died of a heart attack at the age of sixty-eight.

In 1926 Minor abandoned his art and devoted his time exclusively to communist causes. His last cartoon appeared in the November 12, 1926 issue of the *Daily Worker*. While a prolific writer on the subject of politics, Minor wrote little on his role as an artist and never explained

why he abandoned it. One of the standard statements about Minor is that after he stopped being an artist he became a political hack with no creativity or originality. Explanations as to why he gave up art result only in conjecture, of which much has been written. Fitzgerald speculated that the artist's passion for making political points through his art became dissatisfying, and perhaps he did not have enough respect for the artist or value his own art enough to consider it sufficient to reflect communist ideology. According to Joseph Freeman: "His energies express themselves as vitally in political action as in art; and being a man whose temperament requires complete concentration, he abandoned art for action. Ultimately, Minor's biographer, Joseph North, offers the most plausible explanation. According to North, Minor placed greater value on the common job that needed to be done than on his own individual inclination and decided he could not be a political leader and a cartoonist simultaneously. Regardless of the reasons Minor may have had for abandoning his art, the choice was his own. The Communist party recognized his talent and attempted to persuade him to continue drawing. Whether Minor was more effective as a political writer or artist is debatable; however, the emotional immediacy and impact of his artwork exceed his often pedantic and somber writing. Eastman believed that if Minor had continued his art: "He would have lived in memory as one of America's great—quite possibly her greatest, at least her most remorselessly hard-hitting, cartoonist." He explained: "But he had in him this almighty drive toward an extreme ideal—something involving ferocity and destruction, secret meetings in cellars, criminal revolt against fellow humans that are hated, and yet of course, at the end of the long struggle—universal human brotherhood."³⁷

Minor pioneered the use of the lithographic crayon technique and subsequently altered the face of magazine publication in the United States. His interest in newspapers and the role of

³⁷ See Fitzgerald, 109; Freeman, *An American Testament*, 308; and North, *Robert Minor: Artist and Crusader*, 168. Reportedly, Minor did not keep any of his drawings except for two originals. See Orrick Johns, "Robert Minor, the Man," *New Masses* 28 (August 1934): 16-17. Freeman wrote of Minor, "but the party itself, understanding and appreciating the value of his art again and again asked him to return to his drawing board." See *An American Testament*, 307. See also, Eastman, TD, n.d., Max Eastman Papers.

the illustrator remained a major part of his life as he regarded journalism the most immediate way of reaching the masses. Ideologically and stylistically he inspired a generation of labor cartoonists that include Jacob Burck, Fred Ellis, Alfred Freuh, Ross Lewis, Tom Little, and Edmund Duffy.³⁸ Minor was decisive in establishing American graphic arts as an important factor in the development of social art of the 1930s. His life was guided almost exclusively by the burning conviction that the future belonged to the working class. As an early exponent in America of proletarian art, he was crucial to the development in the use of art for propaganda.

³⁸ Maurice Horn, ed., *The World Encyclopedia of Cartoons*, 391-392.

LYDIA GIBSON: 1891- 1964

In August 1920 while Minor was living with Vorse at Provincetown, Gibson contacted him and their relationship from four years earlier resumed. Minor had first met Gibson in San Francisco in 1916 through their mutual participation in the Tom Mooney case and involvement with *Blast* magazine. Prior to his relationship with both Vorse and Gibson, Minor had been married to a woman named Pearl. By the spring of 1922 Gibson had moved to New York and by year's end was married to Minor. That same year she joined the Communist Party. All evidence indicates that Gibson thoroughly supported Minor's political crusades and that she too assumed an active role in the party. She moved with Minor to Chicago when the *Liberator* offices shifted to party headquarters and upon their return in 1923 they settled at Croton where Gibson bought a home. Through Gibson's inheritance, the Minors were financially independent. Minor and Gibson would be married for thirty years and were well suited for each other; sharing the same political ideology, employment at the *Liberator*, and artistic orientation.³⁹

Lydia Mestre Gibson was a painter, illustrator, poet and political activist. She was born in New York in 1891 to a wealthy and prominent family. Her father was the noted English-born architect Robert Williams Gibson, who practiced architecture in Albany during the years 1881-88. Gibson was the oldest of four children, raised by their maternal grandmother. She acquired an early interest in art, claiming that as a child her butler often left her at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and consequently, the museum acted as her babysitter. Later, she would seriously pursue a classical education in art by studying in Paris with William Fraser (1841-1905), Emile-Antoine Bourdelle (1861-1929), Charles Guérin (1875-1939), and Henry Varnum Poor (1887-1970). In her art, Gibson frequently alluded to her knowledge of the masters. As with most illustrators at

³⁹ Gibson wrote Minor inquiring why had he not told her that he divorced his first wife. See Garrison, 174-175. Gibson was the financial provider in the family and paid Minor's salary without his knowing it. She often kept money hidden in the household in anticipation of bailing Minor from jail. Lottie Gordon, (secretary of the Marxist Center), New York, interview by author, New York, December 1997.

the *Liberator*, Gibson combined her interest in art with that of politics. By 1915 she was living in San Francisco and while there became active in socialist and feminist issues, in the movement to free Tom Mooney and in drawing for *Blast* (1916-1917), an anarchistic periodical edited by Alexander Berkman.⁴⁰

Gibson had been a contributor to the *Masses*, submitting poetry as early as 1913. Her drawings for the *Liberator* began to appear in 1919 and she officially joined its staff as a contributing editor in 1922.⁴¹ When Gibson moved back to New York, she assumed more responsibility on the magazine and by October 1922 her status shifted from contributing editor to that of editor, along with the artists Gellert, Gropper and Robinson. At the *Liberator*, Gibson worked as an illustrator, poet, and book reviewer and also took on editorial responsibilities, selecting illustrations for the magazine. Gibson serves as an example of one of the many relatively unknown female illustrators hired by the magazine. Further, her role as an active Communist provides a broader spectrum to the magazine's evolving political orientation.

Cartooning as a man's domain began to change by the late nineteenth century when women gained acceptance as professionals in the field. Typical of many female illustrators of the time, they were also writers and social reformers. The *Masses* was one of the earliest magazines that offered an important opportunity for women artists and writers by including them among their staff of editors and by their support of feminist issues—a tradition continued at the

⁴⁰ Among the many designs of Robert Williams Gibson in Albany are the Albany Cathedral, Clearing House, Botanical Museum, Coffee Exchange, New York Trust Company Building, and Randall Memorial Chapel. See Frank R. Holmes, ed., *Who's Who in New York*, 8th ed., (New York: Who's Who Publications, Inc., 1924), 502. Poor was in Paris in 1910 and during the spring of 1919. See Harold E. Dickson and Richard Porter, *Henry Varnum Poor 1887-1970: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Museum of Art at the Pennsylvania State University, 1983-1984). *Blast*, originally published in San Francisco in 1916 shifted its offices to New York in 1917 and quickly expired, publishing its last issue in June 1917. The art for the magazine was limited to its covers. In addition to its cover drawings, Gibson also conceived of the magazine's logo design.

⁴¹ Evidence suggests that Gibson was romantically linked with Eastman some time in 1919; however, the affair was short-lived but may account in part to her involvement with both the *Masses* and *Liberator*. See Eastman to Gibson, AL, n.d., Max Eastman Papers, and Eastman, "To Lydia," *Liberator* 1, no. 11 (January 1919): 41.

Liberator. In addition to Crystal Eastman's involvement as owner and executive editor and its female patrons, the staff also consisted of Cornelia Barns, Louise Bryant, Wanda Gág, Helen Keller, and Mary Heaton Vorse.

Before settling in New York to work at the *Liberator*, Gibson traveled extensively and in the early 1920s visited Bali and Tahiti. Her Tahitian-inspired drawings and verse were published in the *Liberator*.⁴² Gibson's drawing for the March 1921 issue, "In Tahiti" includes two bare breasted women wearing sarongs in a tropical landscape (fig. 20). Representative of many illustrations for the magazine, the scene is non-political. Gibson evokes the art of Gauguin, not only in subject but also in stylistic rendering of broad, flattened forms, repeated patterning and bold contours. Later Gibson would abandon Tahitian scenes for more serious subjects; however, she retained the strong graphic linear style. Such was the case for her cover design for the January 1920 issue of a female warrior brandishing a spear (fig. 21). "Russia Victorious" is included on the cover to identify an inside article and acts as a caption. While an intentional strategy on the part of the editors to associate the warrior with Russia, it is unlikely that Gibson intended the drawing to represent Russia alone, as it also relates to her interest in feminist issues. When Gibson dealt with the theme of the Soviet Union, there was little room for ambiguity. The cover, executed in a graphic style of flat, broad areas of color with strong contours, reminiscent of poster design, demonstrates one of the drawing techniques Gibson adopted for the magazine. This particular style was Gibson's most successful and employed repeatedly for her cover designs of 1923 and 1924.

Gibson included a woman in most all of her figural illustrations for the magazine, seeking to reveal their role as participants in the class struggle. During Gibson's involvement with the suffragette publishing industry, she advocated a more visible role for women, championed their

⁴² See also Gibson's Tahitian inspired illustrations in *Liberator* 5, no. 2 (February 1922): 20 & 23 and *Liberator* 5, no. 12 (January 1923): 16.

leadership and consistently represented their struggle and achievement.⁴³ For the September 1924 cover she portrayed a working class woman on the roof of a tenement with industrial roofs in the background and rows of laundry hung to dry, capturing the reality of daily life. While not overtly political, the image could be read as urban social genre. Even though the artist had no children of her own, she frequently evoked motherhood in her visual works and in her poems. The November 1923 issue includes a simple contour drawing of a mother breast-feeding an infant. Mother and child again appear in Gibson's drawing for the fifth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, "All Hail, Soviet Russia!" in the December 1922 issue (fig. 22). Two male laborers hold a cake lit with candles as a mother and child look on. In compositional placement, the mother and child are reminiscent of Renaissance masters. Gibson claimed her favorite book was an edition of Leonardo da Vinci's *Notebooks*.⁴⁴ While Gibson's mother and child are not comparable to da Vinci's works of the same subject, the composition indicates a general inspiration.

The artist's work reveals both a classical background and knowledge of contemporary art. She often quoted a variety of sources that include the Renaissance, nineteenth century French Academic art, Neo-Impressionism, contemporary poster design and Japanese prints.⁴⁵ "All Hail Soviet Russia," is both an example of Gibson's support for the Soviet Union and of the more traditional drawing style adopted by her for the magazine. This style consisted of the use of

⁴³ Norma Ashley David, interview by Edith Needleman, tape recording, 13 May 1985. Croton-on-Hudson, New York, Lydia Gibson Papers (uncatalogued), Reference Center for Marxist Studies, New York.

⁴⁴ North claimed Gibson's favorite book was Da Vinci's *Notebook and Illustrations*; however, there is no such title. He may have been referring to one of the many editions of Da Vinci's *Notebooks*, one of which was published in 1923 (New York: Empire State Book Co.). See Joseph North, "To Lydia Gibson," *The Worker*, 19 July 1964, 8.

⁴⁵ Gibson's 1928 painting, *The Women's Auxiliary* is a direct quotation of David's *Rape of the Sabine Women* in figural gesture and composition, placement. Further, Gibson's painting, *The Bathers*, oil of 1925 is dependent on Paul Cézanne. Cézanne also influenced Henry Varnum Poor, Gibson's early instructor. The Reference Center for Marxist Studies in New York is the sole custodian of Gibson's work, which was given to them by her estate at Croton when the state at Croton was closed. It consists of about twelve paintings (poor condition), sketches and poetry. Michael Stephens to Reference Center for Marxist Studies, TLS, 13 January 1984.

shading, classical form, and representational narrative. For Gibson this approach was the least successful, as it betrayed her lack of technical skill. Scale and perspective were inaccurate, figure proportion miscalculated, gestures awkward, and the composition lacked drama. Gibson was at her best with the graphic style that exhibited an understanding of abstraction and design. Her cover for the December 1923 issue included a repeated red star pattern. The image related both to Russia in the use of the color red, and to the upcoming Christmas holidays. In the last issue of the *Liberator* of October 1924, Gibson again employed a simple, yet effective design pattern of green leaves with red and black typography (fig.23). Each separate leaf includes the title of a country; Russia is privileged as the largest leaf and is located on the uppermost branch. In both illustrations the simple design pattern was effective for the covers. They suggest Gibson's awareness of Japanese prints in the strength of decorative patterning, abstract concepts of simplicity, and in flattened form.

While Gibson's art indicates knowledge of modernism and abstraction, she never deviated from a naturalistic representation and appears to have had little patience with contemporary European movements. Even though she never wrote about her role as an artist, in a review of Dehn's work for the May 1923 *Liberator*, she intimated her preferences and dislikes. Of Dehn, she wrote: "He is without the moral despair of Grosz, whose bitterness presupposes a disappointed ideal; he is free of the sentimentality of the French, of the fantastic unreality of the Russians." Gibson dismissed Grosz's brand of German expressionism, nineteenth century French academic tradition, and Russian Futurism. In the review she emphasized Dehn's nationality as American; he was in a unique position to observe and translate "modern life" because he was "young enough to accept great changes without regret."⁴⁶ Gibson's commentary suggests a promotion of American artists because they would be able to express the modern experience, which for her, was new, revolutionary social change. Consistent with the *Liberator* editorial

⁴⁶ Gibson, "Adolf Dehn," *Liberator* 6, no. 5 (May 1923): 36.

tradition, Gibson sought a distinctly American expression for a nation on the cusp of what she believed was revolutionary transformation.

Gibson rarely drew explicitly political cartoons for the magazine, preferring subjects of a social nature or light-hearted themes. Unlike her male counterparts on the magazine, she approached the subject of Russia on a variety of levels. In addition to her decorative designs discussed above, she also explored the domestic lives of the Russian peasant for the June and November 1920 covers (fig.24). In these scenes, Gibson evoked traditional Russian folk costumes through the use of kerchiefs, lace patterns, and other details. The subject of both covers is romance; for June, a couple stand together ready to kiss; and for November a woman is about to open the door for her secret lover to enter. Gibson's light-hearted scenes had the effect of attaching a familiar identity to the face of the Russian people, who in 1920 had been demonized as a result of the "red scare." In fact, the topic of the June editorial was Minor's condemnation of the Palmer raids. Most artists at the *Liberator* showed their support of the Soviet state through aggressive portrayals attacking capitalists and the American government. By contrast, Gibson's domestic subjects served to humanize and de-politicized perceptions of Russia and subsequently make it less threatening.⁴⁷

After the *Liberator* ceased publication, Gibson continued to contribute art and poetry to left wing magazines including *Workers Monthly* (1924-27), *Daily Worker* (1924-1968), *Young Pioneer* (1929-1931), *The Hammer* (1926-1939), and was one of the founders and contributors to the *New Masses*. In the mid-1920s she began painting and also experimented with lithographs and woodcuts. The subject of her paintings consisted primarily of political and social narratives, ranging from the 1923 Pennsylvania Anthracite Strike, to the portrayal of African American female community leaders. She exhibited regularly with the John Reed Club in New York, and was a member of its affiliate, Buro Reed Artist Group, for which she served as secretary to its

⁴⁷ Even though Cornelia Barns also portrayed the domestic and more lighthearted side of the American working class, her images never dealt with Russia per se.

membership committee. She supported the various left-wing political artist organizations that sprang up in the 1930s and was one of the signers of the American Artists' Congress in 1936. In addition to her affiliation with artist political groups, she was also a member of Salons of America and the Society of Independent Artists in New York, exhibiting with them from 1922 to 1936. Her dual talent as a writer and artist were combined when Gibson wrote and illustrated children's books that include *Fairy Tales for Workers Children* (Chicago: Daily Worker Publishing Co., 1925) and *Teacup Whale* (New York: Ferrar, 1934). In 1984, the community of Croton-on-Hudson celebrated its former resident artists and writers, exhibiting Gibson's art along with works by Floyd Dell, Stuart Chase, Max Eastman, William Gropper, Robert Minor, John Reed, Boardman Robinson, and Upton Sinclair.⁴⁸

Gibson joined the Communist Party in 1922 and remained a loyal member until her death in 1964. Her commitment to Soviet Russia was so pervasive that she preferred to be called "Lydga," the Russian version of her name by her friends. Her engagement extended into economic support and she became a major financial contributor to the CPUSA, repeatedly providing bail and court costs for Communists who had been arrested. As an artist and Communist, Gibson's work went unrecorded in the history books. If she was mentioned at all, it was only in connection with her husband. As a female illustrator, feminist, and political activist she provided an alternative visual response to the Soviet Union, one rich in meaning and diverse in interpretation. Unlike the majority of male illustrators on the magazine, Gibson emphasized the role of women in the proletariat movement and provided a broader scope by which to examine

⁴⁸ The Society of Independent Artists established in 1917 was based on the French Société des Artistes Indépendants founded in 1884 through the efforts of Walter Pach. See Clark S. Marlor, *The Society of Independent Artists: The Exhibition Record 1917-1944* (Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Press, 1984), 258. For a recent discussion of Soviet children's book illustrations, see Evgeny Steiner, *Stories for Little Comrades: Revolutionary Artists and the Making of Early Soviet Children's Books*, trans., from Russian by Jane Ann Miller (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999).

Russia.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ For further discussions on Gibson's association with Russia, see Norma Ashley David to Edith Needleman, Lydia Gibson Papers, Reference Center for Marxist Studies. According to David, Gibson had run for congress on the Communist ticket prior to 1952. Gibson contributed over ten thousand dollars to the "Hollywood Ten," artists who were sent to jail during the 1940s and 1950s, Lottie Gordon interview by author. When the British police raided Soviet House headquarters of Arcos, the Soviet Trading Corporation in London in 1927, incriminating documents were found which listed the names and addresses of those receiving secret messages and funds from abroad. Gibson was listed as a recipient of "half legal cables." See Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 207. Fitzgerald also claimed she was the recipient of secret Comintern messages in 1921 and 1926. See Fitzgerald, 111.

WILLIAM GROPPER: 1897-1977

William Gropper best demonstrates the social protest illustrator of the *Liberator* whose style departs from the social genre scenes of the pre-war *Masses*. Gropper most often translated his criticism of the American system into a witty, biting satire, a field he described as “satirical figuration.” He also represents the new type of politically committed illustrator whose commentary will find expression in the Social Realism of the 1930s. Gropper was born in New York to Jewish immigrant parents from Russia and Eastern Europe. His mother supported the family, who barely managed to subsist by working in a sweatshop in the garment district. As a youth, Gropper became interested in drawing and recollected: “At the age of thirteen my great interest and ambition was art. Everything else seemed only an obstacle in the way of this powerful drive. My great wish was to find enough time to study art and to paint . . . I was determined, I was completely obsessed with the one great idea: learning to draw.”⁵⁰ Even while working as an office boy at a men’s wear shop to help support the family he would make thumbnail sketches for the customers during his free time.

His first formal training was at thirteen when he joined an evening life-drawing class at the Ferrer School, which he attended for three years, studying with Bellows and Henri. The Ferrer School instilled in Gropper a devotion to free individual expression and nonconformity. Gropper said of his early experience: “I began to realize that you don’t paint with color—you paint with conviction, freedom, love and heartaches—with what you have. The other end is the technique, the equipment with which you convey that.”⁵¹ He was awarded a scholarship at the National Academy of Design but refused to bend to the academy’s traditional discipline and was soon

⁵⁰ Gropper, quoted by Louis Lozowick, Gropper’s friend and contemporary in *William Gropper* (East Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1983), 17.

⁵¹ Gropper, in an interview with August L. Freundlich in *William Gropper: Retrospective at the Joe and Emily Low Art Gallery* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami, 1968), 13.

dismissed. Gropper's talent did not go unnoticed and in 1915 he met Frank A. Parsons, president of the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts who offered him a scholarship to the school's afternoon classes.

In 1917 Gropper accepted a position as a feature artist on the Sunday edition of the *New York Tribune*. The *Tribune* job would inadvertently introduce Gropper to the radical movement. On a reportorial assignment he was asked to make drawings of IWW headquarters and soon found that he was sympathetic to their liberal causes. From that point forward Gropper met many other socialists and radicals, all of whom soon looked to him for posters, drawings and illustrations. By 1918 Gropper was a steady contributor to leftist and IWW publications such as the *Labor Defender* (1918-1919), *Rebel Worker* (1918-1919), *Revolutionary Age* (1918-1919) and the *Liberator*. During the war, the *New York Tribune* was waging a relentless campaign against all pro-Germans and all radicals. When it was discovered that Gropper had drawn illustrations condemning the policy of its editors in radical publications, Gropper was warned to discontinue his drawings. Refusing to comply, he left the *Tribune* and continued to draw for the radical press. During the fall of 1919 agents of the Department of Justice investigated *Revolutionary Age* and questioned Gropper about his political views and drawings for radical papers. He left the oppressive atmosphere and made a trip to Havana only to return four months later to attend his father's funeral.⁵²

After returning from Cuba in 1920, he began contributing to *Dial*, edited by Scofield Thayer. Thereafter, he began his career as a freelance illustrator contributing to various magazines and newspapers that included *Greenwich Village Guardian Quill* (1917-1929), *Pagan* (1916-1922), *Advance* (1923-1926), *National Financial News*, *New York Evening Post Literary Review*, *Motion Picture Magazine* (1915-1931), *Playboy* (1919-1924), *Shadowland* (1919-1923),

⁵² For an account of Gropper's dismissal from the *New York Tribune* and subsequent activities with the radical press, see Lozowick, 26-27 & 70, and Carlo De Fornaro, "The Groping of Gropper," *Arts and Decoration* (March 1923): 14-15 & 95.

and *The Spur* (1905-1940). In 1923 he became staff contributor to Frank Harris' *New Pearson's*. At this time, Gropper began experimenting with different mediums that included pen and ink, linoleum blocks, woodcuts, etchings, lithographs, watercolors, and oils. In 1921 he had his first exhibit of monotypes in Washington Square Bookshop, New York and occasionally, exhibited at the gallery of the National Arts Club, which also featured Henri, Bellows, Sloan and Hopper. It was also during 1921-1923 that Gropper began taking painting seriously.

Even though he submitted illustrations to other leftist publications, it was with the *Liberator* that Gropper made his first long-term professional association with the liberal press and developed his socialistic ideology. Gropper's work never appeared in the *Masses*. He first began contributing to the *Liberator* in October 1918. Gropper became a "special contributor" to the publication in 1921 and was also promoted to editor. From then on, he took an increasingly active role on the magazine. At the *Liberator*, Gropper's work was recognized for its "incisive originality." Eastman was impressed by the artist and called him a "budding genius." Likewise, there was a steady demand by *Liberator* readers for his "unique" drawings. Not only was the *Liberator* instrumental in shaping Gropper's career but also through his friendship with Claude McKay, Gropper met his first wife, Gladys Oaks, who was a poet and contributor to the magazine. The marriage did not last long and they separated in 1924. That same year, he married Sophie Frankel, a biologist and friend of his first wife.⁵³

Gropper's political cartoons for the *Liberator* were consistently excellent in artistic and ideological power. His work went beyond specificity to universal characterizations through his adeptness at conveying satire, parody, and insight into the human condition. Even though Gropper's drawings indicate a strong criticism of the American government, upon closer

⁵³ See Gahn, "His Early Career," 114-115; Gahn, "The America of William Gropper, Radical Cartoonist" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, New York, 1966); Lozowick, 17; and Crystal Eastman to William Gropper, TLS, 25 January 1919, William Gropper Papers (reel 3501, frame 494), Archives of American Art, New York. The couple collaborated on a book of poetry and drawings, and an experimental magazine. See Gropper and Gladys Oaks, *Chinese White* (New York: Melomime Publications, 1922).

observation they reveal a broader context that unveils the fallacy of human existence and expresses both the flaws and nobility of humankind. Experimentation in style and subject distinguishes Gropper's illustrations for the magazine. His work for the *Liberator* can be divided into four categories: the multiple framed cartoons, caricatured portrait studies, political illustrations of specific issues, and cover drawings.

Typical of Gropper's framed cartoons is "The History of Five Years," a study of disillusionment with America in the November 1921 issue (fig. 25). As one of his most clever and reprinted works from this period, the cartoon includes five frames that chronicle two men before and after the war. The first frame labeled "1917" reads: "Gee! We're happy we're gonna have war—working ten and twelve hours a day ain't much fun for us guys." The men are well dressed and appear optimistic. In the second frame of 1918, the men are now enlisted soldiers and the caption states: "The papers say that the Germans are the worst people on earth. By Golly, we'll clean 'em up." In the third frame of 1919 the men have suffered considerably as war casualties; one of the men is without a leg, the other with a bandaged arm. The caption reads: "Thank God, it's over." By the fourth frame of 1920 the war veterans have returned home. "They promised us our jobs, bonus and a decent place to live in," indicates the caption, as they stand in front of a door with a sign stating, "Keep Out." Finally, in the fifth frame of 1921 the men are completely destitute, wear rags, one has no arm, the other no leg and the caption reads: "No jobs, no bonus, --now all together, boys—'My country, tis of thee---." Gropper's biting sarcasm reveals the bleak reality of war veterans in a system that ultimately failed them. Gropper's interest in the World War I veteran would later relate to the popular cultural image of the "Forgotten Man" in the 1930s. The artist was clearly a pacifist and repeatedly turned to the issue of war's devastation on the physical body and human spirit.⁵⁴ Even though the plight of war veterans was

⁵⁴ See also Gropper, "Come On, Boys! Let's Go to China!" *Liberator* 7, no. 12 (October 1924): 4. I am indebted to Marlene Park for suggesting the relationship between Gropper's image and 1930s popular culture, for example, the film *My Man Godfrey* of 1936. For a collection of documentary portraits

discussed in the magazine, it was a peripheral issue in 1921; labor issues and events in Russian were favored. The drawing serves to demonstrate Gropper's non-sectarian position and instead underscores his broader contextual concerns that went beyond the immediate scope of the magazine. His framed cartoons reveal a dark comic humor and a captivating wit, unmatched by any other illustrator at the *Liberator*. Eastman called Gropper "as instinctively comic an artist as ever touched pen to paper."⁵⁵ Gropper was a natural draftsman and most of his cartoons consisted of line drawings. He knew how to present an idea with undulating lines that fully and instantly characterized shapes, emotions, attitudes, and movements.

The multiple and expressive use of line was brought to new heights in Gropper's caricature studies. The July 1921 cover includes a portrait caricature of William Hays, the Postmaster General who refunded the *Liberator* \$11,289.67 in overcharged postal fees, and is referenced in the editorial (fig. 26). The stark image, executed in flattened broad areas of color and with Gropper's signature contour line, holds the check in his hand and stands in humbled posture. As with any successful caricature, it captures character through distortion. For Gropper, Hays is both hero and villain. The large, irregular and stylized halo above Hays' head pertains to the good deed bestowed on the publication; however, the distortion of bent head, stooped shoulders, large ears and nose suggest a sinister and weak personality. This pose, introduced in the *Liberator*, would later become a standard character type for Gropper, conveying hypocrisy through the insipid villain. Gropper's treatment of flattened planes, stylized forms, and askew composition suggest his familiarity with modernism.⁵⁶

reflecting the "forgotten man" during the 1930s, see Robert S. McElvaine, ed., *Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the "Forgotten Man"* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

⁵⁵ Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 24.

⁵⁶ According to Freundlich, Gropper was also influenced by Cubism and while he never broke up the picture planes, he did employ angular shapes. For the most part, Gropper's angular planes were a mere compositional device. See August L. Freundlich, *William Gropper: Retrospective* (Coral Gables: Emily Low Art Gallery, University of Miami, 1968), 15-16.

As a correspondent for the *Liberator*, Gropper attended the trial of Communist leader Benjamin Gitlow, accused of seditious activities. Clarence Darrow, Gitlow's defense attorney, was among the portrait caricatures accompanying the article by Arturo Giovannitti, "Communism On Trial" in the March 1920 issue (fig.27).⁵⁷ During the trial, the presiding judge objected to Gropper's use of a sketchbook. As a result, the artist drew his portraits on a nearby newspaper and the drawings were published as such. This incident reveals Gropper's ingenious use of the accidental and also indicates an irreverent attitude, underlying concepts akin to the Dada movement.

At the time Gropper did these portrait sketches he was involved with Inje-Inje, an American variation of Dada, originated by Holger Cahill of the Downtown Gallery around 1920. Cahill, who was associated with the Newark Museum in the 1920s and in 1932 with the Museum of Modern Art, sought to relate art to the masses and was an advocate of American folk tradition.⁵⁸ Inje was said to be the only word in the language of a South American Indian tribe and the movement sought to return to what was viewed as primitive simplicity in the use of only vertical and horizontal forms. While Gropper's caricatures, in this instance, do not reflect Inje-Inje, they serve to substantiate the artist's knowledge and involvement with modernist ideas of

⁵⁷ Arturo Giovannitti, "Communism on Trial," *Liberator* 3 no. 3 (March 1920): 5-9.

⁵⁸ Cahill wrote: "Folk and popular art is significant for us because, in our fear that contemporary civilization has almost abandoned its form creating function in favor of the sterile mathematics of machine-form, we are startled and reassured to find this rich creativeness still alive in the upretentious activities and avocations of the common man." See Holger Cahill, "Artists of the People," *Masters of Popular Painting: Modern Primitives of Europe and America* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), 95-105. Gahn conducted several interviews with Gropper during 1965 while researching his dissertation, "The America of William Gropper, Radical Cartoonist." The interview regarding Inje Inje was conducted on 24 April 1965. Gropper's "Line Syncopations" in the *Dial* (see for example, December 1923, 545), reflected this experimental form. See Gahn, "His Early Career," 128-129. None of the literature on Dada, Holger Cahill or the Downtown Gallery mentions the movement. For the most recent discussion of Dada and journalism, see Hanne Bergius, trans. from German by Roy F. Allen, "Dada, the Montage and the Press: Catchphrase and cliché as basic twentieth century principles," in Stephen Foster, ed., *Dada the Coordinates of Cultural Politics* (New York: G.K. Hall and Co., 1996), 107-154. For a discussion of Edith G. Halpert's Downtown Gallery and Cahill's involvement, see Diane Tepfer, "Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery Downtown: 1926-1940: A study in American patronage" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Michigan, 1989).

Dada. Gropper clearly arrived at this technique from necessity, and may, in fact, be one of the earliest examples of an artist employing a newspaper background for a drawing. The cartoonist must have been pleased with the results introduced at the *Liberator*. The technique lends itself to political and newsworthy venues and by 1926 Gropper was employing this approach to his own series, "Taking the News at Face Value" at the *New York World*.

The third category of the artist's work at the *Liberator* was illustrations of specific political issues that forcefully convey his indictment of the American system. His work parodied the Wilson and Harding administration's policies on the Soviet Union, the Allied Forces, the Ku Klux Klan, and the exploitation of labor. Gropper's April 1922 drawing, "The Fruits of Wilson's Russian Policy," depicts a powerful image of an open wagon filled with corpses (fig. 28). The driver of the wagon is labeled "Famine." At the time, the Wilson administration was leading an aggressive campaign against Russia, resulting in starvation and countless deaths. Again, Gropper's wit, and in this case irony, expose hypocrisy. Unlike the majority of political illustrations featured in the magazine, the image does not rely on captions to fully convey its message. The artist does not shield the viewer from violence and grotesqueries and maintained, "in a cartoon you have to attack." In this respect, Gropper is similar to Minor and by extension also evokes Goya. Gropper admired the work of Goya and paid homage to the artist in the cumulative work of his printmaking career, the "Capriccios Portfolio" of 1953-56. During the McCarthy era, Gropper identified with Goya and wrote of the artist: "Like Goya, who was moved to create a set of Capriccios etchings of his times, I devoted in solitude for three years (1953-1956) to express myself of the Inquisition of our times."⁵⁹

While Goya served as an inspiration for Gropper, it was the German Expressionist, George Grosz with whom a direct kinship existed in temperament, style and subject.⁶⁰ The June

⁵⁹ See Gropper, as quoted in Gahn, "His Early Career," 143-144, and as quoted by Steinberg, 1-2.

⁶⁰ In 1917 Theodor Daubler, the German poet and critic categorized Grosz as an "expressionist" in his essay, "George Grosz," *Das Kunstblatt* 3 (1917): 8-82. Today, Grosz is more directly associated

1923 issue includes a small drawing by Gropper of a soldier shooting a man, while another figure lies dead at his feet (fig. 29). In addition to the violence depicted, the use of nervous, jagged and expressive lines directly corresponds to any number of published illustrations by Grosz (fig.30). Gropper first used this expressive drawing style, reminiscent of Grosz in the *Liberator's* December 1920 issue. In it, a starving man begs before a bloated bourgeoisie who sits with a full meal at his table, reminiscent of Grosz's anti-bourgeoisie illustrations. Even though Grosz first appeared in the *Liberator* on March 1922, Gropper had earlier occasions to see his work. Scofield Thayer, a friend of Grosz and editor of *Dial* magazine, accepted Gropper's illustrations for his magazine in 1920 and began collecting Gropper's work between 1920-24. Thayer edited the literary magazine *Dial* from 1920-1925, and frequently traveled to Vienna and Berlin. The magazine reproduced many European and American modernists and provided a forum for major contemporary writers and critics. In addition, Thayer collected the work of the *Liberator* contributor, Adolf Dehn who met Grosz in Berlin in 1921, and whose work also reveals a marked Grosz influence. Thayer was in Vienna in 1922 and in communication with Dehn, who assisted Thayer in the publication of an artist's portfolio of reproductions, published by the *Dial* in 1923. Thayer admired a type of thin stylized drawing and often reproduced drawings by Gropper and Dehn. He also published the work of *Liberator* artists Robinson and Davis. In addition, Thayer helped raise bail for the *Masses* during its indictment.⁶¹ Gropper's critical satirical illustrations,

with Berlin Dada. See Rose-Carol Washton Long, ed., *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993), 84-87 & 154.

⁶¹ For Dehn's involvement with Thayer, see Richard W. Cox, "Adolf Dehn: The Life," in Lumsdaine, 7. In 1919 Scofield Thayer and Sibley Watson bought the old *Dial* (1840-1919) and transformed it to a monthly devoted to the arts. Thayer was committed to art as strongly as to literature and insisted on better placement for reproductions. See Daniel Catton Rich, "Dail M For Modern," *The Dial and the Dial Collection* (Worcester Art Museum, 1959), 8-24. For a discussion of the Dial collection and Thayer's involvement with the *Liberator* circle, see Michael True, "Modernism, The *Dial* and the Way They Were," in Gayle L. Brown, ed., *The Dial: Arts and Letters in the 1930* (Worcester Art Museum, 1981), 6. Thayer collected Gropper's work between 1920-1924, see Jon Russell, "The Dial Collection" in *The Dial and the Dial Collection* (Worcester Art Museum, 1959). For a recent discussion of the shift in editorial direction after Thayer and Watson purchased the *Dial*, see McKible, 94-132. For further information regarding Grosz at the *Liberator*, see chapter four.

inspired in part by Grosz, would be representative of the direction of political cartoonists in the late 1920s and 1930s.

The last category of Gropper's work for the *Liberator* was the covers, which reveal a different side of the artist, but nonetheless, correspond to his ever-shifting stylistic experimentation. In the tradition of the *Liberator*, Gropper's covers depart from political commentary, satire, or caricature. The subjects range from an evening industrial cityscape, a man plodding through snow, a man diving into water and a laborer. The diver and figure in the snow relate to the months of publication, respectively August and February in their seasonal activity. The magazine editors had a penchant for seasonal covers and often used Cornelia Barns' social genre scenes. Gropper's interest in genre is reminiscent of the work of his former instructor, George Bellows. Gropper's style, however, is rendered in simple broad, flat planes, once again suggesting his knowledge of modernist works. Gropper's cover for the May 1922 issue is of a muscular miner holding a pick handle (fig. 31). The drawing, on a dark background with white chalk contour, indicates yet another experimental technique. The image celebrates the heroism of the American worker and would become an important theme among illustrators, particularly as the magazine became progressively procommunist.⁶²

By the late twenties, Gropper had become an established illustrator and newspaper cartoonist, a draughtsman of skill and great social conscience, and an artist widely published in periodicals. After the *Liberator* folded, Gropper continued to contribute to the radical press until 1949. In the fall of 1924 he became staff cartoonist for *Freiheit*, a New York Yiddish language daily newspaper edited by Moissaye J. Olgin. At this time, Gropper gained a reputation as one of the leading cartoonist of New York's radical press. With the founding of the *New Masses* in 1926, he joined the staff and eventually became its star satirist. Throughout his career Gropper

⁶² Gropper appeared on the cover four times in 1922 and prior to that once in 1921. According to Gahn, in 1918 Gropper would develop his ideal rendition of the laborer as a muscular figure, chained,

continued to draw cartoons, maintaining that the cartoon was “as pure a form of art as painting;” he felt that drawing kept him in touch with the vital currents of the times.⁶³ In 1927 Gropper traveled to Russia as a delegate to the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, along with Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis and Scott Nearing. After his arrival in Moscow he joined the Soviet Artists Union and drew for the *Young Leninist*, *Gudok* and *Pravda*. Upon his return to the United States in November 1928, Gropper produced a book of drawings on Soviet life, *56 Dessins URSS* (Paris: Le Triangle, 1929).

During the 1930s Gropper began easel painting in earnest and eventually became a leading painter of the school of Social Realism. Aside from radical circles, Gropper was relatively unknown until his one-man show in 1936 at the ACA Gallery in New York. As a result of the exhibit, Lewis Mumford acknowledged Gropper as “one of the most accomplished, as well as one of the most significant artists of our generation.” The artist also turned to mural painting in the 1930s. In 1934 he painted two murals for the Schenley Corporation and in 1935 a mural for the Hotel Taft, both in New York. This was the beginning of a series of murals under various auspices. He produced two post office murals for the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP)—one in Freeport Long Island (1936-1938) and one for the Northwestern Postal Station in Detroit (1938) on the theme of the automobile industry. Gropper’s best-known mural commission was *The Construction of a Dam* (1937-39) for the new Department of the Interior building in Washington D.C. Gropper’s reputation as a painter escalated when he was awarded a

handcuffed, and bound at the waist with ropes, pulling himself up from the mud and beginning to break his bonds. See Gahn, “His Early Career,” 137, and *Labor Defender*, 15 July 1918, and 15 October 1918.

⁶³ Harry Salpeter “William Gropper, Proletarian,” *Esquire* (September 1937): 105 as reprinted in Shapiro, 191-202. For further information on Gropper’s reputation in the 1920s, see Gahn, “His Early Career,” 130-131, and Patricia Phagen, “William Gropper and *Freiheit*: A Study of His Political Cartoons, 1924-1935” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1999).

Guggenheim Fellowship in 1937, followed by the selection of three of his paintings for the 1939-1940 New York World's Fair.⁶⁴

All through his career, Gropper never abandoned his political activism and although he never joined the Communist Party, he did embody its ideals in his emphasis on social themes with the perspective of the proletariat against capitalism and in his political activities. Gropper was a founding member of the John Reed Club, which began in New York in 1929 and exhibited in the first group show of the JRC held at the United Workers Co-op Apartments in the Bronx in December 1929. In November 1930, he traveled to Europe as one of three American delegates to the Second World Plenum of the International Bureau of Revolutionary Literature held in Kharkov. Gropper also promoted artists' organizations, such as the Artists' Union and the American Artists' Congress, signing the original call for a Congress in 1936.

Instances of censorship plagued Gropper's entire career. His work for the radical press and political activities were ultimately used to discredit him. During the McCarthy era, the artist came under severe government harassment and was accused by McCarthy of providing strategic maps to the Soviet Union. When Gropper was questioned before the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Government Operations in 1953 he prepared a statement which read in part:

I have the honor of being the first to have been blacklisted by McCarthy in 1953 . . . I cannot get a job as a teacher or janitor in any school, institution, or government building. I cannot receive an award, or [have] any of my work exhibited or commissioned, Neither is any of my work to be sent on international shows. Of course, with it goes the concentrated effort to keep my name out of publications, books, or work of any kind.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ See Lewis Mumford, "Satirist Into Painter," *New Yorker*, 27 March 1937, 48-50 as cited in Shapiro, 203-205. In 1934, Gropper painted *The Bacardi Bar* and *Wine Festival* for the Schenley Corporation and a mural on colonial American themes for the Hotel Taft coffee shop in New York. The Museum of Modern Art invited Gropper to participate in "Murals by American Painters and Photographers" on the proposed subject of the "Post-War World" in 1932. His mural, *Class Struggle in America Since the War*, along with murals by Gellert and Ben Shahn were refused by the museum for their controversial radical content. Gellert wrote about the incident in "We Capture the Walls!" *New Masses*, (June 1932). See also Steinberg, 24-27.

⁶⁵ The statement was never read before the Committee. FBI agents, who began a file on the artist in 1941, noted all of Gropper's professional connections. See Steinberg, 1-3. Gropper was called to testify before the committee in connection with a map he had painted, "America, Its Folklore," which was distributed by the United States Department of Information Services. As a result of the hearing, Gropper

Throughout his career, Gropper never gave up his belief that art had the power to achieve social and political change and was committed to the notion that art was a critical aspect of society. He sought to expose the hypocrisy of corrupt institutions and the plight of the common worker. According to Milton Brown, Gropper was a landmark in American art: "He cut through the esthetic cliches, the stock types, the involved literary accompaniments of the standard political cartoon, as well as the moralizing, heroicizing, and didactic patterns of left-wing polemicists, to produce a new, slashing, satirical style, sophisticated, allusive and esthetically exhilarating."⁶⁶

A comparison between a Robinson and a Gropper illustration of the same subject demonstrates the difference between the former *Masses* contributors to the *Liberator* and the new generation of political artists. Robinson's full-page drawing for the September 1921 issue (fig. 32) and Gropper's "The Crime Wave" for the June 1922 issue (fig. 33) both address censorship as it affected the magazine. Robinson's drawing portrays a young boy reading a copy of the *Liberator* beside his father who asks him: "My son, what are you reading? You should remember that your ancestors have been Americans ever since 1776." Gropper's six-framed cartoon includes a series of heinous crimes from robbery to murder, after each crime the caption states, "No cop in sight." The last frame consists of a row of officers with batons in hand and written below, "To the *Liberator* Ball." Both cartoons were responses to written texts in the magazine; for Robinson, the suppression of left-wing papers; for Gropper, the police raid of a *Liberator* Ball. While both drawings rely on captions, Gropper's drawing is clearly the more aggressive, combative, humorous and satirical. Robinson's more sedate rendition indicts the system with

was blacklisted. See Freundlich, 20. For further information on McCarthyism, see Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: the McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Stalin's regime or the popular front policy did not dampen Gropper's support of Russia. See Steinberg, 40.

⁶⁶ Brown, "William Gropper (1897-1977)" in Louis Harap, ed., *Jewish Currents Reader 4, 1976-1986: Essays, short stories, poetry, selected from the magazine* (New York: Association for Promotion of Jewish Secularism, Inc., 1987), 314.

subdued wry irony--there is no ferocity or direct emotional impact. Gropper's work, on the other hand, is an all out attack against the system, which simultaneously assaults the viewer's sensibility. While Robinson's drawing is executed in a sketchy manner in the technique he made famous it remains a traditional composition. Gropper's angular and rhythmic lines, and more simplified forms are a striking departure from tradition. Robinson's drawing relies on narrative, Gropper on immediate impact. The constraint of Robinson gives way to the expressiveness of a Gropper. Likewise, their sensibilities are in direct opposition; Robinson's drawing would have the viewer ponder the significance of censorship, Gropper's cartoon, on the other hand, expects an immediate emotional response from the reader.

Not all political illustrators who joined the staff of the *Liberator* had Gropper's wit or skill; however, they were united in their depiction of more direct and intrusive images. Gropper turned away from the realistic mode of Robinson and transformed the heroic or villainous impersonal forces of society that were Robinson's protagonists into specific character types. The influence of the French nineteenth century realism of Daumier, Forain and Steinlen gave way to the influence of post-war German Expressionism and Dada.⁶⁷ The younger generation of illustrators at the *Liberator* were not interested in symbolic representation in a traditional realistic cartoon manner, but were instead concerned with the critical depiction of particular aspects of social existence that demanded change. They had a clear political agenda, were more direct in their portrayal of the class struggle, and had a specific villain to indict--whether it was American institutions, capitalist exploiters, or opponents of Bolshevik Russia.

The underlying tenets of the art of social concern during the 1930s were concepts derived in part from the artistic example of the *Liberator* circle. The apparently instinctive rejection of the middle class had much to do with the active intellectual revolution against the bourgeoisie before

⁶⁷ Brown referred to Gropper's caricatures as "psychological humanization" in *American Painting From the Armory Show, 187*.

and after World War I.⁶⁸ Attacks against capitalism originated by the socialists of the *Masses*, continued in a more radical strain on the *Liberator* and *New Masses* (1926-1948, fig. 34) and ultimately found expression in the painting and graphic art of the 1930s. Socially conscious artists sought to move away from an individualist ethic toward a more collective one and disdained “art for art’s sake.” Pure abstraction and personal expressiveness were out of step with the desire to communicate and reach the masses. The artist of the 1930s sought to change the relationship between artist and society by democratizing art and culture, endeavoring to make art available to all. Art became a necessary, desirable, and essential part of culture and consequently the artist was called upon to serve society, to create an art embodying national ideals and values, and to make art relevant to the masses.

Not only did the *Liberator* circle pioneer an art of radical content and proletarian art, that found fuller expression in the next decade, but the magazine was crucial in introducing Diego Rivera, one of the most influential artists on socially relevant art of the 1930s, to an American audience.⁶⁹ The December 1923 issue featured an article by Frederic W. Leighton on Rivera’s murals at the Bolivar amphitheater at the National Preparatory School in Mexico City and also introduced the Union of Technical Working Painters and Sculptors, consisting of Rivera, David A. Siqueiros and Jose C. Orozco.⁷⁰ The article printed a translation of the manifesto, declaring the

⁶⁸ Gilbert, 17.

⁶⁹ The mural revival in Mexico began in 1921 at the Chapel of San Pedro y San Pablo, followed by the National Preparatory School in Mexico City in early 1922. The murals commissioned by Vasconelos (Minister of Public Education) in 1921 were the principal component of the unique progress of national cultural renewal that took place in Mexico in the early part of the twentieth century. See Laurance P. Hurlburt, *The Mexican Muralists in the United States* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), Desmond Rochfort, *The Murals of Diego Rivera* (London: Journeyman Press, Ltd., 1987), and Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* (New York: Universe Publishing, 1994). The *Liberator* article on Rivera was not the first one published on the Mexican muralists in the United States. Evidence indicates that *International Studio* published a January 1923 article, titled “Mexican Painting Today” that predates the *Liberator*.

⁷⁰ The organization, also known as the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, Sculptors was dedicated to putting their services at the disposal of organized labor. The pamphlet referred to in the article was most likely, “A Declaration of Social, Political and Aesthetic Principles,” written by Siqueiros in 1922 and signed by all the members, among whom were Rivera, Orozco, Jean Charlot, Ignacio Asunsolo, Xavier

responsibility of artists to “overthrow of the old social mechanism now in power.” The comprehensive essay included a biography emphasizing Rivera’s role as a revolutionary and artist. Rivera was described as a member of the central executive committee for the Communist Party of Mexico, and “his country’s most renowned living painter.” Included were reproductions from the National Preparatory School; the mural, “Exit from the Mine,” (1923) from the east wall of the Court of Labour; and a cartoon from the pamphlet for the *Grupo Solidario*.⁷¹ Although none of the leading Mexican artists executed major works in this country until 1930, the influence of the mural revival had already reached the United States. In 1928 Boardman Robinson was one of the first American artists to paint murals in the United States. Likewise, Gellert and Gropper were among the foremost muralists of the 1930s.

While not all graphic illustrators of the *Liberator* pursued painting, most continued to champion socialist causes throughout their careers, contributing to such leftist publications as the *New Masses*, the *Daily Worker* and *Art Front*. In the 1930s, several *Liberator* artists became involved with the American Artists’ Congress, the Artists’ Union, and the Works Progress Administration (WPA). More importantly, however, the political commitment of artists did not cease with the demise of the *Liberator* and they continued to propagate an art of social satire and political propaganda, which found expression in the activities of artists in the 1930s.

Guerrero, Fermin Revueltas, Roberto Montenegro and Carlos Merida. An English translation is published in *Art and Revolution* (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1975), 24-25, as indicated by Desmond, *Mexican Muralists*, 221.

⁷¹ Prior to Rivera’s appearance in New York on March 20, 1933 for the controversial RCA murals, his reputation as the leading exponent of Mexican mural painting was well established. In January 1928, Rivera’s work was exhibited at the Weyhe Gallery in New York under the direction of Zigrosser.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEFINING BOLSHEVISM IN AMERICA

*"I gave my heart to Lenin more completely than I have to any other leader, and fought for the Bolsheviks on the battlefield of American opinion with all the influence my voice and magazine possessed."*¹

*"Revolutions have their periods of poetry and their periods of prose. The Russian Revolution has entered now into its prose period. The time of revolutionary glory, tragic and beautiful, has passed; and the time of revolutionary work sober and stern has begun. The time of wonderful dreams is over, and the time of dull realities has come . . ."*²

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

In 1917 and 1918 Russia was in turmoil--Russian armies were fighting and losing a bloody and demoralizing war against Germany. In March 1917 Czar Nicholas abdicated his throne and a weak and divided provisional government was set up in Petrograd. The provisional government was awaiting the convocation of a constituent assembly, an elected body that would determine the future of the country between its two wings of Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. In July 1917 the provisional government crushed a Bolshevik uprising and Nikolai Lenin, leader of the Bolshevik forces fled Russia. On November 7, 1917 Lenin returned to Russia to direct a coup. Revolutionary workers, sailors and soldiers captured the Winter Palace, overthrew the provisional government and proclaimed a Marxist Republic in Russia. The following day, the Council of People's Commissars, consisting of Bolsheviks, was established with Lenin as chairman of the Council. The triumph of the Bolsheviks occurred in Moscow on November 15, 1917; a month later Russia opened peace talks with Germany and Austria. Even though Russia pulled out of the war with Germany, it was still in the midst of a bloody civil war between the Bolsheviks

¹ Eastman, *Reflections on the Failure of Socialism* (San Diego: Viewpoint Books, 1955), 11.

² Dell, "The Russian Idea," *Liberator* 5, no. 1 (January 1922): 26.

(renamed communists in March 1918) and the Mensheviks, Cossack legions and other counterrevolutionary forces that lasted from 1918 to 1921. It was during this tumultuous time that the Bolsheviks massacred the Czar and his family on July 16, 1918. After the victory of the Bolsheviks in the civil war, Russia was renamed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) or Soviet Union on December 30, 1922.³

The *Liberator* was one of the few non-daily periodicals in the United States with direct information from Russia during the November revolution. Eastman explained in his autobiography: "The IWW having been smashed by wholesale arrests, and the left socialist press put out of business, the *Liberator* was alone on the newsstands in reporting Russian developments with theoretic understanding. It was alone, almost, in the Western world." Eastman, Dell, and particularly Reed set about reporting and interpreting the Russian Revolution to American intellectuals. The reaction of the younger generation to the Revolution was conditioned, in part, by the work of the *Liberator* and its enthusiasm for the Bolsheviks. Freeman revealed in his autobiography that as a student, he and his colleagues were receiving most of their information from the *Liberator*, which was "giving us our first authentic picture of the Bolsheviks." The Bolshevik Revolution galvanized the radical community in the United States, fulfilling the dreams and the predictions of many prewar radicals with the *Liberator* playing a key role in shaping a generation of American radicals' attitude toward Bolshevism and Russia. The magazine printed Soviet documents, discussed new political and economic ideas and commented on cultural events. While reporting on news from Russia, the magazine continued to devote itself to culture, maintaining a balance between art and politics. Art, at times, complemented a political

³ In 1903 the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party split into the "Bolshevik" and "Menshevik" factions. Initially, both parties were Marxists and advocated workers' rights; however, by 1910-14 the two factions acquired distinct and separate identities. The Mensheviks were anti-Lenin, with closer ties to the bourgeoisie. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, were pro-Lenin, more militant, and had closer ties to the working class. By 1917, the term "proletarian" (Russian for working class) became a political designation, identified with the Bolsheviks. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution, 1917-1932* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 6, 24-25. For a complete history of the Russian Revolution, see E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1950).

report, on other occasions it directly accompanied an article; however, for the most part illustrations had nothing to do with political events and were featured as independent works. Even in the *Liberator's* final year when art was subordinate to politics, the illustrations were never solely journalistic.⁴

The focus of this chapter and the following, will be the illustrations that corresponded to specific political events, either as direct accompaniment to articles or in general sentiment. The Russian Revolution was the determining factor for the publication's inauguration. Events following the Revolution: the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, President Wilson's foreign policy, Allied intervention, the subsequent "red terror" and the Spartacist insurrection in Germany will be examined in order to understand how radicals and political artists in 1920s America viewed Bolshevism.

Following the revolution, news from Russia was so confusing that no one knew precisely what had taken place. When John Reed cabled the *New York Call* on November 22, 1917 with news of the Bolshevik revolt, events begin to unravel. Reed, together with his wife Louise Byrant, representing the *Masses*, the *New York Call* and *Seven Arts*, sailed to Petrograd to cover the story of the provisional government in August 1917. Reed knew no Russian when he arrived in Petrograd but was given access to closed meetings of the Bolsheviks. He interviewed Alexander Kerensky, Prime Minister of the provisional government, heard Lenin speak at the Smolny Institute, interviewed Trotsky, was present at the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, and witnessed the capture of the Winter Palace. Reed was the first American radical eyewitness to the Bolshevik revolution and his reports were the only ones coming through from Russia to the United States at the time. "No matter what one thinks of Bolshevism, it is undeniable that the Russian Revolution is one of the great events of human history, and the rise of the Bolsheviks a phenomenon of world-wide importance," wrote Reed in *Ten Days That Shook the World*,

⁴ See Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 138 and Freeman, *An American Testament*, 140.

published in March of 1919. The book, based on his notes taken in Russia and articles for the *Liberator*, proved to be the definitive eyewitness account of the Revolution by an American and was a powerful influence on the thinking of many radicals about the Soviet experiment.⁵

News from Russia dominated the magazine, especially in the first year when Reed was sending in his articles. The *Liberator* was in large part defined by the fact that it was the only magazine of national importance that had direct and constant access to Russian information.⁶ In every issue from March until August 1918 included Reed's eyewitness accounts, observations, and analyses. The magazine published his articles on Kerensky, the Russian army, the Department for Foreign affairs, foreign intervention, propaganda in the German army, and the structure and operation of the Soviet government. Reed declared in the first issue of the *Liberator*:

For the first time in history the working-class has seized the power of the state, for its own purposes—and means to keep it. Lenin and Trotsky sent the revolutionary proletariat of the world this message, 'Comrades! Greeting from the first proletarian republic of the world. We call you to arms for the international social revolution.'⁷

Reed's articles were reprinted in radical papers all over the United States and Canada. Eastman, like Reed transported the Bolshevik program to America, proclaiming in the first issue that the world was "entering upon the experiment of industrial and real democracy." The magazine editorials urged American socialists to work for a revolutionary transformation similar to the one

⁵ See Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World*, vol. 1 (New York: Modern Library, 1935), xii. When the book was published in Moscow at the end of 1923, Lenin's wife did the translation and Lenin himself wrote an introduction to the 1922 edition. For further information on the importance of Reed's book, see Klein, 60 and Granville Hicks, *John Reed: The Making of a Revolutionary* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), 321.

⁶ Klein, 60-61.

⁷ John Reed, "The Triumph of the Bolsheviks," *Liberator* 1, no. 1 (March 1918): 14-21. According to McKible, Reed's first accounts of Russia published in the *Liberator* are "primarily utopian and poetic." He also noted that the articles published in the *Liberator* had a greater urgency than Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*. For a complete analysis, see McKible, 41-49, 62. See also Eric Homberger and John Biggart, *John Reed and the Russian Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

experienced by Russia. Articles in the magazine advocated immediate assistance to Russia and urged the protection of the Russian Revolution from German militarism in the hope of hastening the upcoming worldwide socialist transformation.

Events in 1918 and 1919 moved at an accelerated pace and while the articles in the *Liberator* kept up with the momentum, there were surprisingly few political illustrations reflecting the magnitude of events in Russia. In 1918 the magazine continued to print anti-capitalist or anti-war illustrations in the tradition of the *Masses*; for example, accompanying Reed's first article was an illustration by Cornelia Barns of a soldier going to war. Images merely intimated revolution as in Gellert's March 1918 cover of the proletariat sowing seeds for the first issue (fig. 6), or Young's "The Triumph of Karl Marx," which contains a portrait bust of Marx surrounded by newspapers whose headlines read "socialism." Aside from Robinson's double-page spread, "An Interruption," there was no direct reference to the revolution. In fact, the cover of the second issue contained a "new modern woman" by the artist Frank Walts, continuing his tradition from the *Masses* of cover drawings of women (fig. 3).⁸ Similarly, the second issue of the *Liberator* featured an article on the aesthetic serenity of Chinese paintings. The absence of illustrations pertaining to events in Russia underscores the *Liberator's* commitment to the role of art. Illustrations were not adjuncts to articles, but given as much prominence as poetry, verse and reportage. More importantly, it reinforces the early *Liberator* circle's bohemian position. Most contributors were still engaged in a generalized socialist vernacular, not a revolutionary one. Artists were just beginning to assimilate events taking place in Russia and very few dealt with the topic of insurrection, revolution or Russia. Artists preferred to focus on the continuing depiction of the lives of the masses, on the disparity between capitalists and the masses.

⁸ Walts, who specialized in stylized portraits of film and theater actresses for the *Masses*, also executed theater posters and billboards. He drew more than half the covers of the *Masses* after 1915 and ten covers for the *Liberator*.

Minor gave greater specificity and emotional intensity to events in Europe with his politicized drawing “Cain,” in the second issue of April 1918 (fig. 35). A powerful, muscular male holds a large bat labeled “German Majority Socialist.” He has just struck a figure identified as “Russian Revolution,” who lies helpless at his feet. The Germans had forced the weak Bolshevik regime to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. The treaty deprived Russia of a large section of Eastern Europe and appeared to radicals as Germany’s victory over the workers’ revolution, which threatened the existence of Soviet Russia. Consequently, many anti-interventionists changed their position on the war, advocating an Allied victory in order to overturn the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and save the Bolshevik government. Another segment of the population, consisting of both radicals and liberals, perceived Russia’s signing of the Brest-Litovsk as a betrayal, since the defeat of Germany by Russia was a revolutionary duty. In October of 1918, the *Liberator* published Lenin’s “Brest-Litovsk—A Brigands’ Peace,” in which he defended the position of the Soviet republic. “It is not true that we have betrayed our ideals or our friends when we signed the ‘Tilsit’ peace,” explained Lenin, but were forced “to sign an incredibly oppressive and humiliating peace.”⁹

Reed fully supported Lenin’s decision to sign the harsh treaty, explained why it was necessary, and urged recognition of the Soviet government by the Allies as the best way to defeat Germany in his July 1918 article, “Recognize Russia.”¹⁰ Reed’s article was accompanied by Art Young’s double-page spread, “Boys, I Can’t Hardly Recognize You!” of Uncle Sam looking through huge binoculars at Lenin and Trotsky holding the flag of the Soviet Government but not recognizing them (fig. 36). Young echoes Reed’s message through the use of humor and irony. Young’s cartoons were usually direct, with humor as a guiding principle to their understanding. He aimed at exposing hypocrisy and revealing the truth behind the official image, the respectable

⁹ See Philip S. Foner, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 29-31, and Lenin, “Brest-Litovsk—A Brigands’ Peace,” *Liberator* 1, no. 8 (October 1918): 22-23.

¹⁰ Reed, “Recognize Russia,” *Liberator* 1, no. 5 (July 1918): 18-20.

symbol. Young was adept at journalistic illustration and worked with Reed on several articles for the *Liberator*, combining literary and graphic imagination. More than any other illustrator for the magazine, Young's drawings were often directly connected to specific articles or editorials and, unlike most artists; he was exclusively an illustrator, never delving into painting, lithography or graphics.

While Reed was suspicious of Wilson's tactics, Eastman was not and during the spring and summer of 1918, *Liberator* editorials endorsed Wilson's foreign policy. Eastman assumed that the President and the Bolshevik leaders would work together to create a new international order. Eastman overlooked the anti-Bolshevik orientation of American foreign policy and it soon became clear that the Wilson administration refused to recognize the legitimacy of the new government and was determined, like the other Allied powers to destroy the Soviet state. Years later, in 1922 when Eastman was criticized for his endorsement of Wilson's policy, he wrote: "I mistook Wilson for a strong and extraordinarily able politician of progressive capitalism...It was an error both in judgment of Wilson's ability, and in understanding the relation between the revolutionary movement and the movement for a capitalist international."¹¹ Eastman's attitude toward Wilson hardened primarily because of two developments--the exclusion of Russia from the newly formed League of Nations and the Allied intervention in Russia.

For Eastman, the League was "the imperialistic alliance of the Five Victorious Allies," and "a conspiracy against the liberties of mankind." Eastman's first condemnation of Wilson's policies was the December 1918 editorial where he categorically charged that the proposed league was a "capitalist International" which would become a "gigantic strikebreaking agency" against socialist revolutions. Robinson's drawing, "You Too" in which a laborer comes to the

¹¹ Eastman, "As to Discrimination," *Liberator* 5, no. 1 (January 1922): 5-6. For historical accounts of American foreign policy, see Josephus Daniels, *The Wilson Era: Years of War and After, 1917-1923* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1946) and Richard D. Challener, ed., *From Isolation to Containment, 1921-1952: Three Decades of American Foreign Policy from Harding to Truman* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970).

defense of a fallen man, representing Russia, followed his editorial. The laborer is ready to strike a man, labeled “capitalism,” who carries in his hand the League of Nations document. Robinson’s drawing conveys the *Liberator’s* new editorial position that aligns capitalism to the League of Nations. The caption suggests betrayal, not only directed at the Soviet government but also to those who had prior faith in Wilson’s policies. Crystal Eastman once again expressed the group’s outrage generated by the Allies’ mistreatment of Russia in her editorial, “A League of Which Nation?” in the February 1919 issue. “The Soviet Republic has demanded admission to the armistice, has applied for representation at the peace conference, has appointed its delegate,” she wrote, “and the reply has been silence, or criminal slander and renewed invasion of Russian territory.” Crystal concluded that without recognition of the Soviets, “the League will be a compact of tyranny.” In the same issue of February 1919, Young’s cartoon of an over-scaled hand rolling up a document reading “Wilson’s Words” again refers to the betrayal experienced by leftist intellectuals (fig. 37). In it, tiny figures, consisting of American and European radicals attempt to hold on to the document, but ultimately tumble to the ground. Wilson became the main target for the *Liberator* group as Eastman accused him of being incapable of “scientific” reasoning and of understanding human nature; concluding that the League of Nations was a total failure.¹²

The withdrawal of Russia from the war had permitted Germany to focus her attention on the Western Front. To Allied strategists, the only logical solution seemed to be armed intervention in Russia. Such action stemmed from the belief that the Lenin government was held together by German influence and could not possibly endure because the Russian people did not support it. The Allied intervention policy in Russia was designed to neutralize German influence by reactivating the Eastern Front, which, it was hoped, would automatically result in the downfall of Bolshevism. On August 3, 1918 the President announced that the administration would

¹² See Max Eastman, “Wilson’s Failure,” *Liberator* 2, no. 5 (May 1919): 5-6, and Crystal Eastman, “A League of Which Nation?” *Liberator* 1, no. 12 (February 1919): 7-8.

contribute American troops to the Allied invasion of Siberia. By late 1918, the United States had approximately 7,000 soldiers on duty in Russia, alongside some 25,000 Allied troops. Eastman perceived American intervention as yet another incomprehensible betrayal and anti-Bolshevik strategy. Consequently, the editor turned against Wilson with a vengeance. In the March 1919 issue, Kenneth Chamberlain's drawing captioned "Why?" portrays a solitary American soldier standing in a barren, snow filled landscape, labeled "Siberia" (fig. 38). Chamberlain, who would later sign his work "Russell" because of fear of reprisal, asked the question on the minds of many radicals and Russian sympathizers. While several reasons were given for intervention, Philip Foner believed that the purpose was to destroy Bolshevik power. The Bolsheviks were viewed as dangerous social revolutionaries who threatened American interests and the existing social order throughout the world. Eastman declared that it was unlawful for Wilson to invade Russia and despite continuous government harassment and censorship, he stated: "President Wilson is waging his own private and personal war on the Government of Russia, in direct violation of the spirit, and even of the letter, of the United States Constitution." In addition, he demanded immediate withdrawal of American troops from Russia.¹³

Beginning in late 1918, the *Liberator* with the full weight of its influence, undertook an aggressive stand against the American government with the "Hands off Russia" campaign. The campaign became a unifying force in the American radical movement and encompassed all its various factions, even with the split in the Socialist Party in 1919. The intensity of the *Liberator's* commitment to Bolshevism was measured by Crystal and Max Eastman's national tour in 1918 and 1919 to plead for an Allied withdrawal from Russia. "They are hostile to the spirit of democracy that is the foundation of our government," wrote a local Buffalo newspaper reporting on the Eastmans' lecture circuit. The article concluded that, "if they had their way the United

¹³ See Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare, A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 14; Foner, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 32-33; and Eastman, "November Seventh, 1918," *Liberator* 1, no. 10 (December 1918): 5.

States would be another Bolshevik Russia.” Despite hostilities from the mainstream press and the growing concern from the “red scare” of 1919, the *Liberator* continued its defense of Soviet Russia and condemnation of Wilson’s foreign policies. Artists, too, rallied to support Russia and expose the devastation wrought by the interventionist policy. The August 1919 issue included a drawing by Young, “Wilson’s Foreign Policy,” of a Russian worker holding a page that reads, “Soviet socialization of land and industry,” while a large oversized hand, titled “United States” attempts to stab the Russian worker. Written below the drawing is the following: “Assault and attempt to kill the government of Russia, representing nine-tenths of the Russian people and the highest ideals of applied democracy.” Young’s drawings were often complicated in detail and text, yet unified in effect and caption. While the artist’s work conveyed support of the Soviet Union and he was active in politics, having run for the State Assembly in 1913 and State Senate in 1918 in New York on the Socialist ticket, Young never embraced Communism. The concept of restricting human liberty was Young’s guiding principle, as he wrote: “It seems that the lesson of the Russian Revolution is that you can’t kill an idea by either prosecution or persecution. The Tsar thought by banishing scholars and thinkers and censoring the press that he could put an end to the spirit of liberty.” Like his colleague, Robinson, who frequently addressed the intervention issue, both artists shared a similar political orientation. Both sought to expose the hypocrisy and irrationality of American society; however, while defending Russia, neither artist was active in his commitment to Bolshevism. In turn, both artists embodied the early theoretical bohemian position of the *Liberator*.¹⁴

Among the first American organizations to support the Bolshevik Revolution was the “Friends of the Russian Revolution,” organized less than a month after the revolt, primarily to support the Soviet demand for an immediate peace without annexations or indemnities. The organization provided positive information about the Revolution to the American public and was

¹⁴ See *Buffalo Commercial*, 9 December 1918, press clipping, Max Eastman Papers, and Young, *New York Call*, 5 December 1917.

independent of party control.¹⁵ Among its members from the *Liberator* circle were Crystal Eastman, Vida Milholland, and Alexander Trachtenberg. By 1921 The Friends of Soviet Russia, along with the American Committee for Relief of Children in Soviet Russia, whose solicitations often appeared in the magazine, raised money for Russian famine relief. Partly as a result of Allied intervention and civil war, the Soviet state was an economic wreck with serious food shortages affecting large areas of the nation. In the early 1920s between two to three million people died of starvation in Russian territory. Gropper's April 1922 illustration, "The Fruits of Wilson's Russian Policy," of a wagon full of decaying bodies, forcefully communicates the tragic situation (fig. 28).

Reliable information about conditions in Russia was unavailable to foreign governments, the press, and the general public in the aftermath of the revolution. After the decree of November 9, 1917, the Bolsheviks banned what they called the "counter-revolutionary press" and "bourgeois" journalists from their soil and until 1921. The only exceptions were political publications that recognized the Soviet government. American editors were forced to rely almost entirely on rumors, gossip, and third-hand reports emanating from foreign capitals. Throughout 1918, the Allied blockage of Soviet-controlled territory severed most of the means of communication, including the telegraph, telephone and mail. The reporting was so confused, inaccurate, and hostile to the Bolsheviks that no one really understood what was happening inside Russia, let alone why. This provided an opportunity for the invention of all sorts of horror stories.¹⁶ Reporters covered the Soviet regime from Riga, the Latvian capital located hundreds of

¹⁵ The purpose of the organization was to urge Congress "that friendly relations between America and the Russian democracy be continuously maintained, and that food supplies, money, and such assistance as can be given by America to the builders of the New Russia be offered without reserve." See Foner, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 56.

¹⁶ One of the most celebrated examples of deliberate fraudulent attack on the Soviet Union was the Sisson documents. Edgar Sisson, a former editor of Hearst's *Cosmopolitan* went to Russia in 1918 as a representative for George Creel's Committee of Public Information. While ostensibly devoting himself to distributing Wilson's speeches, Sisson had actually spent his time spying on the Bolsheviks, with the aid of both the American and British intelligence services and the numerous groups of counter-revolutionaries.

miles from St. Petersburg. The press published what few pieces of information it could find—third-hand accounts, rumors, and the highly opinionated pieces written by refugees, who found their way to foreign bureaus. The mainstream press published stories emerging from unreliable sources and the vast majority of the coverage was explicitly condemnatory. Negative coverage of the situation in Russia was evident in most of the mainstream press including, the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *New York Sun* and *Los Angeles Times*, as well as journals such as the *Literary Digest*.¹⁷ In the fall of 1918, the mainstream press reported on the “red terror” conducted in Russia after Socialist revolutionary forces attempted to assassinate Lenin on August 30, 1918 and thousands of opponents of Bolshevism were randomly killed.

Contributors to the *Liberator* sought to neutralize the news of “red terror.” Reed asked the question: “With such rumors prevalent in Russia itself, how was America to know what was false and what true?” Eastman was unqualified in his defense of the Soviet Union, including denial of any acts of terror attributed to the Bolsheviks, regardless of their validity. He accused the American government of discrediting Russia by devising “a bloody and indiscriminate Reign of Terror.” The editor further stated, “whatever reign of terror exists in Russia today, and whatever extreme measures may have been taken by the Russian Government to protect itself against conspiracies, are the direct inevitable result of the invasion of Russia by foreign armies.” Reed wrote a scathing review of John Spargo’s newly released book which depicted Bolshevism

With the approval of President Wilson and George Creel, Sisson issued his famous documents, purporting to prove that Lenin and other Soviet leaders were in the pay of the German high command and that the Bolsheviks were really German agents. Shortly after their release, the liberal press denounced the documents as fraudulent. See “Russia in America,” *Liberator* 1, no. 10 (December 1918): 16 and George Kennan, “The Sisson Documents,” *The Journal of Modern History* 28, no.2 (June 1956): 130-154.

¹⁷ See Nickle, 108. The reports from Walter Duranty, Paris correspondent of the *New York Times*, were largely portrayals of Russians as international bomb-throwers. See Whitman Bassow, *The Moscow Correspondents* (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1988), 30-35, and Walter Duranty, *I Write as I Please* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1935). The *New Republic* noted that the *New York Times* from 1917-1919 reported that the Bolshevik regime had or was about to fall ninety-one times, that Lenin and Trotsky were about to flee Russia four times, and that they had fled three times. See Klehr and Haynes, *The American Communist Movement*, 52-53. See also John Hohenberg, *Foreign Correspondence: The Great Reporters and Their Times* (New York and London: Columbia University

as “an inverted form of Tsarism.” Robinson sought to dispel myths of “red terror” and reported on the conditions of Russian prisons. In his drawing, “A Typical Bolshevik Atrocity,” three soldiers engage in what is described below the caption: “Five minutes after prisoners of war are brought into a Bolshevik camp they are served with bread and tea, and five minutes later they are given propaganda literature in their own language.”¹⁸

Bolshevik propaganda to the United States was not organized until the establishment of the Third International in March 1919. Lenin invited revolutionaries all over the world to join Russian Bolsheviks in forming the Communist International, also known as the Comintern, to replace the pre-war Socialist International. The Communist International, which met at Moscow on March 2, 1919, was comprised of thirty-two delegates with full power to act. One of the main objectives of the Comintern was propaganda, as it sought to enlist the aid of radicals throughout the world in its crusade for universal revolution. Comintern propaganda urged the creation of workers organizations and the destruction of public support for the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and the elimination of intervention through strikes and sabotage. Reed worked for the Bureau of International propaganda that was attached to the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs in Russia. His job was to prepare all the decrees and decisions of the various Soviets for distribution in the United States. The Third International with its radical manifesto served as a stimulus to the left wing socialist movement in the United States. The formation of the Third International served to exasperate the mounting concern of the “red terror” in the United States. Eastman viewed the

Press, 1964), and George Seldes, *You Can't Print That: The Truth Behind the News, 1918-1928* (New York: Payson and Clark, 1929).

¹⁸ See Reed, “A Message to Our Readers,” *Liberator* 1, no. 4 (June 1918): 25-26; Eastman, “The League of Nations,” *Liberator* 1, no. 10 (December 1918): 5-7; Reed, “Bolshevism: What It Is Not,” *Liberator* 2, no. 5 (May 1919): 39-41; and Robinson, “A Typical Bolshevik Atrocity,” *Liberator* 3, no. 1 (January 1920): 4. In 1918 and 1919 John Spargo wrote several books on Bolshevism. The book reviewed by Reed was most likely *Bolshevism, The Enemy of Political and Industrial Democracy* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, c. 1919).

Communist International as the legitimate League of Nations, whose manifesto corresponded to that of Marx and urged American socialists to endorse the Comintern.¹⁹

Not all contributors regarded the Bolshevik ascension with the same enthusiasm as Eastman and Reed. The question of applying the lessons of the Revolution to the United States created dissension among some staff and contributors to the magazine. Even though Minor would later become a Communist party leader, initially he had major reservations about the new Soviet government. In 1919 Minor traveled to Russia as a newspaper correspondent, witnessed the Civil War and met Lenin. Lenin admired Minor's work on behalf of Tom Mooney and granted Minor the first interview since he had assumed leadership in Russia. At the time, Minor was still an anarcho-syndicalist and was unreceptive to Bolshevism. He subsequently repudiated Lenin and denounced the Soviet Government in two articles published in the February issues of the *New York World*. Minor explained that "the Soviets which were once the spontaneous expression of rebellion against the old order, representing the will of one class to rule, have been whipped by Lenine [Lenin] into a shape bearing considerable resemblance to an ordinary congress." As an anarchist, Minor believed that all states were tyrannical. For him, the new Soviet government had "fallen under the dread tyranny of the Commissaries," and suffered from "a painfully acute case of Government ownership." Minor was regarded as one of America's leading radicals and became internationally renowned for his interview with Lenin and subsequent arrest in Paris that same year. His dispatches, thus, had great impact on the American liberal press's reaction to the new Soviet regime and the question of American intervention.²⁰

Eastman regarded the astonishing news of Minor's criticism of the Soviet government in the *New York World* with suspicion and urged the readers of the *Liberator* to reserve judgment,

¹⁹ See Murray, 42-43 and Eastman, "The New International," *Liberator* 2, no. 7 (July 1919): 28-35.

²⁰ See Garrison, *Mary Heaton Vorse*, 349, Minor, "Lenine [Lenin] Overthrew Soviets By a Masked Dictatorship; Bourgeoisie Gain Power," *New York World*, 6 February 1919, Fitzgerald, 102 and Benjamin Gitlow, *The Whole of Their Lives* (Belmont, MA: Western Islands Book, 1948), 71-77.

since Minor's "personal integrity is above question." Minor wrote to Eastman while in Paris and claimed that the *New York World* changed his words, included misprints and misquotations, which distorted the meaning of his text. Nevertheless, Minor wrote at the end of the letter; "You must pardon me for not being a Bolshevik. As I glory in the Reformation but cannot join Martin Luther's church, so I glory in the October Revolution but cannot join the Bolshevik party." A year later in "I Change My Mind a Little" published in the October 1920 issue, Minor denounced anarchism and withdrew "every reservation that I made in my praise of the Russian Soviet Republic." Minor began to study the Russian Revolution, reading Lenin's *The State and Revolution* and Karl Marx's *Capital* to find that Marx's manifesto provided "a general outline in complete harmony with the tactics which were actually employed by the Bolsheviks in 1917." Minor came to regard the Soviet state and Lenin as the logical result of Marxist theory and Lenin as "a scientist in an unscientific world." According to Benjamin Gitlow, a founding member of the American Communist Labor Party, Minor was the most important figure in American communism, explaining that he had "done more than any other American communist, living or dead to transform the American communist movement into a real Bolshevik movement."²¹

²¹ See Eastman, "Bob Minor and the Bolsheviks," *Liberator* 1, no. 13 (March 1919): 5-6, Minor to Eastman, ALS, 20 April 1919, and Minor to Eastman, ALS, 20 April 1919, Max Eastman Papers. Unable to comprehend Minor's original attack against the Soviets and later his complete endorsement, Minor's critics accused him of being an "intellectual acrobat." After being expelled from the Communist Party, Benjamin Gitlow accused Minor of being an agent of the Bolsheviks. Gitlow wrote: "He [Lenin] was alert to the fact that the people of the United States would be duly impressed in Minor, in reporting the interview, adopted an anti-Bolshevik line which would create a favorable impression of the Bolsheviks in American government and business circles." See Gitlow, 81. Albert Weisbord, expelled from the party in 1930, decided that Lenin and Minor conspired on *The World* articles to mislead the American bourgeoisie and thus hasten withdrawal of American troops. See Garrison, 349, Minor, "I Change My Mind a Little," *Liberator* 3, no. 10 (October 1920): 5-11, and Gitlow, 69.

THE SPARTACIST REVOLT

The *Liberator* did not view the Russian Revolution as an isolated event and also reported on international revolutionary uprisings in Hungary, France, Austria, and Germany. In January 1918 the pro-Bolshevik wing of the Finnish social Democratic party seized the government and proclaimed a Finnish Red republic. In Latvia, the Ukraine, and Georgia, former nations of the Czarist Empire, revolutionaries established workers' republics. In November 1918 soldiers and sailors mutinied and joined workers in forming revolutionary councils in the German port of Kiel. Kaiser Wilhelm abdicated and later in November a provisional government was formed. In November 1919 Spartacists seized portions of Berlin and proclaimed a workers republic. In March 1919 revolutionaries took control of the southern German state of Bavaria and proclaimed a Communist republic, and in Hungary, Communists established yet another Red republic. The magazine enthusiastically greeted the changes as proof of an international class struggle and the dawn of great new age. Crystal Eastman was the first American correspondent in Hungary after Bela Kuhn's uprising and sent back reports to the *Liberator*. Crystal was a loyal Bolshevik supporter and was convinced that the only way to restore liberty was to destroy the capitalist system. Beginning in May of 1919, the *Liberator* ran a monthly feature called, "International Labor and Socialist Notes" by Alexander Trachtenberg. The column reported news of strikes and socialist electoral victories throughout the world.²²

The November 1918 Spartacist revolt in Germany caused the greatest fervor among the *Liberator* circle. After the failure of its 1918 offensive in the West, an exhausted Germany faced external military and internal social collapse. The Kaiser fled Berlin, and a period of disorder

²² See Crystal Eastman, "In Communist Hungary," *Liberator* 2, no. 8 (August 1919): 5-10. See also Cook, *Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution*, 28 and Klehr, *Storming Heaven Itself*, 17. Trachtenberg (1884-1966) was born in Odessa and participated in the Russian Revolution of 1915. Around 1906-7 he immigrated to the United States and played a key role in the dissemination and

followed that many felt would end with the creation of a Red Germany. To coalesce forces and shape a revolutionary political party, a congress of the Spartacists, members of the Independent Socialist Party who sought to overthrow capitalism and install a communist government based on the Soviet model, and other German leftist organizations met on December 30th in Berlin and founded the German Communist Party (KPD). The provisional government was made up primarily of the SPD (Social Democratic Party) and the USPD (Independent Social Democratic Party). The provisional government's Minister of Defense Gustav Noske, under the direction of the SPD, recruited the services of the Freikorps (free corps). The Freikorps were volunteer groups organized to protect the revolution against leftist insurrection.²³ On January 4, 1919, the provisional German government removed the USPD (Independent Social Democratic Party) police president of Berlin, Emil Eichhorn, from his post. Subsequently, the provisional government with the aid of the Freikorps began to demobilize revolutionary movements before they could become Bolshevik. The KPD's disruptive activities and open ties to Soviet Russia made it the prime target of SPD efforts to quell civilian unrest and impose order. In a spontaneous uprising prompted by Eichhorn's dismissal, demonstrators occupied press offices while Eichhorn went into hiding during the bloody government suppression that followed. Spartacist leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg sponsored a series of strikes and demonstrations throughout November and December 1918 in a desperate attempt to keep the task of unfinished revolution before the public eye. On January 15, 1919, the Freikorps allegedly murdered Luxemburg and Liebknecht. With the arrests of other KPD leaders, the majority socialist government effectively thwarted the German Communist Party's leadership within the first few days of its existence. On February 6, 1919 the Constituent Assembly met at Weimar where it elected Friedrich Ebert as

popularization of Marxist-Leninist ideas. See Bernard Johnpoll and Harvey Klehr, *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 387.

²³ The Freikorps became the center for reactionary counterrevolutionaries. See Long, 238.

President of the Weimar Republic, consisting of a coalition of the SPD, Democratic Party, Centrists, and USPD.²⁴

Through the *Liberator*, American radicals became acquainted with the leaders of the German socialist revolution—the lawyer Karl Liebknecht; the literary critic and philosopher, Franz Mehring; the organizer and editor, Clara Zetkin; and the theoretician, Rosa Luxemburg.²⁵ Eastman enthusiastically endorsed the KPD and the Spartacists (also known to *Liberator* readers as Spartakusbund, Spartacans and Sparticide) and wrote in the January 1919 editorial, “we see the prophecies of Karl Marx fulfilling themselves in Germany as they did in Russia.” No sooner had American radicals learned of the possibility of another proletarian government in Germany than they were informed of the murder of Liebknecht and Luxemburg. The March 1919 issue was devoted to the fallen leaders and included a cover portrait of Liebknecht by Clive Weed. Inside the issue was a reprint of the Manifesto issued by the Spartakusbund a few weeks before the two leaders were killed. The manifesto, addressed to the workers of all countries, announced the new party and the arrival of revolution in Germany. The March 1919 tribute issue included a drawing by Chamberlain captioned, “Taking the Last Trench,” which portrayed the demonstrators taking over the press offices after Eichorn’s dismissal, and Reed’s tribute article, “Liebknecht Dead.”

Minor was in Berlin during the Spartacist revolt and witnessed the barricades and fighting in the streets. He sent his eyewitness report, “The Sparticide Insurrection,” along with portrait sketches of Liebknecht, and Noske to the *Liberator*; they were published in the August

²⁴ For discussions of this period, see McCloskey, William A. Pelz, *The Spartakusbund and the German Working Class Movement, 1914-1919* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellon Press, 1988), Ida Katherine Rigby, *An alle Künstler! War-Revolution-Weimar: German Expressionist Prints, Drawings, Posters and Periodicals from the Robert Gore Rifkind Foundation* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1983), A.J. Ryder, *The German Revolution, 1918-1919* (London: Published for the Historical Association by Routledge and Paul, 1959), and Joan Weinstein, *The End of Expressionism: Art and the November Revolution in Germany, 1918-19* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). For a more recent political discussion, see David E. Barclay and Eric D. Waltz, ed., *Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism From 1840 to 1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998).

²⁵ Anon., “Who’s Who in the German Revolution,” *Liberator* 1, no. 12 (February 1919): 18-21. See also Freeman, *An American Testament*, 145.

and September 1919 issues. Minor expressed his outrage at the betrayal of these socialist leaders and the controversial death of Luxemburg:

The mob—just a crowd of average Germans found by chance on the street—had dragged a sick old woman out of a cab, torn her body to pieces with their hands and thrown her flesh into a canal . . . it was a deliberate murder by a government machine.²⁶

American radicals experienced a setback after learning of the unsuccessful uprising and brutal murders of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. The episode was a poignant reminder that defeat of the revolutionary movement was possible. The threat of right wing socialists, whom Lenin warned were the main enemy of the revolution, was at that moment threatening leftists' goals for revolutionary change in America.

By 1920 the *Liberator* contributors set about analyzing the effect of the First World War and events that caused the defeat of the Spartacists on a nation struggling in the face of economic and moral defeat. The magazine had two foreign correspondents in Germany, Bill Schack a childhood friend of Freeman and Hiram K. Moderwell, an historian. Moderwell's article, "Caesar and Spartacus" appeared in the July 1920 issue. His analysis centered on the harsh entente of the Versailles Treaty which left Germany "with twenty millions of starving and revolting inhabitants." "Thus it came about," wrote Moderwell, "quite simply and inevitably, that the class which made the war and which the Allies fought to disarm, got the arms back in their hands."²⁷ Moderwell's, "Counter Revolution in Advance: A Summary of Recent German History" in the February 1920 issue provided an account of the events of the uprising and included a photograph of Rosa Luxemburg, and the now well-known portrait of the dead Liebknecht by Käthe Kollwitz. Before the funeral, several artists including Kollwitz were invited by the Liebknecht family to

²⁶ Minor, "The Sparticide Insurrection," *Liberator* 2, no. 8 (August 1919): 22-25 and *Liberator* 2, no. 9 (September 1919): 31-39. The magazine continued to remind readers of the fallen leaders well after 1919 and published a letter written by Rosa Luxemburg while imprisoned in 1917 to the wife of Karl Liebknecht. See *Liberator* 3, no. 10 (October 1920):12-13. In the March 1921 issue, the editors published two letters from Karl Liebknecht to his son. See *Liberator* 4, no. 3 (March 1921): 8.

²⁷ Moderwell, "Caesar and Spartacus," *Liberator* 3, no. 7 (July 1920): 14-21.

portray the murdered leader at the morgue, where his body lay. Kollwitz did several drawings, which she worked out in charcoal sketches in 1919 as the basis for a composition depicting workers viewing their fallen leader. These sketches would eventually lead to the woodcut, *Memorial for Karl Liebknecht* of 1919-1920. Liebknecht had been a friend of the Kollwitz family, and although Kollwitz never became a member of the KPD, the war had a profound impact on the artist and resulted in the death of her younger son, Peter who was killed in October 1914. Along with many German artists disillusioned by the war and its immediate aftermath, she sympathized with the plight of the Spartacist leaders. Even though Kollwitz was venerated as the "People's Artist," she was never a revolutionary, nor a member of the KPD, but instead a moderate socialist.²⁸

The starkly realistic image of Liebknecht marked the first of three appearances of Kollwitz in the magazine. The German artist would again appear in the January 1924 issue in a full-page advertisement sponsored by The Friends of Soviet Russia announcing "Germany's Children are Starving." The solicitation includes Kollwitz's print of children with raised bowls begging for food. The print, "Germany's Children are Starving," of 1924 (fig. 39) was used as a poster for International Workers Aid (IAH). In addition, Kollwitz's print, "Bread" of two small children tugging at their mother for food, published in the August 1924 issue, was also used as a poster design. "Bread" was part of a series of post-war scenes depicting themes of hunger, indigence and suffering, which Kollwitz executed after 1919 in response to conditions in postwar Germany. Kollwitz was among the earliest artists enlisted by Willi Munzenberg, the Comintern's Western Bureau Propaganda Minister, as part of IAH to draw attention to the plight of the drought and famine-stricken in the Volga farming region of Russia. The Comintern considered the primary purpose of the IAH to be propagandistic in order to prepare for the German and

²⁸ Kollwitz voted "majority socialist" in the January 19, 1919 election. She wrote in her diary entry dated October 1920, "I really am by no means revolutionary, but evolutionary." In her subsequent entries of 1919-1920, she also described her conflicting role as a "proletarian artist." See Long, 186-188.

Central European revolution. Kollwitz, George Grosz and other artists produced posters and staged exhibitions whose proceeds were sent to Russia for famine relief. The *Liberator* circle would have been familiar with Kollwitz's work, not only through the IAH, but also through her published work in *Simplicissimus* and through Carl Zigrosser, the director of the Weyhe Gallery, who promoted her prints in the United States. Lydia Gibson's print of a kneeling and desperate mother clinging to her infant and young boy drawn for the Committee for International Workers' Aid, may have been inspired by Kollwitz's example (fig. 40). While Gibson's drawing is effective at conveying need, she lacks the emotional impact of a Kollwitz. Nonetheless, both artists emphasized the alternative side of revolution and war through familial subjects.²⁹

In October of 1923, the Communist Party of Germany once again attempted to defeat the Social Democrats, then in power, but was forced to retreat. In March 1924 the *Liberator* published a lengthy treatise on the October defeat, "The Present Situation in the Communist Party of Germany" by A. Thalheimer, outlining the political parties in Germany. This long, somber "treatise" published in full in the magazine is an example of the shift in the editorial direction after the *Liberator* was turned over the Workers' Party. However verbose the political reportage, the magazine continued to provide commendable art and included three of Grosz's illustrations, "Profiteers," "Café of the Schiebers," and "The Republic" to Thalheimer's article.³⁰ While not

²⁹ See McCloskey, 105-106 and Gibson, *Liberator* 7, no. 3 (March 1924): back cover. In its report of the postwar German crisis, the *Liberator* did not neglect German culture. William Schack wrote, "Art in Starving Germany," *Liberator* 5, no. 10 (October 1922): 20-21, which discussed the construction of the new Kunst Palace museum, the production of Ernst Toller's *Die Maschinenstürmer*, and briefly mentioned the November Gruppe.

³⁰ In some cases, the magazine editors added their own titles to Grosz's illustrations. "Profiteers" was originally titled "Haifische" (Sharks) of 1921 and later published in Grosz's *Die Gezeichneten* (The Marked Men, Berlin: Malik Verlag: 1930). "Café of the Schiebers" was originally titled, "Schonheitsabend in der Motzstrasse" (1918) and was published as plate no. 7 in Grosz, *Ecce Homo* (Berlin: Malik Verlag, 1922). "The Republic," an ink drawing of 1922 was originally titled "Hinrichtung" (Execution) and was a variation of plate no. 84 in *Ecce Homo*. See also Grosz, *Love Above All and Other Drawings: 121 Works by George Grosz* (New York: Dover, 1971), 104 and Serge Sabarsky, *George Grosz: The Berlin Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 244.

pertaining directly to the article, the illustrations reveal the condition of postwar Germany from a proletarian perspective.

After the collapse of the German monarchy in 1918, Grosz became a member of the KPD, while pursuing a definition of a proletarian culture in Germany and continuing his assault upon the bourgeoisie. In December 1918 he became a founding member of the November Gruppe, an organization of Berlin artists founded in the autumn of 1918 and named for the month of the uprising, which espoused vaguely revolutionary aims with the desire to reform the arts. Through the effort of Wieland Herzfelde, founder of Malik Verlag publishers, Grosz began to be recognized as the party's foremost revolutionary artist. After the Executive Committee of the Comintern issued its circular in October 1921 endorsing the use of drawing and caricature as a means of understanding the proletarian revolution, Grosz's satiric illustrations became more widely distributed and began to appear regularly in the pages of the party press. From 1921 on, Grosz's drawings began to be recognized on a wider scale and by 1923 he was unquestionably the KPD's most prominent artist. Consequently, Grosz's drawings, lithographs and watercolors began to be reproduced by various national and international radical and artistic periodicals. Most of the artist's illustrations used in the *Liberator* were from the book, *Das Gesicht Der Herrschenden Klasse* (1921). Grosz's illustrations were prominently featured in the *Liberator* and used exclusively for German events pertaining to either politics or literature.³¹

Grosz's first appearance in the *Liberator* was the March 1922 issue, accompanying the article by George Granich "One Day's Work."³² The fictional tale relates the story of a hobo turned miner who decides he does not want to risk his life for the profits of the rich, quits his job, and returns to his life as a hobo. While Grosz's two illustrations were not intended for the short

³¹ See McCloskey, 90-91 and 105-106. After 1924, Grosz found himself at odds with the KPD's cultural policy. See also, Hi Simons, "George Grosz, Artist Communist," *Liberator* 5, no. 7 (July 1922): 28-29.

³² Granich, "One Day's Work," *Liberator* 5, no. 3 (March 1922): 12-13. The two illustrations captioned with the correct English translation of the German titles were from *Das Gesicht der herrschenden Klasse* (The face of the ruling class) of 1921.

story, they nonetheless complement it. One drawing captioned, "Where the Dividends Come From," includes an upper section of miners at work and a lower section of a woman weeping over a shrouded dead body (fig. 41). In the second drawing, titled "-----and Where They Go to," a bloated bourgeoisie and military figure enjoy the good life of food and drink in a café setting (fig. 42). Grosz's caricatures were used frequently in 1924 (May, August and September) and his images of the miner would characterize the new artistic editorial direction with its proliferation of labor themes that the magazine undertook at this time. His expressive, yet representational style, coupled with a penetrating understanding of proletarian subjects became the ideal model for political illustrators on the magazine. His work embodied both the political and artistic direction of the *Liberator*, particularly after 1922 when the magazine became involved with the Workers' Party.

Grosz was distinguished in the magazine by becoming the first international artist featured in an article by Hi Simons, "George Grosz, Artist-Communist" in the July 1922 issue. The article, one of the earliest introductions of the German artist to an American audience, emphasized Grosz's role as a communist artist. While taking exception to *Liberator* illustrators, Simons criticized the lack of revolutionary spirit in American art and argued that Grosz was the best example of revolutionary art: "His attitude and his work are a challenge to bourgeois artists everywhere who, with the obsequious genuflection's of the sycophant, seek the patronage of the middle class."³³ Simons described Grosz's career and discussed Wieland Herzfeld's theory of "Tendenzkunst," which called upon artists to enter the field of propaganda in the revolutionary struggle. Tendenzkunst, or tendentious art was practiced during the early 1920s in Germany and was an art that sought to intervene in immediate political issues. The article was crucial in introducing Grosz as a prominent communist artist to the American public. In fact, the *Liberator*

³³ Simons, "George Grosz, Artist Communist," 28-29. Simons had written the introduction to *Georg[e] Grosz: Twelve reproductions from his original lithographs* (Chicago: Musterbookhouse, 1921). Simons claimed that his book on the artist was "the first publication in America of Grosz's work."

may well have been the first American magazine to publish the drawings of George Grosz. *Broom* (1921-1924), subtitled "An International Magazine of the Arts and published by Americans in Italy," carried three full-page reproductions of Grosz drawings and an English translation on the artist by the German art critic, Paul Westheim in the February 1923 issue. Grosz's first appearance in the *Liberator* was March 1922 and the article by Simons published in July 1922, both predating the *Broom* article.³⁴

Surprisingly, Simon's article did not include any of Grosz's illustrations, but instead a satirical cartoon of a congressman by Gropper, reminiscent of Grosz's knife-board style of 1915-1916. The juxtaposition by the editors suggests their recognition of Grosz's impact on *Liberator* artists and his potential as a model for proletarian artists. After 1922 several *Liberator* artists among them John Barber, Cornelia Barns, Maurice Becker, Adolf Dehn and William Gropper experimented with Grosz's expressive linear style. Dehn met and befriended Grosz while in Berlin sometime in late 1921 or early 1922. Grosz took a special interest in Dehn and had aspirations for Dehn's role in American art. "You will do things in America which haven't been done, which need to be done, which only you can do—as far at least as I know of America," Grosz reportedly said to Dehn.³⁵ Dehn sent the *Liberator* several illustrations of scenes from Vienna that were published from 1922 to 1924 (fig. 43). The illustrations were not politically topical, but instead portrayed the life of the masses, with special emphasis on character types.

³⁴ For information on Grosz's published work in *Broom*, see Kay Flavell, *George Grosz: A Biography* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 78-80. The only other cultural American magazine that would have reproduced Grosz's drawings during the early 1920s would have been *Dial*, edited by Scofield Thayer. Even though Thayer was enthusiastic over the Expressionists and reproduced the work of Oscar Kokoschka, Lovis Corinth, Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Franz Marc and Edvard Munch, Grosz never appeared in the magazine. See Rich, "Dail M For Modern," 8-24. Other American radical and communist publications, as discussed in chapter one, were limited in artistic illustrations.

³⁵ For a discussion of Dehn's association with Grosz in Berlin, see Jocelyn Lumsdaine and Thomas O'Sullivan, *The Prints of Adolf Dehn: A Catalogue Raisonné* (St Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society, 1987), 7, Guy Pene du Bois, "Adolf Dehn," *Creative Art* 9 (July 1931): 34-35 and Rich, "The Dial and the Dial Collection." Dehn's quote is cited in Zigrosser, *The Artist in America*, 19.

caricature and linear variation in the tradition of Grosz. By 1922 Grosz's influence is evident in Dehn's work in the harshness of line and exaggeration of character types. Dehn's satires were tame in comparison to the overtly political and expressive quality of a Grosz. While Dehn was sympathetic to left wing causes, he never joined the Communist Party, nor was he engaged in an active political life. While other artists experimented with Grosz's technique, his true heir at the *Liberator* was Gropper. Both artists exemplified the radical proletarian artist of the *Liberator* in its post-bohemian period.

When Grosz immigrated to the United States in the summer of 1932 he was already recognized as a leading member of Berlin Dada and as a prominent political illustrator, best known for his series of legal confrontations with the German government, ending with his famed blasphemy trial of 1923. The artistic left in the United States was familiar with Grosz through the international circulation of satiric journals in which his work had been featured. However, it was primarily Grosz's association with the *Masses-Liberator* circle that contributed most profoundly to his reception and success with New York's intelligentsia. Not only was Grosz linked to the *Liberator* circle through his association with Dehn but also with Max Eastman. The two had initially met in 1922 at an international congress held in Leningrad where artists and intellectuals were invited to celebrate the fourth anniversary of the revolution. The congress was designed to foster closer cultural ties between the new Soviet State and the West and to discuss plans for an alliance between Soviet culture and international revolutionary culture. When Grosz came to New York in June 1932, the two would resume their acquaintance and be affiliated with the magazine, *Modern Quarterly*. In addition, the *Masses-Liberator* group would also contribute to Grosz's employment and exhibition in America. Before coming to the United States, Grosz had accepted a temporary teaching position at the Art Student's League in 1931. John Sloan, a former *Masses* contributor who served as the League's president from 1930-1932, supported the German artist's appointment in the midst of a heated battle by the Board of Directors at the League concerning Grosz's communist affiliation. Further, because of Dehn's mutual association with Grosz and

Zigrosser, Dehn made arrangements for the first exhibition of the German artist's work in the United States. Through Dehn's efforts, Grosz's watercolors and drawings of workers were put on exhibition on January 1931 at the Weyhe Gallery as his formal introduction to the New York art world. The *Liberator* circle thus played an instrumental role in Grosz's American reception, not only featuring his work in the magazine from 1922 on, but also through their support.³⁶

³⁶ For information on Grosz's American reception, see McCloskey, 148-150. However, McCloskey neglects to mention the *Liberator's* role and instead emphasizes Julian Gumperz's essay, "George Grosz—Up out of Dada," in the April 1927 *New Masses* "as the first article devoted exclusively to the discussion of an artist's career in the publication." See McCloskey, 148. In addition to his meeting with Eastman in Russia, McKay sought out Grosz at the Fourth Congress in 1923 which they both attended and later met Grosz again in Berlin. McKay introduced the American artist, Marsden Hartley to Grosz. See Cooper, *Claude McKay Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance*, 194. Grosz was summoned by Zinoviev, chairman of the Communist International to discuss plans for setting up an international communist journal with editorial offices in Berlin and Paris. In 1934 Grosz would commend Eastman's expose of art under Stalin. See Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 347, and Flavell, 48 & 65. For a full discussion of the Sloan's involvement, see Flavell, 68-71.

DEFINING BOLSHEVISM

After the Revolution, according to Eastman, not even Jack Reed knew exactly what a Bolshevik was; however in a *Liberator* article of 1919 Reed defined Bolshevism as “Applied Socialism.” Eastman himself offered little information on the Bolsheviks except that they were “intellectuals” armed with Marx’s scientific intelligence and the Communist Manifesto. In the *Liberator* editorial of August 1920, Eastman attempted a definition of Bolshevism as “a relentless, undeviating, technically-scientific business promotion and organization of utopian change, nowise inferior in cold and calculating force, to the organization—for instance—of the railroads of the northwest, or of the British imperial finance. This is what Bolshevism is.” For Eastman, Bolshevism was both utopian and pragmatic. While seemingly contradictory, the concept reflected Eastman’s ideal world of rationality. Eastman’s commitment to the primacy of rationality would influence his interpretation of the Russian Revolution, of Lenin, and of the Bolsheviks. The *Liberator* circle embraced the Russian Revolution as the achievement of Bolshevik “social scientists,” and Soviet Russia as a great work of modern progress. Identification of the Soviet government as a scientific system would become an important element in American revolutionary socialists’ understanding of Bolshevism.³⁷

Lenin was a controversial figure among the left, both in the United States and abroad. The cult of Lenin was already being produced in Russia and exported to the world’s radicals as the image of the Revolution. One of his most outspoken supporters was Eastman and the *Liberator* circle. The magazine published only favorable accounts of Lenin and the Russian Revolution and defended the achievements of Lenin to counter-balance the vilified image of Lenin in the mainstream American press. Even though Eastman had never seen or talked to

³⁷ See Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 110, Reed, “Great Bolshevik Conspiracy,” *Liberator* 1, no. 12 (February 1919): 32, and Eastman, editorial, *Liberator* 3, no. 8 (August 1920): 5.

Lenin, the Soviet leader personified the new, modern order for him. In Eastman's "A Statesman of the New Order" for the September 1918 issue, Lenin is admired for his scientific, rational intelligence, the "revolutionary engineer" whose leadership confirmed the vitality of the individual will. The *Liberator* circle set about the task of legitimizing Lenin's leadership by proving his credentials as a revolutionary scientist and human engineer, possessing the scientific skills necessary to oversee the Soviet experiment. For Eastman, Lenin became a mythic figure, a conduit for power and pure creativity. American radicals admired Lenin and identified with the Bolsheviks, as this identification provided a sense of connection and empowerment to a radical community isolated within an increasingly hostile environment.³⁸

The January 1919 cover of the *Liberator* included a portrait of Lenin by Clive Weed (fig. 44). The often-reprinted image was based on a photograph and was one of the earliest introductions of Lenin to the American public. Included in the issue was Lenin's first direct message, "A Letter to American Workingmen" to the American people since becoming the recognized leader of the proletariat. In it, Lenin calls for American workingmen to join in "the inevitability of the international revolution."³⁹ The magazine would also publish Lenin's, "A Statement and a Challenge," calling for the victory of socialism on a world wide level in the October 1919 issue and "Self-Determination of Nations: A Speech by Nikolai Lenin," of remarks made by the Soviet leader at the Eighth Convention of the Russian Communist Party (Moscow, March 18-23, 1919), in the June 1920 issue.

³⁸ Eastman, "A Statesman of the New Order," *Liberator* 1, no. 7 (September 1918): 10-13 and Nickle, 154-157. McKible suggests that Lenin was becoming the embodiment of all the magazine's greatest hopes. See McKible, 50-51.

³⁹ Lenin, "A Letter to American Workingmen," *Liberator* 1, no. 11 (January 1919): 8-13. Lenin's letter, dated 20 August 1918 was first published in *The Class Struggle* of December 1918 and was not widely distributed until March of the following year. See Foner, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 48. Eastman explained that the letter had been brought over from Stockholm by Carl Sandburg, a friend of Reed and printed at *Revolutionary Age*, the Marxist paper published in Boston by Louis Fraina for publication in the *Liberator*. See Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 138.

Identification with a foreign revolutionary movement made radicals vulnerable to charges of anti-Americanism. One of Eastman's techniques was to situate the *Liberator* within a respectable tradition of American radicalism and social critique. He claimed that "the right of revolutionary agitation" was "interwoven in the traditions of this country," quoting Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and Abraham Lincoln. Pro-Soviet Americans sought to refute charges of an unnatural or foreign nature in their political allegiance by "Americanizing" Bolshevism. Robinson's February 1919 cover of Lincoln (fig. 13) serves as a direct example of situating a revolutionary example in the context of American tradition, thereby legitimizing American radicals by claiming Lincoln's humanitarian legacy as their own. It seemed important to radicals to find American equivalents to Russian developments as a way of completing their own identification with the revolution. The "Americanization" of Bolshevism became a defining aspect of the *Liberator* circle's definition of communism.⁴⁰

Stuart Davis encapsulates the early response of Greenwich Village artists to Bolshevism in the February 1919 issue titled "Bolshevism in Bohemia" (fig. 45).⁴¹ The scene consists of a lively group of Bolsheviks and bohemians socializing in a Greenwich Village café setting. The image transforms the "alien" nature of the Russian proletariat into the familiar, thereby Americanizing the foreign element and legitimizing the embrace of Bolshevism. Further, Davis depicts the Bolsheviks as intellectuals, not terrorists; they are comrades engaged in a common purpose with their American counterparts. The Bolshevik as intellectual was an association fostered by Eastman's concept of the Bolshevik as "scientific engineer." For Davis, the Bolshevik

⁴⁰ "A little rebellion now and then is a good thing" said Jefferson," in Eastman, "Science on Trial," *Liberator* 3, no. 12 (December 1920): 20. On another occasion, he wrote: "In the name and memory of Benjamin Franklin, I demand that the American government and the government of New York State, pending the time when they will be compelled by the power of the international proletariat to recognize the sovereignty of the Russian Republic." See "The Soviet Envoy," *Liberator* 2, no. 8 (August 1919): 30-31. See also Nickle, 99-100.

⁴¹ George Schuyler, editor of the *Messenger* described artistic life in New York life as taking place in a Greenwich Village cellar with "a few chairs and tables, weird and grotesque paintings and sketches on the walls" where men and women sat chatting. See George Schuyler, "At the Coffee House," *The*

example offered renewed hope and the desire for change as indicated in his illustration “Bolshevism Hits America,” in the same issue (fig.46). The drawing, captioned: “It is reported that Trinity Church is considering the possibility of free pews!” consists of a laborer pointing to the bible as one clergy welcomes him into the church, while another scratches his head in confusion, and the other lifts his hand in a gesture of opposition. While an obvious critique of the hypocrisy of organized religion, the image also suggests that the Bolshevik concept of collective equality for the masses should be an ideology adopted by an institution that professes fairness to all. In the 1930s, Davis would continue his interest in political causes and become an active organizer of the American Artists’ Congress; national executive secretary of Artists’ Union in 1936, and its national chairman in 1938. In addition, he would become an instructor for the Works Progress Administration and art editor of *Art Front* in 1935.

Robinson would also explore hypocrisy and turn to a religious metaphor in “The Second Coming: The Bolsheviks are capturing the churches, says the ‘Times’” in the April 1921 issue. In the drawing, Christ points toward a blocked cathedral door as several male laborers attempt to break it open with a large wooden post. The image aligns Christ with the masses and serves to belie the misrepresentation of Bolshevism by the press. Among the many misconceptions of Bolshevism was that it would lead to a complete breakdown of organized systems including religion, as indicated by a contemporary article that describes the Bolsheviks as “enemies of order and the Christian religion.” As Nickle pointed out in her analysis of the *Liberator*, Greenwich Village radicals believed the Bolshevik project of “revolutionary reconstruction” implied much more than a mere political upheaval. It would also bring about profound change in the personal and spiritual lives of all it touched.⁴²

Messenger (June 1925): 236-37. McKible suggests the description illustrates the space of “modernism” as it actually constituted art and writing in New York in the 1910s and 1920s. See McKible, 18-28.

⁴² See *Buffalo Commercial*, 9 December 1918, Max Eastman Papers, and Nickle, 104-106.

In contrast to Davis's portrayal of the Bolshevik as urban dweller and intellectual, Clive Weed presented the Bolshevik in the industrial landscape as common worker. In the July 1919 double-page spread two laborers sit in an industrial setting reading a newspaper with the word "Bolshevism!" printed on the headline. The caption reads: "I know what this Bolshevism means, Bill—it means us!" (fig. 47). The American "Bolshevik" was transformed from the urban, intellectual setting to the domain of the laborer and became identified with the universal worker. Weed has taken the American identification with the Bolshevik to its logical conclusion by declaring that the Bolshevik and the American worker were the same. The image of Bolshevik as one with American labor would come to dominate the magazine's portrayal of Bolshevism and in turn, communism. After the initial introduction of Bolshevism to America, Eastman's view of the Bolshevik as scientific intellectual gave way to Reed's perception of the Russian Revolution as the work of the common people and the Bolshevik leadership as one with the will of the masses.

By 1921 artists' portrayals of the Bolshevik was of a laborer engaged in some sort of physical activity; an activity that was universally relevant. For the May 1921 cover, Gellert presented the Bolshevik busy at work sweeping the planet (fig. 48). Even though much of Gellert's work for the magazine was non-political, he was an avid enthusiast of Bolshevism and during the Revolution had aspirations of going to Russia to help fight for the cause. Later in his career he joined the CPUSA in 1934, visited the Soviet Union in 1927, and published *Karl Marx 'Capital' in Lithographs* (1934).⁴³ Gellert believed that artists should be aligned with workers and at the *Liberator* he became instrumental in shaping the early bohemian sensibility into a new Marxist aesthetic. In contrast to Gellert's March 1918 cover of the sower, an essentially nineteenth century proletarian prototype, the worker sweeping the globe is now engaged in a

⁴³ Zoltan Deak, *Hugo Gellert 1892-1985, People's Artist* (New York: Hugo Gellert Memorial Committee, 1986), 13. James Wechsler, who is currently writing a dissertation on Gellert for the Graduate Center, provided the date for Gellert's official membership into the Communist Party.

more metaphorically significant task. Gellert's sower throwing heart-shaped seeds symbolic of growth was characteristic of the early utopian response of radicals to the revolution (fig. 6). The proletariat as sweeper is non-idealized and simplified, his back is lowered, turned from the viewer and placed on top of a world which must first be cleansed of corruption and opposing elements before revolutionary progress could be realized. For the April 1921 issue, Maurice Becker again used the planet and worker in his illustration "Not Slipping" (fig. 49). A worker identified as "Russian Revolution" carries the planet on his shoulder and struggles to prevent it from slipping off a mountainside whose stone steps read "Capitalist Concession." The image suggests difficult times ahead but victory will ultimately prevail. Even though Becker continually executed political drawings for the magazine, he believed that art and propaganda was a false issue, maintaining it was not the artist's task to develop socialist theory.⁴⁴ Despite his reservation, Becker remained dedicated to radical issues and continued his involvement in the 1930s. Artists and radicals were beginning to be aware that the utopian dream required hard work and dedication before the Marxist goal could be realized. Since the war, revolutionary changes had been thwarted in Europe and the United States. Only in Russia had significant change occurred.

⁴⁴ Fitzgerald, 213.

POST-REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA

The November 1920 issue of the *Liberator* contained a full-page photograph of Reed and below was written, "Died at his revolutionary post, October 17, 1920." While in Moscow, Reed died of typhus at the age of thirty-three. After his death, his body lay in state for seven days, followed by a procession through the streets of Moscow; he was laid to rest at the Kremlin, the only American buried under the wall. The December 1920 issue was largely devoted to the dead revolutionary and loyal contributor. The cover by Gellert of a cupid figure about to aim its bow to slay a dragon, evokes Reed's courage as a revolutionary. Gellert, who first met Reed in the spring of 1918, claimed the meeting left a lasting impression on him: "I felt terribly inadequate politically. Then and there I decided to start delving into the works of Marx."⁴⁵ Reed had returned to Russia in late 1920 and while there wrote an article for the *Liberator*, published in the December 1920 and January 1921 issues describing the atmosphere of Russia, the sense of well-being and the new spirit of hope.⁴⁶ "Death comes like this, I know—Snow-soft and gently cold," were the lines from Reed's poem "Fog" included in the tribute issue. The editorial pledged:

And we pay our tribute to him now that he lies dead, only exactly as we used to pay it when he stood here making us laugh and feel brave, because he was so full of brave laughter. Our tribute to John Reed is a pledge that the cause he died for shall live.⁴⁷

John Reed quickly became a metaphor of revolutionary commitment, and his death was read as a sacrifice to the radical movement. By the 1930s Reed had become a legend and was rediscovered by a younger generation as a symbol of bohemian radicalism and the quintessential

⁴⁵ Gellert, as cited in Deak, *People's Artist*, 13.

⁴⁶ Although continuous controversy regarding Reed's apparent disillusionment with communism still persists, in his last articles for the *Liberator* he did not indicate any such sentiment. See Reed, "Soviet Russia Now," *Liberator* 3, no. 12 (December 1920): 9-12, and "Sweet Russia Now," *Liberator* 4, no. 1 (January 1921): 14-17.

⁴⁷ Eastman, "John Reed," *Liberator* 3, no. 12 (December 1920): 5-6.

American revolutionary. Reed's adventurous life and early death inspired countless American leftists, and his memory was later to be perpetuated through the establishment of the John Reed Clubs across the nation. For radicals, like Freeman and Gold, Reed's example was a beacon to their growth, "his life seemed to us a model for middle-class intellectuals who went over to the proletariat." Even after his death, Reed was the spokesman of the Bolsheviks in the United States. Eastman and his staff continued to devote the majority of political reporting to events in Russia. Counter-revolution had not succeeded in toppling the new government and the civil war in Russia was drawing to a close with the Red army triumphant. While causing widespread suffering in Russia, the Allied intervention and blockade did not succeed in overthrowing the Bolshevik government. In January 1920 the blockade against Russia was lifted by the Allied powers and in July 1920, the United States withdrew its troops. The "Hands Off Russia" campaign conducted by American radicals, liberals and trade unionists contributed to ending the intervention. Reed's death only intensified the concern, sympathy and commitment the *Liberator* displayed toward the communist cause of revolutionary Russia.⁴⁸

By 1922 the *Liberator's* depiction of Russia shifted from the picture of a burgeoning new society to one of a highly organized and disciplined nation.⁴⁹ Contributors celebrated Soviet accomplishments and the new image of the proletarian to emerge was one of victory and well being. Eugene Debs wrote "Russia's Embattled Liberators" commemorating the fifth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution for the December 1922 issue. In it, Debs declared that the Revolution would be "chronicled in history as the greatest and most luminous and far-reaching achievement in all the annals of mankind." Debs perpetuated the image of Bolshevism as one of triumph "in

⁴⁸ See Gold, "John Reed's Body," *Liberator* 6, no. 10 (October 1923): 21, Freeman, *An American Testament*, 302, and McKible, 121.

⁴⁹ McKible acknowledges the *Liberator's* theoretical shift in direction toward Russia during 1922; however, he offers an alternative reading as one where Eastman and other *Liberator* contributors were beginning to question their role in the revolution and their relationship to Moscow. For a full discussion, see McKible, 54-61. In addition, McKible argues that with the new editorial team of Gold and McKay, the *Liberator* shifted its focus from Russia to the growing prominence of New York as a radical center. See McKible, 205-212.

the face of every conceivable attempt to crush and destroy them on the part of the combined capitalists powers of the earth.” The Bolsheviks were endowed with “the invincible revolutionary spirit, the noble heroism, the sublime faith and fortitude, the flaming idealism and the stoical self-denial of the Russian revolutionary warriors [were] infinitely beyond human speech and will be recorded only in the triumphant liberation of the race.”⁵⁰ Gibson’s tribute drawing, “All Hail Soviet Russia!” (fig. 22) and Gellert’s portrait sketch of Lenin were included in the same issue (fig.50). As a dramatic departure in style from Weed’s traditional 1919 portrait of Lenin, Gellert’s portrait executed in cubist faceting conveys Eastman’s concept of Lenin as a “social engineer” and modern hero.

After 1922, artist’s renditions of Russia shifted from its defense to the celebration of its success. Russia was now, as Trotsky put it, “a permanent revolution.” Images of the Kremlin, Soviet leaders and Russian domestic scenes appeared on the covers. Editorials read, “Russia—Happy Land,” and declared that it was, “safely out of famine, pestilence, civil war and economic collapse. and established in a relative prosperity, which the workers of nearly all of Western Europe must envy.”⁵¹ In the November 1923 *Liberator*, Fred Ellis’s double-page spread, “The Victor: Soviet Russia Defeats the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” embodied the new attitude. The central scene is chaotic with skeleton, horses, and figures piled upon each other; the word “War” is written on the shield of one of the fallen victims. A splayed banner reads, “4 Horsemen.” Standing to the left of the carnage is a man in a suit, representing capitalism, with his hands raised in a gesture of disbelief. At the far the right, a workingman on a steed rides away into the distance, carrying a banner of the Russian flag. Ellis’s medieval reference elevates the scene to mythical proportion as a clear reference to the victory of the revolutionary workers in the Soviet state over the Allied forces and capitalism. Ellis, who met Minor when he moved to

⁵⁰ Debs, “Russia’s Embattled Liberators,” *Liberator* 5, no. 11 (November-December 1922): 12.

⁵¹ “Russia Happy Land,” *Liberator* 6, no. 11 (November 1923): 6-7.

Chicago in 1922, first appeared in the *Liberator* as an associate editor in the October 1923 issue. Minor admired the artist for having the rare gift of capturing the power and humanity of workingmen, and subsequently used his work for the *Liberator* and later the *Daily Worker*.

The First World War was now regarded as having positive consequences as it established Bolshevism in Russia and exposed imperialistic and capitalistic corruption. The lines were clearly drawn between those who supported international Communism and those in opposition. Karl Radek's article, "The Face of the Earth after the War" in the September 1924 issue announced: "The world war has brought the beginning of the epoch of socialist revolution. This epoch will perhaps witness new imperialist wars, but at the same time it will witness revolutionary fights, revolutionary struggles which will put an end to the epoch of imperialism and lay the foundation of a new epoch, the epoch of the proletariat which will construct the socialist order."⁵²

For the *Liberator* circle, the beginning of 1922 was the moment when bohemian idealism shifted to political reality. The year 1922 was marked by Eastman's departure from the *Liberator*, the dispersal of former *Masses* contributors, and the new economic prosperity and political security of the Soviet Union. By 1922 the Russian Revolution entered into what Dell referred to as its "prose period." In an article for the January 1922 issue, Dell metaphorically compared the revolution to poetry, maintaining that at its inception the revolution was in its "poetic phase," describing the effort as "tragic and beautiful." "The time of wonderful dreams is over," wrote Dell, "and the time of dull realities has come." Dell recognized the utopian nature of the early days of revolution and now urged readers "to remind ourselves of the glory of that dawn, and to try our confidence in the sober realities of to-day by the glorious hopes of yesterday."⁵³ As the Revolution continued, and its fate became less certain, Dell's essay was an attempt to consolidate

⁵² Karl Radek, "The Face of the Earth After the War," *Liberator* 7, no. 9 (September 1924): 14-17.

⁵³ Dell, "The Russian Idea," *Liberator* 5, no. 1 (January 1922): 26.

waning support at home for what was once a romantic model of political transformation.⁵⁴ The Russian Revolution, Dell claimed, was never a struggle for absolute freedom, but rather a nationwide struggle to improve the material conditions of the Russian people. Dell argued that the Revolution must be viewed as an ongoing experiment in the struggle for the material improvement of the proletariat. Likewise, Eastman appealed to readers:

It is going to require a great effort for the American lyrical socialist to grow up into an engineer of history . . . I ask my readers to begin now by throwing out that wonderful childish idea that revolution is a substitute for reform and putting in its place the simple fact that revolution is what makes fundamental reform possible.⁵⁵

When Eastman came face to face with the Russian bureaucracy, it would not be long before he would be unable to sustain his own proclamations.

After Eastman left the *Liberator* and New York in 1922, he first went to Italy to report on the European economic conference in Genoa, the first attempt by Western powers to admit Soviet Russia to a concert of European nations. From there, he went to Paris and Berlin and arrived in Moscow on August 23, 1922. At first, Eastman was optimistic about the developments he observed in Genoa and Moscow, declaring, "socialism did work." During Eastman's stay in Russia (1922-23) he mastered the Russian language, studied Marxist theory in depth for the first time, and became acquainted with many Bolshevik leaders. As a known sympathizer of the Bolshevik revolution, Eastman had entrée into nearly all Bolshevik circles. He attended the opening session for the Fourth Congress of the Third International and reported to the *Liberator* that Russia, in contrast to America, was ruled by "an aristocracy of the best engineering brains" who used Marxian ideas as "working hypotheses." While Eastman never met Lenin, who was ill at the time, he heard him speak at the Congress. Eastman undertook the study of Lenin's relation to the Western understanding of Marxism and wrote the book, *The Wisdom of Lenin* published in part in the June 1924 *Liberator*. It was in Eastman's words, "a defense, or at least an explanation,

⁵⁴ McKible, 30-31.

⁵⁵ Eastman, "A Permanent Revolution," *Liberator* 6, no. 12 (December 1923): 10-11.

of what would prove the most disastrous feature of his teaching, the identification of the dictatorship of a party with the dictatorship of the proletariat." Eastman's visit would coincide with the struggle for control of the Russian Communist Party by Joseph Stalin's faction. In the winter of 1923, totally innocent of the campaign building up against Trotsky inside the Russian party, Eastman decided to write a biography of Trotsky. Even before meeting Trotsky, Eastman regarded him as superior to other Bolshevik leaders. Eastman had no idea that Lenin's relations with Trotsky were clouded by the latter's refusal to serve on the council of Peoples' Commissars in April, 1922, nor was he aware that such a refusal had provided ammunition to Trotsky's growing number of enemies.⁵⁶

Lenin died on January 21, 1924. The February issue of the *Liberator* declared:

With him expired the mind that had more than any other to do with the shaping of this century. It is doubtful if in all history any man's hand left as deep a mark upon the world. The nations for centuries to come will flow into forms first sketched by him . . . the Revolution will go ahead without him . . . Long live the Revolution! Long live the Communist International!⁵⁷

After Lenin's death, the Soviet Communist Party was in the throes of a succession struggle as a bitter conflict broke out between several factions of the Communist party, led by Trotsky and Stalin. Trotsky's principle of "permanent revolution" sought a far-reaching international movement and condemned the Comintern's United Front policies as opportunistic. The United Front was a call for rank and file workers and farmers to form a united front with the Communist party. In September 1922 the Politburo censured Trotsky for dereliction of duty. In 1924 he was charged with "Trotskyism" which his opponents defined as a Menshevik deviation from the doctrines of Lenin and consequently in early 1925 he was compelled to resign as Commissar of

⁵⁶ Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 318; "Moscow's Answer," *Liberator* 6, no. 7 (July 1923): 23-24; and *Love and Revolution*, 400. "The Wisdom of Lenin" first appeared in the June 1924 *Liberator* 7, no. 6): 8-12. Eastman's biography on Trotsky was never completed and he only wrote on Trotsky's youth, *Leon Trotsky: The Portrait of a Youth* (New York: International Publishers, 1925).

⁵⁷ "Lenin's Death," *Liberator* 7, no. 2 (February 1924): 5. The last half of the 1920s was a period of internal turmoil for the Communists as factional disputes erupted, first between Stalin and Trotsky and then between Stalin and Gregory Zinoviev and Nikolai Bukharin.

War. Later, in 1926 Stalin had Trotsky expelled from the Politburo, in 1927 from the Communist party, and two years later from the Soviet Union. In 1936 Trotsky eventually came to live in Coyoacan, a suburb of Mexico City where in 1940 Ramon Mercader, a Spanish Communist agent, stabbed him to death. When Stalin assumed leadership in 1928 he began to consolidate his power inside and outside the Soviet Union, converting communism into a bureaucratic governmental system. This entailed a complete subordination of the Communist International to the interests of the Moscow party. Subsequently, Stalin was responsible for the death and deprivation of millions of people, establishing totalitarian political control over the party and his country.

In May of 1924, Trotsky informed Eastman of what is now known as “Lenin’s Testament.” In this document, dictated on Lenin’s sickbed at the end of December 1922, Lenin warned of the danger of a split in the party, and in a postscript ten days later had virtually called for Stalin’s removal from the post of General Secretary. Known only to Lenin’s wife and his secretary for more than a year, the testament was read at a closed meeting of party leaders the day before the opening of the Thirteenth Congress in May 1924, but was not made known to the public or to the general congress. Eastman left Russia in June 1924 cognizant of the inner conflicts of the Russian Communist Party and of the corrupting force of the growing bureaucracy. He spent the next three years in Western Europe, where he finished his book, *Since Lenin Died*, published in the spring of 1925. The book made public “Lenin’s Testament” and the conflict surrounding the leadership after Lenin’s death. *Since Lenin Died* was Eastman’s first public criticism of Soviet Russia and in it he threw his support behind Trotsky as the true successor to Lenin. The former *Liberator* editor was the first revolutionary from the West to present an informed explanation of Stalin’s rise and Trotsky’s fall from power. The explosive book created a worldwide sensation and international outrage in radical circles. The Central Executive Committee of the Comintern issued a special statement denouncing the book as “the product of an enemy of the Russian revolution and of the Comintern.” Minor called the book a “veritable

goulash of incoherent lies.”⁵⁸ Stalin’s henchmen demanded Trotsky’s repudiation of Eastman’s revelations of which Trotsky complied and subsequently disavowed Eastman’s effort.

When Eastman returned to the United States in the spring of 1927 he championed the left opposition against Stalin and became persona non grata in communist circles.⁵⁹ In time, Eastman became an outspoken critic of Stalin and Communism, viewing Stalin and Hitler as demonic leaders who had learned totalitarianism from Lenin. Eastman’s disillusionment was all consuming. After World War II he became a fanatical anticommunist, applauding Senator Joseph McCarthy’s witch-hunt against liberals. Eastman, as one of the most influential radicals of his generation, drastically altered his position from staunch supporter of Soviet Russia to its worst American enemy. In retrospect, Eastman, never having joined the Communist Party, remained an individualist, embracing reform and not revolution. Eastman’s radicalism was primarily devoted to the welfare of the individual and he serves as example of the bohemian radical coming face to face with reality. By 1922, the gap between poetic imagination and political reality had left a gaping hole. The Russian Revolution could no longer be the unproblematic image of cultural and social transformation that once sparked the community of intellectuals affiliated with the bohemianism of the *Liberator*. In the final analysis, even though Eastman placed a high value on activism, he remained the non-conforming individualist, the romantic revolutionary who was stirred by the utopian prospects of the Bolshevik experiment. In its ideal form, socialism or communism, as defined by the *Liberator* in its early years meant freedom and equality for all persons in all societies. The devotion to this belief can be seen in the variety of themes and subjects selected for the magazine. By contrast, Soviet leadership did not define communism as broadly as Eastman. Over the course of the *Liberator*’s first four years, the relationships among

⁵⁸ Both quotes are cited by Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 361. Trotsky said of Eastman’s book, “I repudiate beforehand and categorically any comment directed against the Russian Communist party,” *The Nation*, 17 June 1925, press clipping, Max Eastman Papers.

⁵⁹ Eastman, *Reflections on the Failure of Socialism*, 14-15.

art, socialism, and revolution had gone through considerable changes. As the glory days of the Revolution disappeared, art and politics, as defined by Eastman, became something separate from the Revolution.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ See also Milton Cantor, *The Divided Left: American Radicalism, 1900-1975* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 80, and McKible, 61.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LIBERATOR'S RESPONSE TO COMMUNISM IN AMERICA

*"Without as yet understanding Internationalism, the American working class is lining up with the workers of all countries in the gigantic battle which to test the power of the present world-order to endure. Without as yet believing in Revolution, it is undertaking its part in the industrial war which is the beginning of Revolution."*¹

SOCIALISM TO COMMUNISM: SHIFTING IMAGES OF LABOR

World War I and the Russian Revolution changed the character of radicalism in the United States. National issues in the forefront of the American radical movement in the early 1920s were the formation of the two Communist parties in the United States, the "red raids" directed against immigrants and radicals, the subsequent censorship of the press, and the emergence of organized African American movements. During the *Liberator's* crusade to support and interpret Soviet Russia to the American public, the magazine simultaneously faced domestic internal crisis. These events and their editorial responses would determine the course and shape of the radical movement in America, and threaten the very existence of the publication and livelihood of its contributors. Despite the seemingly repressive conditions, artists and contributors of the *Liberator* remained zealous in their faith in the possibility of revolutionary transformation and improved social conditions.

The Comintern's requirement of insurrection in highly industrialized capitalist countries was decisive to the eventual factionalism in the Socialist Party in the United States.² While most socialists praised the Russians, the basic difference among them involved the question of

¹ Eastman, "Pittsburg or Petrograd?" *Liberator* 2, no. 11 (December 1919): 5-7.

² Cantor, *The Divided Left*, 69. For further information on the American Communist movement, see Bernard K. Johnpoll, ed., *A Documentary History of the Communist Party of the United States*, Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History, 1919-1957* (New York: Da

applying the lessons of the Bolshevik revolution to the United States. In the spring of 1919 the pro-Bolshevik left wing of the Socialist Party prepared to take control of the American Socialist Party, following the Bolshevik example of non-compromise with moderate or right wing socialism. In May 1919 incumbent leaders of the Socialist Party's moderates expelled the pro-Bolshevik left wing, consisting of foreign-language delegates and including the entire Michigan, Massachusetts and Ohio state organizations. The foreign language delegates and Michigan socialists attempted to consolidate and issued a call for a national convention for the purpose of organizing a Communist party in America to assemble in Chicago on September 1, 1919. In Chicago, meanwhile, the regular Socialist Party also called an emergency convention on August 30, 1919. The unity of the left wing faction was impaired by the rise of internal factionalism between the foreign language federations who issued the call for the separate convention, and the native-born left wing faction.

The Socialist Party convened in Chicago, and the native-born left wing, led by John Reed, was forcibly ejected. The ejected group severed all ties with the Socialist Party to form the Communist Labor Party (CLP) and represented native-born elements of the left wing. Most delegates followed the lead of the left's English-speaking leaders: John Reed, Benjamin Gitlow, and James P. Cannon. The CLP proclaimed undeviating loyalty to the Comintern and its policies, although the delegates only partly understood what those were. They also denounced the Socialist Party as corrupt and non-revolutionary.³ Meanwhile, the other Communist convention consisting of foreign delegates, got under way at the headquarters of the Russian Federation in Chicago and adopted the name Communist Party of America (CP). Louis Fraina and Charles Ruthenberg led the foreign element of the left wing. The Socialist Party, stripped of its members, was led by Morris Hillquit and Victor Berger and remained uncompromising in its opposition to the two

Capo, 1974), and Robert Vincent Daniels, *A Documentary History of Communism*, (New York: Random House, 1960).

³ Klehr, *The American Communist Movement*, 21-22.

newly formed Communist groups. The Socialist Party platform maintained that the transition from capitalism to socialism should be peaceful, legal, and gradual. Those that remained socialists stressed that conditions in the United States were entirely different from those that made insurrection possible in Russia. The unwillingness of the established leadership in the American Socialist Party to accept an insurrectionary outlook was the immediate cause of the split in 1919. The CP attempted to model itself on the 1917 Bolshevik party, and looked directly to Moscow for leadership. The CLP fell somewhere in between these doctrines of advocating immediate revolution and supporting the Communist International. However, unlike the CP, they saw significant differences between the American and Russian situation and sought to retain American leadership and control within the party. The United States government outlawed both the CLP and the CP. Each party was convinced that it was the true Communist party and that the other was the obstacle to the unity of revolutionary forces.

Young's cartoon in the July 1919 *Liberator* (fig. 51) reflected the frustration of many radicals concerning the American Socialist Party's reluctance to comply with Russia's call for revolutionary action. In a darkened landscape, a figure labeled, "U.S. Socialist Party" is sprawled under a tree titled, "Petit-Bourgeois Respectability." With trepidation, the figure extends his foot toward the lake water, labeled "Communist International." Young and Eastman were in Chicago to cover the triple conventions and reported the events in the October 1919 issue. Eastman held serious reservations about the disintegration of the Socialist Party and feared that factionalism would prevent any party from dealing effectively with pressing social issues. While not completely satisfied with the outcome of any of the three conventions, Eastman endorsed the CLP, stating: "Its program is upon the whole a vital, simple and realistic application of the theories of Marx, and the policies of Lenin, to present conditions in America." Like the CLP, Eastman recognized that in America revolution would take a different form from that in Russia.⁴

⁴ See Eastman, "The Chicago Conventions," *Liberator* 2, no. 10 (October 1919): 19 and Cantor, *The Divided Left*, 69-70.

For the most part, *Liberator* artists did not address the formation of the Communist parties in America, nor did they endorse any specific labor party in 1919. However, they remained sympathetic to socialist causes and their work continued to reflect concern for the plight of labor and the masses. Editors and contributors alike were united in their defense of the rights of workers. Covers for the years 1918 and 1919 addressing labor, were generally of a socialistic genre with no explicit political content, as in George Bellows' July 1919 cover of two female workers, hunched over from the weight of a large basket they carry between them.

The artist, Cornelia Barns best demonstrated the preferred editorial selections of the laborer during the early years of the *Liberator*. Barns was a member of the Socialist Party, joined the *Masses* in 1914 and continued to work for the *Liberator* during its entire existence.⁵ In 1921 she was the art editor and associate editor of *Birth Control Review* and also illustrated for *Woman Voter* and *Suffragist*. Barns' portrayal of striking workers was used for two covers. On the April 1919 cover, the word "Strike!" is superimposed on a cluster of women (fig. 52). The cover represents the strike of the International Garment Workers in New York, of which eighty-five percent of the strikers were women. Barns' illustrations never conveyed emotional indignation at the system, but rather a strong empathy with the working class and special attention given to the female worker and children. Barns' social interest themes were not explicit, but commentary and choice of subject revealed her commitment to socialism and feminism. While not politicized, her covers repeatedly turned to the common man, woman and child engaged in either leisure activity or work. Her laborers were dignified, yet non-heroic; were not confined to the urban or rural setting and possessed a universal appeal. Barns' work was used frequently on the covers and she produced a total of twelve for the magazine. Typical of her inside illustrations was "Tired" in the

⁵ Barns was the daughter of Charles Barns, a writer for the *New York Herald*. Because of recurrent tuberculosis, she moved to California around 1917. During the years 1922-23 her work barely appeared in the *Liberator*. She also illustrated for *Good Morning*, *New Masses*, and *New York World*. For further discussions and biographical information on Barns, see Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 175, Delaware Art Museum, *City Life Illustrated 1890-1940: Sloan, Glackens, Luks, Shinn and Their Friends and*

May 1918 issue (fig. 53). The drawing portrays a peasant woman, possibly an immigrant, sitting with infant in arm and another small child leaning against her, highly reminiscent of Daumier's *Third Class Carriage*. Barn's drawings ranged from mild social critique to satires of types, reflecting the generalized socialist concerns of the early publication. By 1922, the heroic industrial male laborer would replace simple images of common people engaged in both play and work. The defining moment came with the formation of the Workers' Party in 1922.

The early history of the Communist party in America is one of complex factionalism, with both underground and aboveground operations. Even though the Comintern urged the CP and CLP to unite, in April 1920 the CP split yet again into two organizations, both claiming the name "Communist Party of America." Charles Ruthenberg and Jay Lovestone led the smaller of the two parties. The larger CP consisted almost entirely of non-English speaking members. At the end of May 1920, Ruthenberg's CP met with Reed's CLP to form the United Communist Party (UCP). The CLP had failed to attract a large enough membership to assume a lasting role and it subsequently faded into oblivion. Nonetheless, there were still two parties, the CP of foreign language representatives and the newly formed UCP. Simultaneous with the internal factionalism, were the notorious "red raids" of 1919, driving the newly formed parties underground. In 1920 the Comintern insisted that the two parties merge and demanded that the American party end its underground existence. In May 1921, the two parties merged into a single party that adopted the name of Communist Party of America, but still remained an underground organization. In 1921, the Comintern formed the Red International of Labor Unions, known as the Profintern. The first Profintern Congress in July 1921 directed revolutionaries to enter mainstream labor movements. The underground Communist party of America created the aboveground, American Labor Alliance on July 1921, which was little more than a coordinating committee for such aboveground Communist-run organizations as the Friends of Soviet Russia,

Followers (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1980), 30, and Alice Sheppard, *Cartooning for Suffrage* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994).

the Irish American Labor League, and the Hungarian Workers Federation. On December 1921, the American Labor Alliance was re-named the “Workers’ Party” by consent of the Comintern. This party, like its predecessor, was a cloak for the Communist underground. Again, there were two parties, the above ground Workers’ Party and the underground Communist Party of America. Under the directive of the Comintern, the underground Communist Party of America was dissolved in April 1923 and notified the Workers’ Party that the latter was the legitimate Communist party in America. In 1925 the Workers’ Party would change its name to the Workers’ (Communist) Party of America and in 1929 to Communist Party USA or CPUSA.⁶

Eastman had severe misgivings about the form and direction that the revolutionary movement was taking. In the October 1921 editorial, he expressed his frustration with the stagnation of the underground Communist party. He claimed that after two years “nothing of appreciable value to the cause of communism has been done by the revolutionists.” Eastman criticized the underground party for its “romanticism” and avoidance of “educating workers for the revolution.”⁷ Eastman accused the Communist parties of producing “little more than a lively underground debating society,” and criticized the emphasis on discipline within their ranks. While the *Liberator* often discussed Marxism in its early years, the term “communism” was rarely employed and never fully interpreted. The *Liberator* circle gradually began using the term communism to describe their desired social system so as not to be confused with American Socialist Party. In addition, the terms militant, Bolshevism, communism and socialism were used

⁶ After the Workers’ Party was set up, a left opposition of the underground Communist party broke away in January 1922 in protest against the Workers’ Party’s moderate program. This opposition also called itself the Communist Party of America and set up its own “legal apparatus,” the United Toilers of America. Thus, not only were there once again two Communist parties, both underground with the same name, there were two aboveground parties, the Workers’ Party and the United Toilers of America. In the fall of 1922 the Fourth Comintern Congress in Moscow convened a special commission to hear representatives of the two factions and insisted on a united aboveground party. For further information, see Klehr, *The American Communist Movement*, 33-37 and Gitlow, 83.

⁷ Eastman’s criticism of the revolutionary movement relied heavily on Lenin’s pamphlet, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* of 1920. In it, Lenin realized that continued expectation of world revolution was illusory and instead called for pragmatic tactics to advance the communist case. Lenin urged

interchangeably. When discussing labor parties, Eastman wrote: "In what relation do the Communists (that is, Socialists) stand to the proletarians as a whole?" Again, terms were loosely employed when Eastman addressed the formation of the Communist parties in America: "It sent a wave of militant or Bolshevik, or Communist, socialism around the world." Despite his reservations on the direction of the revolutionary movement in the United States, Eastman endorsed the Workers' Party in the February 1922 editorial, expressing his hope that the party would finally "constitute the authentic socialist movement of this generation." Eastman maintained that the Workers' Party combined "all of the leftward elements that have split off from the Socialist party since 1919 and that it had a good chance to become the true and ultimate standard-bearer of revolutionary change."⁸ Even though Eastman endorsed the Workers' Party, there was little evidence of its influence on the editorial direction of the magazine until Eastman's departure at the end of 1922.

From 1923 to 1924, the *Liberator* concentrated on specific Communist programs. The Workers' Party bore the stamp of a new Communist international strategy, the United Front. Conceived by the Comintern, the United Front policy entailed strategic reorientation to secure world revolutionary progress. The Workers' Party had a three-pronged goal: amalgamation of all trade unions into industrial unions; the formation of a labor party; and the recognition of Soviet Russia. The new party would work within non-left, mass institutions, including the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and labor parties through the Federated Farmer-Labor movement.⁹ The aboveground Workers' Party made its first venture into mass politics through the Federated

communists to participate in elections and work within pre-existing trade unions to bring about a progressive stance. See Klehr, *The American Communist Movement*, 30-31.

⁸ Eastman, "An Opinion on Tactics," *Liberator* 4, no. 10 (October 1921): 5-6; "Labor Parties," *Liberator* 1, no. 12 (February 1919), 33; "The Chicago Conventions," *Liberator* 2, no. 10 (October 1919): 19; and "A Christmas Party," *Liberator* 5, no. 2 (February 1922): 5-6.

⁹ Samuel Gompers was head of the AFL, also referred to as the AF of L. Gompers, who was also the head of the Labor Committee of the Council of National Defense, cooperated with American involvement in the war.

Farmer-Labor established in July 1923. The Farmer-Labor Party was part of the Comintern's United Front policy to develop class-consciousness of workers within the pre-existing trade movement, attempting to work within the mainstream political system. Ruthenberg and other Communist leaders were regularly featured on the pages of the *Liberator*. Articles applauded the communist movement in the United States and the Soviet proletarian dictatorship. With the dissolution of the underground party, Ruthenberg declared "Communism in the Open Again" in an article for the February 1923 issue. "The Communist movement in this country has undergone a transformation," wrote Ruthenberg, "it is no longer a spontaneous outburst of enthusiasm." The new party, claimed Ruthenberg, "proposes to teach the necessity of Soviets and the Proletarian Dictatorship to the workers through their own experiences in their struggles against the capitalists." He further explained "its campaigns and programs of action [were] therefore based upon the actualities of the life of the workers in the United States." The role of the Communist party today, according to Ruthenberg was "the amalgamation of the trade unions into industrial unions and the formation of a labor party."¹⁰

Aside from lengthy political articles, one of the clearest expressions of the magazine's change of direction was its propensity for labor cartoons and its emphasis on the laborer, based in part on the United Front policy's goal of an organized labor movement in the United States. As early as May 1918, artists conceived of "Labor" as a heroic industrial worker. In Chamberlain's drawing, "Today," a giant figure identified as "Labor," confidently strides over an industrial landscape strewn with business owners vying for his attention (fig. 54). The image embodies characteristics that will be used repeatedly for further depictions of the laborer. These traits include male heroism as the major attribute, identification with the land, and association with a manual task. In Chamberlain's drawing, the heroic is established through scale distortion. The

¹⁰ Ruthenberg, "Communism in the Open Again," *Liberator* 6, no. 2 (February 1923): 12-14, and "The Role of the Communist Party," *Liberator* 6, no. 7 (July 1923): 14-15.

laborer is identified with the land by the overalls worn, indicating his job as a farmer, and is associated with the task of breaking stones, as he carries a sledgehammer. The worker is no longer the isolated peasant tied to the land, but part of the modern collective industrial workforce. Unlike earlier images of the worker, who were both male and female, the laborer, without exception, will always be male. By 1922, the preferred image of the male laborer will be that of coal miner. Mining came to be viewed as the most dangerous of jobs and the miner the most exploited of all laborers. The *Liberator* was continually reporting on mining strikes throughout the nation and miner's plight was well publicized. The miner became emblematic of the new proletariat industrial laborer.

By 1922, the laborer had fully evolved into a character type. Gropper's laborer for the May 1922 cover (fig. 31) introduced the solitary miner engaged in work. The figure, ready to weld his pick handle is bare breasted and wears the familiar miner's cap. Heroism is conveyed through the heavy musculature, the silent dignity of his task and his single placement in the composition. The image carries no explicit partisan message but is nonetheless politically potent through its glorification of the worker. Gellert's woodcut for the January 1924 cover consisted of two steelworkers pushing carts of iron (fig. 55). Like Gropper's illustration, Gellert's workers are bare breasted to reveal their strength and engaged in quiet concentration on their task. Unlike Gropper's free linear technique, Gellert's cover is highly stylized with horizontal bands and repeated patterns. In February 1924, Gellert's steelworkers reappeared in a special two-page feature, "Inferno 1924: The Pennsylvania Iron Region," which includes text and five illustrations by the artist. Three of the illustrations depict steel workers at various tasks—one reproduces the January cover, the second portrays workers pouring liquid metal, and in the third workers roll sheet metal. Two other drawings depict a bridge and the worker's kitchen. Gellert's accompanying text was a poetic exaltation of the steelworker's task. In it, Gellert conjured up the industrial landscape as a dismal place where, "black steel lace[s] against the light of the sky," where trees die, fish cannot live and birds do not fly. For Gellert machines and industry destroyed

the landscape, and yet, despite the unbearable conditions, he believed: “man is the only animal who could live in this country.”¹¹ He felt the heroic laborer would rise from the depths of his despair to endure. Tragedy and nobility combined to redefine the role of the modern American laborer. Gellert once again portrayed the laborer as a solitary worker for the July 1924 cover. Executed in a cubo-futuristic style of emanating and swirling contours, Gellert obliterated detail and thus universalized the task of labor. Gellert’s 1924 images of the worker as the tragic, exploited, hero working under considerable hardship, were a significant departure from his nostalgic cover of the cheerful peasant sowing seeds in the inaugural issue of 1919 (fig. 6).

Clive Weed’s January 1920 illustration portrays three miners in a ditch while two lavishly dressed capitalists address them: “Trouble with you people is, you want the earth.” One of the miners responded: “Trouble with you, is you’ve got it.” The miners are again depicted over life size and heroic, with the difficulty of their tasks etched on their faces. In contrast, the capitalists, dressed in fur coats, appear as bloated caricatures of greed. Significant to the evolving image of labor is the underlying threat implied. Weed’s miners are prepared to fight back, indicated by the unity in number, their sheer size, and the utter contempt indicated by their facial expressions and response. Minor’s illustration, “Labor Gets Up,” (fig. 19) not only announced the formation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party in 1923, as an explicit partisan image, but also implied an even greater threat. The giant figure of a farmer held down by ropes is about to break free from his bondage. Tiny figures representing capitalist and government exploitation are strewn about. The image and caption suggest that when the laborer becomes unionized, the workers will be liberated and destroy their oppressor. By 1924, the image of the laborer was no longer that of silent victim; he was now organized, brave and ready to act. However, Minor’s illustration makes clear that it is only through organized unions, specifically that of the Communist aligned Federated Farmer-Labor Party, that freedom from oppression could be

¹¹ Gellert, “Inferno 1924: The Pennsylvania Iron Region,” *Liberator* 7, no.2 (February 1924): 14-15.

realized. Fred Ellis' February 1924 double-page spread, "Selective Immigration: All Imported Meat Must be Stamped with Indelible 'No Labor-Union or Communist Tendencies,'" warns the viewer through its violent portrayal of what could happen without union or communist intervention. In a large panorama interior of a meatpacking factory, scores of laborers are hoisted as slabs of meat onto hooks as a grotesque display of exploitation and abuse.

Minor's editorial selections from 1923 to 1924 reflect his ongoing theory of the role of propaganda in art. Minor maintained that propaganda was crucial to the revolutionary struggle and deserved greater attention by the Communist movement. Propaganda as defined by the artist himself was "any expression of a concept of the universe, when there are two concepts in rivalry."¹² Minor's own illustrations and artistic selections were not merely chosen for their stated viewpoint, but also for their persuasive attacks upon competing forces. The defining difference between the early and late *Liberator's* political illustrations was their transformation from passive narrative messages to those designed to incite, provoke and assault. In its evolving depiction of the laborer, the *Liberator* circle served as chroniclers of labor and pioneered the labor cartoon as a form of proletarian art. In the early 1920s, the proletariat came to refer to a working class within a particular urban context, particularly an industrial working class that was manipulated and exploited by owners of industries.¹³

Despite the explicit Communist agenda in 1924, the *Liberator* continued to feature a striking variety of illustrations, cartoons, verse, and short stories, most completely apolitical. While some illustrations embraced specific party programs, the bulk of art continued to be generalized in nature. An example of this approach was the accompanying illustrations to Minor's article, "We Want a Labor Party" in the December 1922 issue. The article, characteristic of the type of didactic and partisan reportage of the late *Liberator*, criticizes the AFL and calls for an

¹² Minor, "Art As a Weapon in the Class Struggle," 5.

¹³ Suggs, *American Proletarian Culture*, 5.

organized labor party.¹⁴ Included in the article were two character studies of the Viennese bourgeoisie by Dehn, Frank Walts' circus study, "Midnight with Ponies in the Circus Stable" and Gropper's drawing of "Madonna and Child." These images do not relate to the article, nor are they political. The continued diversity of illustrations verifies Freeman's contention that the party did not intervene in matters of art. For both the *Liberator's* artistic circle and the Workers' Party, the continued presence of non-politicized art combined with communist inspired articles did not present any immediate contradiction.

The last issue of the magazine included an article titled, "The Reorganization of the Workers' Party," announcing the resolution of the Fifth Congress of the Communist International's new policy of Bolshevization. Begun in the years immediately following Lenin's death, Bolshevization sought a single, unified leadership designed to bring the American party closer to industrial workers.¹⁵ Bolshevization, a term which indirectly ordered loyalty to the Kremlin, was ultimately designed to strengthen Communist domination, leaving little room for experimentation or divergent opinions, and may explain in part the merger and subsequent demise of the *Liberator*. Where once the *Liberator* circle had thought Bolshevism prefigured a new humanism, the burgeoning bureaucratic apparatus now became more evident.

¹⁴ Minor, "We Want a Labor Party," *Liberator* 5, no. 11 (November-December 1922): 13-17.

¹⁵ The policy of getting into closer contact with workers within major industries, and of de-emphasizing alliances with leaders of electoral parties, prepared the CP for its role in the late 1930s. See James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 38 and Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, eds., *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1990), 148-149.

THE RED SCARE

During 1919 there occurred a series of highly suspicious and controversial events that focused public attention on the issue of radicalism. The first of these incidents was the Seattle general strike of January 21, 1919 when 35,000 Seattle shipyard workers struck for higher wages and shorter hours. Altogether in 1919 there were 3,600 strikes involving more than 400,000 workers. On May Day mysterious explosions occurred in various cities throughout the nation. The most publicized and spectacular of these events was the dynamiting of Attorney General Mitchell A. Palmer's home in Washington, D.C. No one was ever convicted of the bombing, although the evidence pointed to left-wing anarchists. In the fall of 1919, Attorney General Palmer launched a series of raids to pursue radicals, known as the "red raids" or "red scare." His initial targets were the IWW and immigrant radicals, specifically syndicalists and anarchists. In the summer of 1919 Palmer received from Congress a special appropriation of \$500,000 for the Justice Department to create a General Intelligence, or anti-radical division. The General Intelligence Division, forerunner of the FBI, had at its head a special assistant to the attorney general, the little known, J. Edgar Hoover. Palmer's announced crusade was to "drive every radical out of the country and bring the parlor Bolsheviks to their senses." The first arrests occurred on November 7, 1919 when federal agents raided the Union of Russian Workers' halls in twelve cities. In January 1920, Justice Department raids in twenty-three states netted some 5,000 radicals and non-radicals, communists and non-communists, aliens as well as native-born citizens, and another 1,000 in the next few weeks. ¹⁶

¹⁶ See Murray, *Red Scare, A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920*, 9. See also Peter H. Buckingham, *America's Sees Red: Anti-Communism in America, 1870s to 1980s: A Guide to Issues and References* (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 1988), and M.J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1990). The Bureau of Investigation, formed in 1908 was renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1935. The Bureau had few investigative duties until the advent of World War I. Following the formation of the special General Intelligence Division (GID), anti-radical component on April 1, 1919, Bureau agents were directed to gather all possible information regarding sedition. Reflecting these priorities, the GID

The "red scare" was largely the result of wartime developments. The rise of Bolshevism, the Seattle strikes, the riots, the bombs, organized labor, and the formation of the Communist parties were all contributing factors. The postwar desire for normalcy, the threat of radicalism and the nation's political and economic instability constituted still others. Also significant were the various investigations, and the sensationalism of the press. The postwar "red scare" was also encouraged by the shifting immigration patterns resulting in xenophobia. It was assumed that the root of the evil was the Bolshevik. After the Russian Revolution all radicals were suspected of being Bolsheviks and regardless of their various persuasions all placed into the same category. Radicals and the radical press professed complete innocence of the bombings and strike wave of 1919 and not one case of bombing violence was ever traced to a radical source. Investigations revealed, "at no place in all that nation-wide raiding of January 1920, were any weapons or explosive materials or destructive mechanism discovered from which an inference of projected crime private or political, could be reasonably drawn." The violence used during the raids was only one of many violations of constitutional liberties. Without warrants of arrest, suspected radicals were carried off to police stations, temporary prisons, and in some cases even deported.¹⁷

The effort not merely to vilify radicalism, but to identify it as foreign to America resulted in the passage of the Immigration Act of 1917. This Act, with its 1918 amendment provided for the deportation of any alien who advocated anarchism, syndicalism, violent revolution, or belonged to any organization that did. Under the Act's authority, aliens were arrested and detained and many deported. Deportation as an administrative matter was an immediate method

concentrated on communists and socialists, and within two years held files on some 450,000 persons. Domestic intelligence investigations continued unchecked into the early 1920s. See Kenneth O'Reilly, *Hoover and the Un-Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 17-18. Many private agencies, the National Security League, the American Defense Society, and the American Protective League, cooperated with the government and enlisted thousands of Americans as unofficial agents to help guard against subversion. Palmer appointed William J. Flynn, former head of the Secret Service and one of the nation's most noted detectives, as chief of the Department's Bureau of Investigation and Francis P. Garvan, also a famous investigator, as assistant attorney general. The Burns Detective Agency, the Pinkertons were private detectives also hired by Palmer. See Murray, 81.

¹⁷ See Murray, 80 and Post, *The Deportations Delirium of Nineteen-Twenty*, 90-93.

to deal with the radical menace because it required little in the way of constitutional protections. On December 21, 1919 the Buford, also known as the “Soviet Ark,” sailed from Ellis Island with 249 deportees. Statistics provided by Constantine Panunzio’s book, *The Deportation Cases of 1919-1920* indicated that the majority of those deported were Russians and Ukrainians, most of whom had been residing in the United States for six to ten years. The remainder were anarchists, including, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman. The mainstream American press carried sensational stories that depicted the shipload of deportees as a collection of bomb-throwers, caught in a destructive plot against the government. The February 1920 issue of the *Liberator* included Robinson’s, “The Sailing of the ‘Buford’” (fig. 56). In it, as the ship leaves New York Harbor, a long trail of smoke obscures the face of the Statue of Liberty. Robinson viewed the deportation as a trampling of American civil liberties. For the *Liberator* circle, the fundamental rights of American citizens was being seriously violated.¹⁸

Eastman called the raids a “frame-up” by those interested in “getting” the leaders of radicalism. He referred to the persecution of radicals as “white terror in America” and accused the government of czarist tactics. Eastman blamed both the “capitalist press” for biased reporting and the Wilson administration, claiming, “such an extreme measure of oppression could hardly have been adopted without his express consent.” Of the press, Eastman wrote: “For our newspapers from coast to coast, with hardly a dozen exceptions, make daily incitement to mob-violence, daily intimations that certain large classes of people are outside the protection of the law. These incitements and intimations are the stock-in-trade of those who shout the loudest about Americanism.” In the February 1920 article “Examples of Americanism,” Eastman questioned the rights of Americans: “We are not distinguished by freedom, but by the sanctimoniousness with which we institute the grossest forms of tyranny.” Eastman declared the raids unlawful and unconstitutional: “Their [American government] most conspicuous national characteristic, at the

¹⁸ Eastman, “Examples of Americanism,” *Liberator* 3, no. 2 (February 1920): 13-16.

present time at least, is contempt for personal liberty and an established custom of taking the law into their own hands whenever they feel like it." Police and federal officials paid minimal regard to civil liberties in the Palmer raids, often failed to obtain search warrants, held those arrested incommunicado, or subjected them to abuse.¹⁹

Despite the repressive climate, artists of the *Liberator* continued their attacks against the American government and their support of Russia. As events unfolded, the *Liberator* circle demonized Palmer, focusing on the criminality of his actions. The Attorney General was repeatedly portrayed as a corrupt outlaw and despised persecutor of the innocent. In Robinson's full-page drawing "Simon Legree Palmer" in the March 1920 issue, Palmer is literally cast as a cowboy outlaw (fig. 57). Simon Legree refers to the evil sadistic slave master from Harriet Beecher Stowe's nineteenth century story of the pre-civil war south *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Palmer, who holds a whip, takes aim at figures tied to a whipping post, labeled "Communist Labor Party and Communist Party." During the raids, the newly formed Communist groups faced the most drastic persecution from state authorities acting under the criminal syndicalism acts. On January 2, 1920 both the CP and CLP headquarters were raided in New York and more than 400 persons were arrested. A series of raids in January 1920 netted more than 5,000 suspected CP and CLP members. In New York, Benjamin Gitlow and Charles Ruthenberg were arrested and received sentences of five to ten years. Communists had no choice but to exist in secret and went underground. According to Harvey Klehr, there was little chance of a Communist uprising in the United States at the time and that Communists were not responsible for the bombings and had little to do with the strikes of 1919 and 1920. In the final analysis, the raids on the Communists accomplished their purpose. Communists destroyed their membership cards, and leaders adopted

¹⁹ See Eastman, editorial, *Liberator* 2, no. 7 (July 1919): 5-7; *Love and Revolution*, 135-136; and "Examples of Americanism," *Liberator* 3, no. 2 (February 1920): 13-16.

pseudonyms when writing in the party press. Within a year Communist membership fell by eighty percent.²⁰

Artists responded strongly to the issue of radical persecution because it dealt with the greater issue of civil liberties and the violation of the very codes of the American system. Artists may not have agreed on the Russian Revolution, Bolshevism, or Communism, but were united in their defense of civil liberties. Art Young best captures the reaction of radicals to the raids in his February 1920 cartoon, which contains the Statue of Liberty being cuffed and dragged by Palmer to “courts, jails and exile”(fig. 58). Particularly poignant in Young’s cartoon are the fallen and discarded papers once held by Liberty that read, “Tolerance,” “Free Speech,” “Hospitality,” “The Constitution” and the “Declaration of Independence.” Young did not spare other agencies involved with the raids, and included figures representing the Department of Justice, Congress, Secret Service, Agents, Legion, Preacher and Press. The image serves as a compendium of the “red raids” and expresses the indignation experienced by the radical community. Young was aggressive in his attack against Palmer and again exposed the hypocrisy of Palmer’s campaign in the June 1920 issue. In the cartoon, Palmer addresses a Department of Justice Agent cowering in the background, “Say, look here—if something doesn’t happen pretty soon, I’m a ruined man.” Palmer holds a newspaper whose headlines read: “No Riots at Radical Meeting,” “Bomb Discovered in U.S. Mail—A Baseball,” and “Rich Man Shot at By IWW, Shot at Himself.” Young and other contributors found humor in the absurdity surrounding the hysteria. In the February 1920 issue, Gropper’s five-framed cartoon, “Rounding Up the Reds,” expresses both the humor and tragedy of the raids. Gropper satirizes the process of an alleged “dangerous red” as he goes from being raided, arrested, interrogated, and brought to court, where the bible is brought in

²⁰ Klehr, *The American Communist Movement*, 26-29. Membership in the Communist and Communist Labor Party dropped from 50,000-60,000 in 1919 to approximately 10,000 in 1920. See John Graham, ed., *Yours for the Revolution" The Appeal to Reason, 1895-1922* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 286-288.

as evidence of seditious literature. Included in February 1920, issue was Howard Brubaker's small verse: "Who is it worries all the Feds, And fills the Times with scary heads, And murders people in their beds? The Reds."

Becker's June 1920 illustration, "Dealing With the Reds," portrays Palmer menacingly pointing at a figure identified as "Post." Post was the Assistant Secretary of Labor from 1913-1921 and was a formidable critic of Palmer. He judged numerous cases of unfair arrest and imprisonment and intervened in more than 1,600 cases, ordering wholesale cancellations of warrants and by April 1920 had released almost half of those apprehended in the January raids. In 1923 he wrote a personal narrative of his experience, *The Deportations Delirium of Nineteen-Twenty*, wherein he exposed the red crusade "as a stupendous and cruel fake." Post revealed that agents of the Department of Justice, saturated with "labor spy" interests of "masterful corporations," used the Bureau of Immigration "pretty much at their own will and for their own ends." Post concluded that the detectives acted with "scornful indifference to the personal liberty clauses of the American Constitution." Post's liberal policy led to several congressional investigations of the Labor Department and to an attempt to impeach Post.²¹

By 1921 the "red scare" was over. Its decline began with public protest against the excesses of the raids, investigations, and deportations. The unprecedented scale of the Palmer raids—America had never seen anything resembling 6,000 mass political arrests—strained credulity and finally served to crystallize response. The international trends that had engendered fears of revolution receded. The Spartacist revolt in Berlin failed and anti-Communist forces overthrew the Communist regimes in Bavaria, Hungary, Latvia, Finland, Estonia and Lithuania. As information about the arrests emerged, the conclusion became unavoidable that Palmer and Hoover had trampled on substantial parts of the constitution. Scholarship explained the "red scare" as a movement of national repression dedicated to the removal of the twin cancers of

²¹ See Murray, 250 and Post, *The Deportation Delirium of Nineteen Twenty*, 159 & 311.

foreignness and radicalism from the American body politic.²² As a result of the red scare, the anti-radical crusade lost much of its fervor and by 1924 membership in the Socialist Party was drastically reduced with a similar decline in the Communist movement.

Even though the hysteria ended in 1921, the Department of Justice continued its pursuit and persecution of alleged radicals and aliens. Likewise, the *Liberator* did not abandon its vilification of Palmer and Department of Justice tactics. As the years progressed, the public gradually learned the truth surrounding Palmer's illegal raids. The *Liberator* exposed the William J. Burns Detective agency for engaging in "framed-up raids, planting evidence, picking pockets, trading in Government secrets, faking reports, writing dynamite and death threats, forging signatures of radical organizations, and working to provoke bomb-making." The June 1921 issue included Becker's drawing, "Rehearsing the 'Frame-up,'" which depicts a group of men huddling at a table, holding documents that read "Testimony of eyewitness to be learned by heart" and "Incriminating literature to be found on person of ____." The absence of specificity alludes to the ongoing corruption and frame-ups that still persisted. The *Liberator* was the first magazine to publicize the suspicious circumstances surrounding the arrest and impending murder trial of Nicholas Sacco and Bartholomew Vanzetti in the December 1920 issue. The article accused the Department of Justice of covering up its own crimes by trying to kill "two innocent men." Sacco and Vanzetti were Italian immigrants, anarchists and labor organizers who had been framed for murder and robbery by Department of Justice operatives in what would later become one of the most highly publicized and sensational cases in American radical history. In the next four years, the *Liberator* continued to report on the plight of the two men and became one of the earliest exponents of the fund for the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee in New York. In

²² Julian F. Jaffe, *Crusade Against Radicalism: New York During the Red Scare, 1914-1924* (Port Washington and London: Kennikat Press, 1972), 238-239.

addition to Sacco and Vanzetti, the *Liberator* circle carried on its campaign to rally support for political prisoners who had been arrested during the raids.²³

²³ See "The Bomb Business," *Liberator* 6, no. 3 (March 1923): 5; Klein, *Foreigners*, 60-61; Art Shields, "Palmer's Last Crime," *Liberator* 3, no. 12 (December 1920): 24; and Minor, "One Dead—Two in Danger," *Liberator* 4, no. 3 (March 1921): 9-10. Minor visited Vanzetti and Sacco at the Charleston jail in Boston in 1923 and drew an image of the two men in their prison cell (fig. 14). See North, *Robert Minor*, 145. For further information regarding the case, see Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c. 1991).

CENSORSHIP

Dell captured the mood of 1919 when he wrote in the *Liberator's* January editorial: "This magazine goes to two classes of readers: those who are in jail, and those who are not." Repressive government censorship had brought about the death of the *Masses* and the birth of the *Liberator*; censorship continued to play a key role in defining the magazine. On September 19, 1918, as a result of charges made by Palmer, Reed was arrested for a seditious speech and indicted for "willfully, knowingly, and feloniously uttering scurrilous and abusive language" about the Siberian expedition of American troops. Department of Justice agents accused Reed's magazine, *Revolutionary Age* of being a camouflage for a "Russian newspaper" and the "official organ of the Bolsheviki." Palmer was prepared to demonstrate that pro-Germans, pacifists, and Bolsheviks were one and the same and accused Reed of being an agent for the Russian government. Reed was indicted for treason and fled to Russia the following year, where he died in October 1920. Reed, Louise Bryant and Rhys Williams, all contributors to the *Liberator* were named as chief Bolshevik propagandists in the United States. Irwin Granich changed his name to Mike Gold and Gropper fled to Cuba as a direct result of the raids.²⁴

During the raids, Crystal Eastman's name appeared on lists of "dangerous Reds," spied upon by the Bureau of Investigation. In addition to her work with the *Liberator*, Crystal, along with Roger Baldwin founded the American Civil Liberties Bureau in 1917 and organized the First Feminist Congress in the United States on March 1, 1919. In the early winter of 1919, Max and Crystal Eastman undertook a speaking tour in the midst of the raids and were in Seattle during its steel strike. A local Cleveland newspaper reported that Department of Justice agents and the

²⁴ See Dell, "What are you Doing out There?" *Liberator* 2, no. 11 (December 1919): 14. For information regarding Reed's censorship during the raids, see Hicks, *John Reed: The Making of a Revolutionary*, 314-15, Reed, "The Great Bolshevik Conspiracy!" *Liberator* 1, no. 12 (February 1919): 32, and Robert A. Rosenstone, *Romantic Revolutionary: A Biography of John Reed* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 362.

American Protective League hunted Max and Crystal with arrest warrants following a "seditious" speech. In addition, the Bureau of Investigation compiled a 369-page file on Max Eastman, whom they judged to be "one of the most dangerous radical socialists in America." The Bureau of Investigation and Michigan police also raided a meeting of Communist leaders at Bridgeman in Michigan on August 22, 1922. Ruthenberg was among seventeen arrested on the charge of violating the Michigan criminal syndicalist law, specifically that of "unlawful assembly." Ruthenberg was found guilty and served three of his ten-year sentence. Minor was among forty that the authorities hunted after the Bridgeman raid and he was forced into hiding shortly afterward.²⁵

While radicalism was nationwide, left-wing groups were largely based in New York. The New York State Legislature responded to the "red scare" by authorizing State Senator Clayton Lusk to form an investigative committee on "seditious activities" and to gather information that would be the basis for restrictive legislation. In 1919, the Lusk Committee embarked on one of the most thorough investigations of New York radicalism. The Lusk report included extensive lists of suspected radicals, socialists, Bolsheviks, intellectual sympathizers and of "parlor Bolsheviks." Among those investigated were the Rand School of Social Science in New York, which functioned as a workers' university and attempted to bridge the gap between the intellectual leadership of the party and its rank and file. The school was raided by a Lusk Committee operative and was accused of being a distribution point for Bolshevik literature and

²⁵ See Cook, *Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution*, 22; Judith Schwarz, *Radical Feminists of Heterodoxy: Greenwich Village 1912-1940* (Norwich: New Victoria Publishers, Inc., 1986), 47; and Eastman, "Adventures for Free Speech," *Liberator* 1, no. 11 (January 1919): 50. The Cleveland paper claimed that Max Eastman was with his "wife," who addressed the audience, but this was inaccurate. All evidence indicates it was Crystal who accompanied Max on his speaking tour. In addition, Max was estranged from his first wife, Ida Rauh in 1919. Eastman saved the press clipping, 8 December 1919, Max Eastman Papers. See also, Nickle, 3.

fined three thousand dollars for publishing an anti-war pamphlet. Not only did several *Liberator* contributors teach at the school, but many attended classes as well.²⁶

Even though the *Liberator* had taken a more cautionary tone in its first year, by 1919, during the “red scare” crisis, the editors and contributors were surprisingly outspoken in their criticism of the American government, attacks upon violators of civil liberty, and support for Bolshevism. In 1919 the magazine included on its covers for the first and only time a series of naturalistic portraits, among them Lincoln, Debs, Liebknecht, and Lenin. Since all these figures were considered heroes in the radical movement, they represent the more politicized nature of the magazine that year. In fact, 1919 was one of the most active years for the publication; the editors took daring steps to promote Bolshevism, the political reporting was diverse, topical and opinionated, the editorials more forceful, and the art and poetry continued to occupy a substantial part of the magazine. Eastman wondered why the *Liberator* office was not raided and concluded: “Wilson failed so miserably in his two previous efforts to put us in jail. We were most inconveniently and awfully American.” The second *Masses* acquittal trial of September 1918 served to restore Eastman’s bravado and strengthen his conviction that “those who identify themselves with the struggle of the working class have a reliable interest in building a free and just society” in the tradition of American radicalism. After two acquittals, the government may have been reluctant to pursue yet another unsuccessful court battle. Ironically, the *Liberator* could well have been immune from prosecution during the very height of the “red raids.” In January 1919 the magazine changed its initial masthead from “a great radical magazine of America” to “a journal of revolutionary progress.” While no documentation exists explaining the change, censorship was not a factor.²⁷ In September 1921 the magazine reported that the Solicitor General

²⁶ See Suggs, 41. Mrs. Carrie D. Rand, the wealthy mother-in-law of the Iowa Christian socialist, George D. Herron, founded the school in 1906. See Jaffe, 15-16. See also Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 137.

²⁷ Both of Eastman’s quotes are from *Love and Revolution*, 137. The *Liberator*’s identification with revolutionary change in Russia may have inspired the new masthead.

of the Post Office announced that all publishers whose slogan was “revolution and not reform” were considered outlaw. While the *New York Call* was in litigation over the use of the title, the *Liberator* managed to avoid any repercussions and this fact serves to substantiate the magazine’s apparent immunity from prosecution.

In the January 1919 issue, Eastman was particularly outspoken in his denunciation of censorship tactics and included a list of demands to the government. Among them were the right of free speech, free press, free assemblage and “that the American people have direct access to the sources of information,” rather than propaganda, filtered through “the brain of George Creel.” In 1917 as part of its control of public expression in wartime, the United States Government established a Bureau of Cartoons. In June 1918 the Committee on Public Information, under the chairmanship of George Creel took over the Bureau of Cartoons. The Bureau of Cartoons was designed to mobilize “the scattered cartoon power of the country for constructive war-work.” The Bureau published a weekly “Bulletin for Cartoonists” which was sent to every cartoonist in the United States. These bulletins contained subjects for cartoons, as suggested by the United States Food Administration, the Treasury Department, and other government agencies.²⁸

In 1919 the Bureau of Cartoons continued to propagate images of patriotism under the guidance of George J. Hecht, one of Creel’s propaganda assistants. While none of the *Liberator* artists succumbed to the pressure of Creel’s drive, many were dismissed, or censored from mainstream publications; such was the case with Robinson, Minor and Gropper. In a climate, which threatened their very livelihood, radical illustrators responded to censorship by striking at the very core of the problem—the press and the notion of free speech. Typical of artists’ responses was Gropper’s October 1918 cartoon (fig. 59) of a kiosk lined with newspaper

²⁸ See Eastman, editorial, *Liberator* 1, no. 11 (January 1919): 5. During WWI George Creel was President Wilson’s Director of Information, generally regarded as an unofficial wartime censor. The Committee on Public Information was in existence from April 1917 to June 1919. See George Creel, *How we Advertise America* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1920), 226. For further

headlines reading, “Fake News”, “Fib,” “Read the Daily Bluff,” and “Lies.” The caption states: Citizen: “I want a newspaper that contains the whole truth.” The System: “Mister, your ration has been reduced to 5% in each newspaper.” Freedom of speech was again at stake in Gropper’s May 1919 cartoon, “Glimpses of American Freedom.” The six-framed cartoon is a scathing critique of the American government’s mishandling of events in 1919, from the strikes to the deportation delirium. In the fifth frame captioned, “Free Speech” a huge figure of a capitalist restrains a helpless kneeling man. Likewise, in Young’s April 1920 cartoon “Free Speech” a female allegory lies tattered and helpless on the ground and says in disbelief, “Why, but I’m Freedom—I’m an American!”

Aside from a few scattered protests appearing in the liberal and radical papers, the mainstream press applauded the raids. The liberal, socialist, and radical press voiced the only denunciations. The Department of Justice supplied the comprehensive news stories that went out from Washington, principally through the Associated Press. A clipping from the *New York Times* “Palmer Pledges War on Radicals” serves as a typical example of anti-red hysteria perpetuated by the general press. “The ‘red’ movement,” explained the article, “represents a specific doctrine namely, the ‘introduction’ of dictatorship the world-over by force and violence.” Bolshevism, according to the author was organized “against democracy” and was another name for “violence and criminality.” To further incite terror, the article concluded that Bolshevism “advocates the destruction of all ownership in property, the destruction of all religion and belief in God.” Horror stories of every kind filled the columns of American newspapers, virtually anything seemed credible to the American public driven to political hysteria. In addition to the already mounting fears generated by the press, the *New York World* reported that radical forces had recently embarked “on a great new field of revolutionary endeavor, the education through agitation of the

information, see William Murrell, *A History of American Graphic Humor: 1865-1938*, vol. 2 (New York: Whitney Museum by MacMillan Co., 1938), 197.

southern Negro into the mysteries and desirability of revolutionary Bolshevism.”²⁹

²⁹ See “Palmer Pledges War on Radicals,” *New York Times* 31 December [1919] and “New York Bolshevists Divided But Both Groups work Night and Day Spreading Propaganda,” *The World*, 4 June 1919, press clippings, Max Eastman Papers.

RACE

The “red scare” became for African Americans the “red summer” of 1919, a nightmare of bloody riots and violent death. There were seven large race riots in urban centers throughout the country, the worst ones in Washington D.C., Chicago, and Arkansas. The Chicago riot of July was perhaps the worst with thirty-eight reported dead and more than five hundred injured.³⁰ Many people were lynched during the riots and the statistics rose dramatically in 1919. Scott Nearing, a socialist instructor at the Rand School and contributor to the *Liberator* from 1923 to 1924 studied the African American problem and wrote *Black America* in 1929, a survey of the African American’s status in America. Nearing observed that the years surrounding World War I were “an era of enlarged Negro race consciousness” which “forced the Negro into a position they were compelled to organize for self-defense and self-advancement.”³¹ The economic imbalance, coupled with the South’s relentless racial oppression, propelled African Americans toward the greater opportunities and justice afforded elsewhere in the nation. Wartime demand for goods and the restrictions upon immigration created an open labor market and led to an accelerated migration of African Americans to urban industrial areas of the North, known as the “great migration.” African Americans entered jobs traditionally held by white European immigrants and posed a threat in job competition. With the rising labor turmoil of 1919, African Americans were being used as strikebreakers in industrial disputes. Migration out of the South and the industrial opportunities of war production pushed the issue of race forcefully out of the South and brought the African American into confrontation with the capitalist system.

³⁰ For a full discussion, see William M. Tuttle Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

³¹ Scott Nearing, *Black America* (New York: Vanguard, 1929), 256. Census estimated that between 1916 and 1928, 1,200,000 African Americans migrated from the South to the North. See Nearing 74.

After the war, several African American organizations began attracting an increasing number of followers and became crucial to race consciousness in the 1920s. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), established in 1910 was the leading African American movement in 1919. W.E.B Du Bois, a sociologist from Atlanta University became the director of publicity and research and editor of their magazine, *Crisis*. James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) of Jacksonville became the executive director of the NAACP in 1920 and Walter Francis White (1893-1955) of Atlanta joined the organization in New York as assistant secretary. Other groups contested the NAACP's leadership among them the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), led by Marcus Garvey. The UNIA was a militant organization founded in Jamaica in 1914, and launched in Harlem in 1917; its aims included repatriating African Americans. Beginning his crusade in New York during World War I, Garvey planned to lead a triumphant return of his people to Africa.³² Cyril V. Brigg's revolutionary organization, the African Blood Brotherhood with its publication, *Crusader* was founded in 1919 and dedicated to political, economic and social equality. Departing from Garvey's plan for a Negro state in Africa, he advanced the idea that setting up an independent African American nation on American territory could solve the race problem. The African Blood Brotherhood would be the first African American organization associated with the Communist movement. The "New Negro" emerged toward the end of the war with the publication of the *Messenger*, founded in 1917. Editors Chandler Owen and A. Philip Randolph defined their "new

³² Wilfred A Domingo, a Jamaican nationalist and journalist was instrumental in shaping Marcus Garvey's ideas on race consciousness and later fostered Garvey's political career in New York. Abandoning Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1919, Domingo became active in Cyril Brigg's African Blood Brotherhood in the early 1920s. Another group known as the "National Brotherhood Workers of America" during its brief existence from 1919 to 1921 attempted to federate all the existing black unions and to "serve as an agency for organizing those Negroes who did not belong to a union." See Cooper, *Passion of Claude McKay*, 326. For further information on the African American experience during this time, see Theodore Draper, *Black Nationalism*, (New York: Viking Press, 1969), Wilson Record, *Race and Radicalism: The NAACP and the Communist Party in Conflict* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964), and Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983).

Negro” in terms of political and social equality and presented a socialist alternative to the reformism of the NAACP.³³ Two of the earliest African American Communists came from the *Messenger* group, Otto E. Huiswoud and Lovett Fort-Whitmen.

The *Liberator* was the only magazine dedicated in part to the rights of African Americans that went to a primarily white audience. While its predecessor, the *Masses* sought to preserve ethnic diversity in its treatment of African Americans, it did not conform to any coherent ideological perspective. Portraits of the African American ranged widely from caricature to celebration.³⁴ Although modern critics have accused the *Masses* of depicting African Americans as primitive and perpetuating racial stereotypes, contemporaries did not necessarily agree. Before joining the *Liberator* staff, Claude McKay wrote of the *Masses*: “I felt a special interest in its sympathetic and iconoclastic items about the Negro.” Discussing the work of Stuart Davis, McKay wrote: “I thought they were the most superbly sympathetic drawings of Negroes done by an American. And to me they have never been surpassed.”³⁵ Stuart Davis drew an illustration of the African American veteran after the war, “The Return of the Soldier” for the March 1919 *Liberator* (fig. 60). Not only was the subject sensitively treated, but also conveyed a depth of understanding of the veteran’s experience. A solitary man is silhouetted against a flat background consisting of a single potted plant and keyboards. The treatment of figure and space suggests

³³ A. Philip Randolph initially joined Marcus Garvey, whom he later opposed. Attorney General Mitchell Palmer dubbed him “the most dangerous black in America.” Randolph remained an independent socialist within and outside the official labor movement. See Mary Jo Buhle et. al., eds., *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1990).

³⁴ According to O’Neill, the depiction of the African American was considered tasteless and perhaps even offensive for contemporary standards. However, he claimed the editors were ignorant of it. See O’Neill, 181. When the *Masses* began supporting the NAACP crusade against lynching in 1916, it gradually took a more serious political approach to the race issue. For discussion of race issues in the *Masses*, see Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia*, 160-167 and Zurier, 15-17. McKible claims that Dell’s review (March 1918) of James Weldon Johnson’s *Fifty Years and Other Poems* reinforced racial stereotyping and set the standard for the *Liberator*’s approach to African Americans for its first three of four years, see McKible 193-197. McKible has neglected to consider the *Liberator*’s visual imagery, Eastman’s political editorial policy, and the magazine’s evolving historical circumstances, particularly in contrast to that of the *Masses*.

³⁵ McKay, *A Long Way From Home*, 28-29.

isolation and a disassociation from the familiar. Davis' illustration of the soldier is rich, complex and relatively free from racial stereotype.

Unlike the pre-war *Masses*, the *Liberator* provided a more serious and political approach to the African American, particularly in its later years when the Comintern took a special interest in race issues. The title of the magazine, dedicated to William Lloyd Garrison's, the *Liberator*, was a testimony to the magazine's commitment to bringing the rights of African Americans to the forefront of the national agenda. In Eastman's evocation of Garrison, he pledged the *Liberator* to the same motto that opened Garrison's *Liberator*, "Our Country is the World—Our Countrymen are Mankind." The magazine ran frequent pieces addressing the political and social conditions of African Americans, as well as showcasing the work of African American poets. In Freeman's memoir, he felt that the *Liberator* circle "represented that ideal society which we all wanted, that society in which no racial barriers could possible exist."³⁶

Eastman was not a passive observer to the race problem but rather advocated militant tactics. As early as 1913, in response to a racial war in Georgia in which hundreds of African Americans were driven from their homes, the editor urged them to arm themselves and when attacked, to fight back: "When we speak for militant resistance against tyranny, we speak for democracy and justice." Eastman consistently maintained the necessity for African Americans to organize and fight against white oppression. In 1919 he wrote: "I can see absolutely no end to the race riots except either the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Negroes, or a success on their part in compelling the respect of the whites by force and organization." Just what structure that organization would take became the subject of many theoretical debates in the 1920s. During its first year, the *Liberator* continued the *Masses* tradition of supporting the NAACP and published

³⁶ Freeman, 246. In the second issue of April 1918, the editors reprinted Mrs. William Lloyd Garrison's letter to the publication expressing her gratitude and endorsement of the magazine. See, *Liberator* 1, no. 2 (April 1918), 5.

the work of James Weldon Johnson, executive secretary of NAACP, and other leaders such as Walter White, and Mary White Ovington.³⁷

Liberator artists treated the African American issue with compassion and refrained from racial stereotype or caricature. Portrait studies, while stylistically diverse revealed a careful study of physiognomy as in John Barber's contour drawing of "After Church in Harlem" in the July 1921 issue (fig. 61). Gropper responded to the plight of African Americans in his illustration for the May 1921 issue "America Leads the World." The chilling scene depicts a distant view of a lynched body; crows fly overhead as hooded figures of the Ku Klux Klan descend the scaffold after the crime. In the 1930s, the darkly silhouetted hanged figure that symbolized lynch violence became a frequent convention in lynching scenes.³⁸ Becker also attacked the Klan in his drawing for the July 1921 issue. In a scene of mayhem, a cowboy aims his gun at a fallen African American male in the foreground. In the background, fires burn, Klan members flee, as more African Americans come under assault. This drawing accompanied an article describing the alleged attack of a white woman by an African American male in Tulsa, Oklahoma, resulting in local riots that focused national attention on the community. Becker again exposed the atrocities perpetuated by the Klan in his September 1921 drawing, "The True Purpose of the Ku Klux Klan"(fig. 62). The scene portrays a group of hooded members abducting a male figure labeled, "Labor Leader" and forcing him toward a smoking cauldron. Of interest to this image was that the victim was not an African American. The transformation from the politicized image that

³⁷ See Eastman, "Niggers and Night Riders," *Masses*, February 1913, 6 and Eastman to Deshon, ALS, 29 July 1919, Max Eastman Papers.

³⁸ Lynching became an important subject for writers of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and a subject for visual artists in the 1930s. In early 1935, both the NAACP and the JRC held competing art exhibitions that not only condemned lynching but also supported their legislative objectives. For a thorough discussion of the subject, see Marlene Park "Lynching and Antilynching: Art and Politics in the 1930s," *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 18 (1993): 311-365 and Helen Langa, "Two Antilynching Art Exhibitions: Politicized Viewpoints, Racial Perspectives, Gendered Constraints," *American Art*, vol. 13, no.1 (Spring 1999): 11-39.

indicts the Klan's mistreatment of African Americans to the Klan's mistreatment of labor reflects the new editorial direction of the magazine.

By the end of 1919, the *Liberator* no longer published the work of NAACP members. The NAACP was skeptical of the Russian Revolution, regarding it inappropriate to the race. As a major spokesman for Bolshevism, Eastman had turned his full attention to the Russian model and began advocating racial organization through the proletarian movement, not through African American movements. "It is to be hoped, however, the Negroes will realize that the economic problem, the problem of exploitation and class-rule in general, lies in the heart of the race problem," wrote Eastman. While not mentioning the Communist parties per se, Eastman strongly suggested they were the solution to the race problem, "and that it is more important for them [African Americans] to join revolutionary organizations of the general proletariat than the special organizations of their race."³⁹ The special concerns of the African American were subordinated to the greater goal of a successful labor movement and ultimately Eastman looked to the Russian example and subsumed race under class. While the *Liberator* circle condemned the action of the Ku Klux Klan, they did not propose any concrete solution to the immediate problem. It was not until Minor assumed editorship in 1923 that there was any aggressive campaign directed against the Klan or lynch law.

One of the major factors for the continuous interest in African Americans at the *Liberator* was the presence of Claude McKay. McKay began contributing to the magazine in July 1919 and became executive editor from January 1922 to July 1922. As the solitary African American editor on a predominantly white radical magazine, McKay's presence lent credence to the staff's insistence that the *Liberator* was working for genuine racial equality and justice and he brought a much-needed sense of the complexities of race to the magazine. Eastman first published McKay's poetry in a two-page spread in the July 1919 issue. The poems expressed the African American

³⁹ Eastman, "Race and Class," *Liberator* 2, no. 9 (September 1919): 7.

mood of desperation and defiance in the summer of 1919 and not only condemned racial injustices, but also renounced the entire social, economic, and political order that had allowed these injustices to occur. McKay's poem, "If We Must Die," called for militant self-defense against white rioters. McKay sought a restructured Western civilization in which African Americans could live in dignity and freedom. Like Eastman, McKay felt the only solution for race equality was through a restructuring of society by means of the proletarian movement. In his essay on Irish nationalism "How Black and Green Sees Red," he wrote, "I see no other way of upward struggle for colored people, but the way of the working-class movement." In his essay he began with the premise that an oppressed race and a colonized nation shared commonalities and he reminded readers that class was always one of many considerations for a liberation movement. McKay did not belong to either the middle-class protest tradition of the NAACP or to the nationalist camp of Garvey's Back to Africa movement. McKay was ideologically closest to a small but articulate group of African American intellectuals, then only just emerging in Harlem, known as the "Black Reds" who were convinced that race interests would be best served by international socialism.⁴⁰

During McKay's editorship, he sought to expose racial discrimination and cultivate equality among races. Gropper and McKay had attended the Theatre guild's presentation of

⁴⁰ Altogether McKay published forty-two poems in the *Liberator*. His articles, short stories and book reviews numbered fewer—only eleven appeared between June 1921 and August 1922. See Cooper, *Claude McKay Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance*, 154. For an analysis of McKay's contribution to the Harlem Renaissance, see also David Driskell, et al., *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams for Studio Museum in Harlem, 1987). For further information on McKay's role as an editor, see chapter one and two. See also McKay, "How Black Sees Green and Red," *Liberator* 4, no. 6 (June 1921): 17-21. McKay was ideologically at odds with the NAACP and while he admitted that the organization had made strides, "it was doing nothing to bring black and white labor together in a revolutionary front," and criticized their middle-class orientation and lack of sympathy with Bolshevism. See Cooper, *Claude McKay Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance*, 143. McKay accused Garvey and the UNIA of being "incapable of understanding the Negro-problem" and setting back the race for many years. He found Garvey's leadership totally deficient, and accused Garvey of repudiating "all the fundamentals of the black worker's struggle." See McKay, "Garvey as a Negro Moses," *Liberator* 5, no. 4 (April 1922): 8-9. Cooper reported that Eastman dropped by the *Liberator* offices while a Black Reds meeting was in progress and was alarmed by the prospect that such gatherings might provoke the

Leonid Andreyev's "He who Gets Slapped." As a courtesy, the press usually sat in the front row parquet; however, McKay and Gropper were placed on the second floor balcony, behind a post, where they could neither see nor hear the performance. McKay's review of the play in the May 1922 issue recounted his experience and became an impassioned denunciation of racial segregation in New York theaters. Discrimination was again reported in the June 1922 issue. The city police, who objected to McKay and other African Americans dancing with white women, raided a *Liberator* fund-raising ball. Gropper exposed the absurdity of police race bias in his illustration, "The Crime Wave"(fig. 33). The same issue included an article on lynching in Texas and was accompanied by three portrait studies. One by Niles Spencer of a "Negro Girl" (fig. 9) another by Hugo Gellert of a "Negro Boy and the last by Maurice Sterne of a "Caucasian Boy." All three sketches were sensitive and accurate studies of physiognomy with no trace of distortion or caricature. The careful editorial selection of these studies humanizes and celebrates ethnic diversity, eradicates racial stereotypes and thereby focuses on a common humanity.

McKay's last article for the *Liberator* in the August 1922 issue was a review of T.S. Stribling's *Birthright*. The review actually became a warning to his radical friends not to ignore "the ugly fact" that the suffering of the African American worker was relatively greater than that of the white worker. Above all, he warned that radicals themselves were often inclined to racism when it suited them. "And so it is not only the birthright of the Negro radical to educate the black worker," wrote McKay, "but it is also his duty to interpret him to the uninformed white radical who is prone to accept the colorful fiction rather than the stark reality of the Negro's struggle for full social and economic freedom."⁴¹ These remarks suggest McKay's disillusionment with the *Liberator* staff and reflect the tensions on the magazine, which ultimately led to his resignation on July 1922. McKay's position as an African American concerned with pushing forward an African

government once again to take a action against him and cautioned against any more meetings at the offices. See Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance*, 143.

⁴¹ McKay, "Birthright," *Liberator* 5, no. 8 (August 1922): 15-16.

American radical perspective on a predominantly white journal created for him problems that figured prominently as an unspoken though underlying reason for his departure.⁴²

A year later, McKay would write *Negroes in America*, 1923 (published in Russia) exposing the lack of understanding among committed radicals with African American concerns. In the original draft, he had voiced his dissatisfaction with the *Liberator*. His frankness resulted in a heated correspondence with Eastman that revealed the social, cultural and ideological differences that existed between even the closest white and African American radicals in the United States. McKay admitted that the race issue was incidental to his leaving, but he had seen that “the leading minds” of the *Liberator* did not understand the revolutionary implications of the racial struggle in America or abroad. McKay argued that Eastman was mistaken to think that the *Liberator* group had ever arrived at any agreement about its policy on race or for that matter on the issue of class struggle. He wrote: “I never once thought you grasped fully the class struggle significance of national and racial problem . . . the atmosphere of the *Liberator* did not make for serious discussion on any of the real problems of Capitalist Society much less the Negro.” In Eastman’s rebuttal, he maintained that McKay had tried to introduce more race material than the other *Liberator* editors thought wise, but that their objections had been merely tactical. As a result of their written argument, McKay deleted from the published version of his manuscript all details relating to his resignation from the *Liberator*. Despite their disagreement, Eastman and McKay continued their friendship.⁴³

On September 1922 McKay departed for Russia with funds raised by Crystal Eastman. That same year McKay’s first collection of poems, *Harlem Shadows*, was published in America,

⁴² Cooper, *Claude McKay Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance*, 162.

⁴³ See McKay, *Negry v Amerike* (The Negroes of America”) trans. by P. Okhrimenko (Moscow and Petrograd: Gosizdat, 1923), as cited in Cooper, *The Passion of Claude McKay*, 77-78; McKay to Eastman, ALS, 3 April 1923; Eastman to McKay, ALS, Spring 1923 and 12 April 1923; and McKay to Eastman, ALS, 18 May 1923, Max Eastman Papers. For an analysis of the letters, see Cooper, *Claude McKay Rebel Sojourn in the Harlem Renaissance*, 162-163.

becoming the first book of poems published by one of the new Harlem Renaissance poets.⁴⁴ Although McKay had no influence in the American Communist party, nor any official invitation from the Soviet government, he attended the Fourth Congress of the Third Communist International as an unscheduled special delegate. At the Congress, held in November 1922, McKay accused American Communists of discrimination: "they must first free themselves from their attitude towards the Negroes before they can succeed in reaching the Negroes with any kind of radical propaganda."⁴⁵ McKay pointed out that the socialists and communists of America were not willing to deal with the race issue and that prejudice continued among their ranks. By 1925, McKay had concluded that the Comintern had failed the African American and he ceased all active participation within the international Communist movement.

On the whole, the Socialist parties avoided dealing with the African American issue and equated it with the general social problem. The early American communists carried on in the socialist tradition, showing no special interest in the race issue. There is no record of African American participation in the foundation of the American Communist movements of 1919. The Comintern did not officially address the race issue until November 1922 at the Fourth Congress of the Third International, adopting the motto of the right of "self-determination" as part of a single world racial movement. "The Negro Commission," the first appointed congress of the Comintern included the "Thesis on the Negro Question" at the Fourth Congress of the Third Communist International. The Comintern based this conception on a single world racial movement. The CP tried to establish a balance between black and white integration, or "assimilation" and Black Nationalism through "self-determination." The right to self-determination as an independent state also included the right to governmental separation but

⁴⁴ Driskell, 169.

⁴⁵ Quoted by Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia: The Formative Period*, 326. Cooper reprints "Report on the Negro Question," *International Press Correspondence*, vol. 3 (5 January 1923):16-17, with a slightly different translation. See Cooper, *The Passion of Claude McKay*, 91-95.

African Americans themselves did not want to separate from the existing governmental federation with the United States. The African American issue came up again at the Fifth Congress in 1924. The right of self-determination was supplemented by another slogan: "National equality for all national groups and races." By 1924 American Communists tried to win African American support through the labor movement. The Workers' Party devoted a section of its program to "The Race Problems." It promised to fight for African American economic, political, and social equality, to destroy the barrier of "race prejudice," and to unite African American and white workers.⁴⁶

In the 1920s, American Communists attracted a few African American radicals such as Otto Huiswoud, a Caribbean immigrant from the *Messenger* group, who was the first African American delegate to the Comintern and the African Blood Brotherhood. In 1919 the African Blood Brotherhood, under the leadership of Cyril Briggs combined Communism with its prior program of African American Nationalism to become the party's first African American front group. Uncomfortable with racial nationalism, in 1925 Moscow abandoned the Brotherhood and replaced it with the more class-oriented American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC), led by Lovett Fort-Whitman. The ANLC touched off a prolonged theoretical debate on the African American question in the Communist movement. Nonetheless, the ANLC neither reached nor influenced

⁴⁶ The CP devoted a paragraph to race in its first program that year, maintaining that the issue was simply an aspect of the plight of unskilled workers in general. The CLP ignored the subject altogether. One of the topics on the agenda of the Comintern's Second Congress in 1920 was the "national and colonial question." Reed as one of the delegates to the congress defined the African American problem as "that of a strong racial and social movement, and of a proletarian labor movement advancing very fast in class-consciousness." He alluded to Garvey's Back to Africa campaign but concluded that "all movements aiming at a separate national existence for Negroes fail." See Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 320-1 and 315-316. In the 1930s the Communists once again adopted the policy of "Self-Determination for Negroes in the Black Belt" in accordance with a program laid down in 1928 by the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern, but it proved unsuccessful. The most tenacious advocate of African American "self-determination" was Leon Trotsky. In 1933 he advised his reluctant American followers to support the African American's right "to separate a piece of land for themselves." See Draper, *Black Nationalism*, 64-68. See also Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 328-329.

much of the African American working class. There were no African American members of the party's central committee until 1929, when Briggs, Huiswoud, and Otto Hall were added.⁴⁷

After McKay's departure, there was a general slackening of African American issues in the *Liberator* until Minor assumed editorship. When Minor moved to party headquarters in Chicago in 1922 he became active in race matters and began studying Marxist writings on the question of national minorities. Around 1923 Minor headed the Negro Department of the Communist party's central executive committee and became one of the foremost white American Communists advancing the struggle on behalf of the African American. Well before Minor moved to Chicago, he demonstrated a concern with race issues. As a former socialist, he had sought to recruit and organize African Americans into the Socialist Party of St. Louis; however, there was virtually no interest from other socialists. While working for the *Masses*, he drew the August 1915 cover, "In Georgia—The Southern Gentleman Demonstrates His Superiority"(fig. 63). The drawing portrays the tortured bodies of two crucified men as blood drips from their hands to form a pool beneath their feet. In the foreground stands the "southern gentlemen," impassive to the suffering. The use of the crucifix provoked deep responses by viewers and upon seeing the image McKay wrote: "I bought the magazine and tore the cover off, but it haunted me for a long time." As pointed out by Park, the cross as a religious reference to the Biblical crucifixion was not unusual and could be read as white lyncher's failure to live up to their own claims of Christian identity. As powerful as Minor's *Masses* cover, he also had succumbed to the pervasive stereotyping of African Americans as in "Pugilism in Excelsis: The Grinning Negro as He Appears to Robert Minor," published in *Current Literature* in 1912. The cartoon depicts the African American boxing champion Jack Johnson as a cannibal, surrounded by human bones. In the May 1920 issue of the *Liberator*, Minor portrays a vagrant, looking at a

⁴⁷ Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1967), 134-135. There is no accurate record of the number of African American Communists in the 1920s, but an average estimate is about one hundred. See Klehr, *The American Communist Movement*, 55-56.

large billboard of Aunt Jemima with the caption, "Aunt Jemima for Vice President: Formerly Connected with the Food Administration" (fig. 64). The drawing, a reference to Minor's dissatisfaction with the upcoming presidential election, perpetuates racial stereotypes. After Minor's move to Chicago, he no longer created unsympathetic images but instead turned to politicized drawings to provoke change both within the African American community and within the public at large.⁴⁸

Minor's defining work on African Americans was the double-page spread, "Exodus from Dixie" in the June 1923 issue (fig. 65). In it, caravans of African Americans trek northward from the flames of burning crosses. In the distant background, fires blaze, figures hang from branches, and a sign reads, "KKK." One of the figures in the foreground looks back with his fist raised in a gesture of revenge. According to Gibson, Minor studied his own hand for the drawing and saw himself as the figure pledging revenge. Even though Minor regarded the migration as one of the most important factors in the emancipation of the race, he cautioned readers, "let no one imagine, however, that the Negro escapes discrimination when he escapes from the South." In 1924 Minor wrote a series of articles relating directly to the race problem. For Minor, there was but one solution for the African American: "The Negro's emancipation can be completed only in the manner in which it was begun: by treating it as a labor class problem." Minor sought to convince the public and African American masses that the only solution to oppression was Communism, ultimately excluding or critiquing all African American nationalist movements. Communists were opposed to nationalist tendencies because they sought international solidarity of all laboring classes without regard for race and ethnic difference. In "The Black Ten Millions," Minor discussed the "Sanhedrin Conference," held in Chicago on February 11, 1924. The conference,

⁴⁸ See Sterling, "Robert Minor: The Life Story of New York's Communist Candidate for Mayor," McKay, *A Long Way From Home*, 29 and Park, 323-324. In addition to Park's analysis, Langa argues that themes derived from Jesus' Crucifixion enabled artists to develop images that avoided the explicit terror of lynching scenes, highlighted emotional suffering, and also evoked African Americans' historical dependence on Christian faith to endure injustice. See Langa, 28-29.

sponsored by the NAACP, the Equal Rights League and the African Blood Brotherhood intervened with the express intent of gathering all African American organizations into a “united Negro front” on a common program for race emancipation. Minor helped draft the “Resolutions Proposed by Delegates representing the Workers’ Party of America.” The detailed report declared “the interests of the white workers and the Negro workers to be the same,” and offered to elect a delegation to visit Russia. The report proposed “drastic measures” against segregation, lynching, and the Ku Klux Klan. Minor was disappointed by the results of the Congress, claiming that all suggested measures ran into opposition by the “Negro bourgeoisie,” and upheld the status quo. The Negro’s fate in America, Minor concluded, was a political question, intertwined with that of the white working class: both needed each other, neither could win without the other.⁴⁹

Minor’s “The Black Ten Million” was accompanied by an illustration by Gibson. Conceived as a wanted poster, it read: “Runaway Slave \$1,000 fine for any Northern labor-agent encouraging fugitives. When last seen was Going North!” In it, an African American male is on the run. The cartoon served to reinforce the need for “drastic” legislation, particularly in the south where illegal servitude in the form of segregation, lynching and exploitation still abounded. While in Chicago, Gibson and Minor lived in the predominantly African American South Side. There can be little doubt that Gibson assisted Minor in his campaign to recruit African Americans into the labor movement. Her illustrations pertaining to race frequently relate to Minor’s articles. In the July 1924 issue, Gibson’s cartoon directly corresponds to an article published by Minor in the August 1924 issue (fig. 66). In Gibson’s drawing, an African American male is about to depart from a party of diners, among them a Klan member and a female allegory of the GOP. The African American male announces to the group: “Goodbye, Miss G.O.P., I used to think you were my friend, but now I see whose friend you are.” The scene relates to the inefficiency of the

⁴⁹ See North, *Robert Minor*, 155; Minor, “Black Ten Millions,” *Liberator* 7, no. 2 (February 1924): 7-9; Minor, “The Negro Finds His Place and a Sword,” *Liberator* 7, no. 8 (August 1924): 20-25; and TD, March 1924, Robert Minor Papers, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

Republican Party in addressing the needs of the African American. Minor condemned the NAACP's continued support of the Republican Party and maintained that as a non-revolutionary organization, the NAACP was ill suited to the urgent needs of its people. By mid-1924, at the Fifteenth Annual Conference of the NAACP, measures were being taken to disassociate from the Republican party as intimated by Gibson's drawing.⁵⁰ The NAACP's focus on reformist solutions and its appeal to elite supporters contrasted markedly with the party's call for radical transformation of the social system based on a restructuring of economic and political systems. Despite these opposing claims, both organizations placed a high value on political activism and both organizations sought support from the working class, union members, and church and reform groups in the white and African American communities.

In the last issue of the *Liberator* of October 1924, Minor wrote, "The Handkerchief on Garvey's Head," a scathing indictment of Garvey, in particular, but of all other African American movements in general. "If we look over the field of Negro leadership in the past twenty years, we still find a bit of that old handkerchief fluttering from the head of nearly every one," wrote Minor who accused African American leadership of identifying with the middle-class and not the "toiling masses." Minor charged Garvey and the UNIA of betraying the African American working class. According to Minor, Garvey "did everything that was humanly possible, and left no boots unlucked in the effort to make himself a 'white man's nigger' in the eyes of the white ruling class." Despite his dissatisfaction with Garvey, Minor argued that the UNIA should not be discarded. In August 1924 Minor attempted to appeal to Garvey's UNIA but the organization was firmly opposed Bolshevism and the editor realized the union would be impossible.⁵¹

⁵⁰ See Minor, "The Negro Finds His Place and a Sword."

⁵¹ In 1923 Garvey was arrested for mail fraud and imprisoned for three months. In 1925 he was convicted of mail fraud and jailed in the Atlanta Penitentiary. President Coolidge commuted Garvey's sentence and deported him from the United States as an undesirable alien in 1927.

Minor continued to be an exponent of African American equality and he became instrumental in defining the role of race within the Communist movement. When Minor became southern editor of the *Daily Worker* in 1928, he resumed his activities on behalf of African American rights. He became part of the large-scale attempt to win African Americans to Communism, under the slogan "Self-Determination for Negroes in the Black Belt" in accordance with the program laid down in 1928 by the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern. The Communists at first tried to take over existing organizations, making the CPUSA a more visible and aggressive political entity and later they formed separate organizations. With the new Soviet policies of 1928 came heightened attacks on capitalism, "social fascism," and liberals, including African-American reform leaders. The theoretical debate on the question of the position of the African American continued through the 1920s into the 1930s and beyond.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s Communists continued their efforts to attract African American members. In 1929 the John Reed Club was formed in New York City under Communist leadership, and branches in many cities became centers for debates regarding the relationships between social and artistic issues. JRC artists began to create images that reflected newly implemented Communist party policies calling for an attack on American racism and efforts to recruit African Americans.⁵² The Artists' Union, formally organized in 1934, also promoted solidarity with African American artists. Despite its various policy shifts, the *Liberator* was one of the pioneering forums that provided interracial cultural and political dialogues for the artist and intellectual as early as 1918 and continuing into the early 1920s.

⁵² Langa, 15-16.

CONCLUSION

LEGACY OF THE *LIBERATOR*: CONFRONTATION BETWEEN BOHEMIANISM AND RADICALISM

*“The Soviet Union is a gigantic roadblock, armed fortified, and defended by indoctrinated automatons made out of flesh, blood and brains in the robot-factories they call schools . . . There is no hope within its dogmas of any evolution toward the free society it promises.”*¹

*“It is characteristic of renegades from Communism that, in their treason to the working class; they flee all the way back to the most reactionary circles and practices of capitalism. And like all Judases, they sell what they can of their knowledge to the enemy.”*²

By the mid-1920s proletarian art and literature attracted the attention of an increasing number of radical intellectuals. As evidenced by the absorption of the *Liberator* into the *Workers Monthly*, the CPUSA, under the direction of the Soviet Union, played a greater role in American social, political, cultural and economic life. Almost contemporaneously, American intellectuals were drawn to leftists politics by either injustices such as the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti (1929) or by successful protest and strikes in industries such as mining. The stock market crash and the Great Depression further inspired both leftward sympathies and political activism. Since in these years, the Soviet Union promoted the cry “art is a weapon,” or an art motivated by and in the service of political ideals, one might think that the role of art and artists in a magazine such as the *Liberator* might have provided a model for those seeking to combine art and politics. And indeed, it did for some artists and intellectuals or periodicals, but for others it either went too far or didn’t go far enough in creating a cultural policy based on the needs of the proletariat. Neither was the contentious political atmosphere of the 1930s favorable to any concessions about the contributions of the *Liberator*. Judgments of the *Liberator*’s usefulness varied dramatically: for

¹ Max Eastman, *Reflections on the Failure of Socialism*, 12.

² William Z. Foster, “Review of *Reflections on the Failure of Socialism*” *Daily Worker*, 6 April 1955, 4.

some it was a blueprint for active engagement in art and politics; for others, it represented a disinherited bohemian bourgeoisie tradition. The diversity of opinions resulted from political and economic conflicts of the time, Soviet Union dictates, and by the activities of its former editors. And though the political atmosphere has changed in the intervening years, hindsight has not created a consensus because the disagreements over leftists politics in the past are still strong. Questions concerning the nature of the American Communist movement, its subsequent impact on labor movements and socialism, its adherence to Stalin and the Soviet Union, and its role in the American cultural scene, continue to be controversial. There is no agreement among American scholars of Marxism and communism on its contribution, or the impact of Soviet cultural policy in the United States.³ Nonetheless, a model by which to evaluate the achievements of the *Liberator* can be created. The legacy of the *Liberator* should be ultimately determined by its ability to integrate art and politics, its capacity to influence the next generation of political artists, and its importance and place in American culture.

The *Liberator* was the only influential American radical publication of the early 1920s equally committed to politics and art. The magazine had both an international and a widespread national audience. In Seattle, during the Steel Strike of 1919, the socialist labor activists Joe O'Connor and Morris Pass reported that at a local bookstore demands for the *Liberator* were so high that they were barely able to keep up with sales. More than three thousand copies were sold at union halls and mass meetings each month in Seattle. Dehn's correspondence with a family

³ Typical of the conflicting positions in scholarship are those adopted by Bernard Johnpoll and Fraser Ottanelli. Johnpoll wrote: "The failure of the American Communists to become relevant to the social, political, and economic life of the United States has been primarily due to their slavish adherence to foreign control and to the persistent changing of party doctrine to serve the foreign and domestic needs of the rulers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." See *The Impossible Dream: The Rise and Demise of the American Left* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1981), 324. Ottanelli wrote: "The party failed to become a mass organization not because of revolutionary posturing and an underestimation of the importance of the workers' immediate concerns . . . the party played an important role in awakening the nation to the plight of the unemployed and in courageously battling against deeply entrenched racial discrimination." See *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 47. For a discussion of the cultural arguments, see Lawrence H. Schwartz, *Marxism and Culture: The CPUSA and Aesthetics in the 1930s* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1980), 3-12.

friend from Montana reveals that the magazine was well received and important for its information on Russia. Its widespread appeal was also indicated by the presence of national “Liberator Leagues” in Seattle, Milwaukee and Chicago where readers would meet weekly in social venues to help raise funds for the magazine. Letters to the editors came in from every part of the nation as well as from abroad. The Italian communist theorist Antonio Gramsci reported that he depended on the magazine for international information. *La Vie Ouvrière*, the paper of the French syndicalist Pierre Monatte recommended the *Liberator* to its English-speaking readers, describing it as “the best magazine now in existence.” Similar responses came from socialist leaders in other countries including Robert Williams of the British Transport Workers. In addition, the magazine published articles by prominent international figures such as Maxim Gorky, Karl Radek and Arthur Ransom.⁴

To a large extent, the *Liberator* represented the cultural transition between the bohemian idealism prevalent in the 1910s and the hard-line communist activism of the 1930s. After the 1929 economic crash, the Communist movement enjoyed its greatest success in American life, attained a very wide following and reached 65,000 members at its height in the late 1930s. American Communists were certain that with the economic upheaval, capitalism would finally fade into oblivion and that a new revolutionary era would soon follow. The internal factionalism of the 1920s was now behind them and the American Communist Party was more unified. Because the party considered itself in a pre-Revolutionary situation, it directed labor organizations toward “revolutionary objectives” by making aggressive political demands. Working within the pre-existing labor unions, as it had done in the past, no longer proved

⁴ See Harvey O'Connor, *Revolution in Seattle: A Memoir* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), 242, Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 138-139, 196-200, and John Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (Stanford University Press, 1967), 59. Gramsci reprinted articles by Eastman and Reed in *L'Ordine Nuovo*. See Cook, *Toward the Great Change*, 29 and 25n.

effective.⁵ The sudden influx of writers and artists into the communist movement was given direction and meaning in radical publications and artists' organizations. In the mid-1920s and 1930s several radical left-wing artists' organizations and art publications began to flourish in response to the pervasive social upheaval. Not only would the majority of *Liberator* contributors continue their politically committed art in these organizations and publications, but also the magazine itself provided their ideological nucleus. The *New Masses*, the John Reed Clubs, the Artists Congress, the Artist Union, *Partisan Review*, *Art Front*, the New Deal programs,⁶ and Social Realism, all become part of that expression. To situate the *Liberator* in its proper position, it is necessary to turn to the prominent political forums for artists during the late 1920s and 1930s, the activities of its contributors and editors, the debates between art and propaganda, and the role of modernism.

Historically, any discussion of social content art of the 1930s inevitably begins with the formation of the *New Masses* (New York, May 1926-January 1948, fig. 38). Recognizing the need for a magazine that would continue the nonsectarian legacy and fill the void in American radical culture left by the loss of the *Masses-Liberator* tradition, the *New Masses* was launched in May 1926, primarily through the efforts of Mike Gold and Joseph Freeman. Gold and Freeman appeared throughout the cultural histories of the 1920s and the 1930s as the most prominent American literary Communists of their generation. Initially the *New Masses* carried on the genealogy of the *Masses-Liberator* tradition, combining strident political propaganda and an

⁵ Between 1930 and 1945 the CPUSA was at the peak of its influence in the United States. See Buhle, *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 15, and Klehr and Haynes, *The American Communist Movement*. For a complete discussion of the trade unions and labor developments in the 1930s, see Ottanelli, 17-48.

⁶ President Roosevelt's New Deal is noted for the opportunity that it provided artists through art programs from 1933 through 1943. The organizations were: Public Works of Art (PWAP) (December 1933-June 1934); Section of Painting and Sculpture of the Treasury Department (October 1934-June 1943), Treasury Relief Art Project (July 1935-June 1938), WPA/FAP (September 1935-May 1934). For a further discussion, see Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *New Deal for Art* (Hamilton, NY: Gallery Association of New York State, Inc., 1977), Francis O'Connor, ed., *Art For the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Arts Project* (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1973).

artistic program. The original goals of the magazine to foster an artistic and literary renaissance in America coupled with a commitment to the plight of common workers were concepts developed by Gold and Freeman while they were editors of the *Liberator*. In the *Liberator* editorials, Gold reasserted his position of the inevitability of an art rising from grassroots America, from workingmen and women, not from bourgeois-trained artists and writers. While the *New Masses* would eventually succumb to the rigidities imposed by the Comintern, from 1926 to 1928, it offered proof once again that the left was both cultural as well as political. The staff of the *New Masses* was able to start the magazine without funding or editorial control from the communist movement. Distinguishing itself from party line papers by emphasizing and preserving an artistic dimension, the magazine provided a larger and better format for the presentation of illustrations. Among the many artists from the *Masses-Liberator* circle contributing to the *New Masses* were Maurice Becker, Glen Coleman, Adolf Dehn, Hugo Gellert, Lydia Gibson, William Gropper, Louis Lozowick, John Sloan and Art Young. In June 1928, the editorial board of the *New Masses* was replaced by Gold as editor-in-chief and Gellert as art editor; both were Communists at the time. Gold, who had joined the Communist Party sometime in 1925, remained a loyal party member until his death. As editor, Gold sought to transform the *New Masses* from a publication sympathetic to workers, to a magazine produced by and for the proletariat. Gellert, as noted before, had joined the party in 1934 and was also a lifelong enthusiast.⁷

In 1929 artists and writers, primarily from the *New Masses* circle, met to form the John Reed Clubs (JRC). The clubs were modeled on literary studios for worker-correspondents created by the Proletcult in the Soviet Union that Gold and Freeman had seen during their visits to

⁷ See Marquardt, *Art and Journals*, 223. The prospectus of the *New Masses* promised that half the pages would consist of illustrations, "these will be cartoons of current political and social events, drawings of American life and also, though not ever predominantly, pictures that have no 'journalistic' value but are based on the emotion of art." The Prospectus was submitted in 1925 to the American Fund for Public Service, also known as the Garland Fund, who in part financed the *New Masses*. Its founder, Charles Garland was a wealthy young Harvard graduate who established the fund to assist progressive and radical causes. See Suggs, *Proletarian Culture*, 82-83.

Russia.⁸ While many JRC members were Communists, the executive committee of the national organization included Freeman, Gropper, and Lozowick. The draft manifesto of the JRC published in the *New Masses* in June 1932 stated their objective of uniting intellectuals in the common struggle against capitalism. The JRC sought the development of a cultural movement dedicated to advancing the interests of the working class and to defending the achievements of the Soviet Union. The Clubs adopted the slogan “art is a class weapon,” designed to emphasize their opposition to “art for art’s sake.” Among their goals was the development of a new revolutionary working class of writers and artists to fight against Fascism, the development of a revolutionary labor movement, and the rejection of bourgeois influence. In addition to providing a regular meeting place at which matters of art and politics could be discussed, the clubs held art exhibitions, established art schools, and published journals.

By 1930 the *New Masses* had become the official organ of the Moscow-based International Union of Revolutionary Writers (IURW), which had met at Kharkov in 1930. The American delegation to the Kharkov Conference included *Liberator* contributors, Fred Ellis, Michael Gold, and William Gropper. They returned to America with suggestions for a cultural program outlining activity for building a “proletarian-revolutionary cultural movement” in the United States. Reflecting the IURW endorsement of political content in art, the *New Masses* adopted the slogan of “revolutionary art” and no longer included drawings on their covers, instead they published drawings and cartoons that were more overtly political in content, militant in tone, and supportive of the Soviet Union. Likewise, the JRC subscribed to the fundamental program adopted by the IURW. In 1933, the *New Masses*, now explicitly partisan in text and

⁸ For a discussion of the JRC and *New Masses* activities, see Marquardt, “*New Masses* and John Reed Club Artists, 1926-1936: Evolution of Ideology, Subject Matter and Style,” *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 12 (Spring 1989): 56-75. For further information on the JRC, see Helen A. Harrison, “John Reed Club Artists and the New Deal: Radical Responses to Roosevelt’s ‘Peaceful Revolution,’” *Prospects* 5 (1980): 240-68. For an overview of the American Artists’ Congress, and other artists’ organizations, see Walter Witherspoon Brayman, “Art and Politics: The Radical Artists’ Movement, 1926-1945” (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, Columbia, 1973). Gold visited Russia in 1925 and Freeman the following year.

image, adopted a weekly format in which drawings and cartoons by radical artists were increasingly replaced by photographs. The Popular Front policy, formulated in August 1935 at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, called for broad alliances with other socialist and democratic groups to fight against Fascism and thus for the end of the JRC and its school. The JRC was disbanded at its second national convention in 1935. The Popular Front led many artists to turn their attention to the American Artists' Congress and the Artists' Union. After 1939 when the magazine supported the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, the *New Masses* gradually declined in circulation until January 1948 when it appeared for the last time as a weekly. Two months later it was resurrected as a monthly under the title *Masses & Mainstream* (New York: 1948-1956).⁹

The dispute between the *New Masses* editors and the former *Liberator* editors, Eastman and Dell demonstrates the difference between the two publications and serves to crystallize the

⁹ See Marquardt, *Art and Journals on the Political Front*, 228-230. The Popular Front is the name used to describe the United Front policy established at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International from July-August 1935. The program called for an end to divisiveness and an effort toward unanimity among socialists, liberals, and Communists in the mission against fascism and war. See Steinberg, 31. For an examination of the events and factors contributing to the increasing disaffection of liberal intellectuals with Stalin's policies, see Gerald M. Monroe, "The American Artists' Congress and the Invasion of Finland," *Journal of the Archives of American Art* 15, no. 1 (1975): 14-20, and Garnett McCoy, "The Rise and Fall of the American Artists' Congress," *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies*, 13 (1988): 334-335. The Artists' Union was organized in response to government employment of artists by requesting the establishment of permanent government art projects. The American Artists' Congress drew together many of the same intellectuals and artists who had nurtured the JRC. The first American Artists' Congress Against War and Fascism was held in New York, February 1936. See Francine Tyler, "Artists Respond to the Great Depression and the Threat of Fascism: The New York Artists' Union and its Magazine 'Art Front' 1934-1937" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1991); McCoy, 334-335; Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams, eds., *Papers of the American Artists' Congress* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985); and Patricia Hills, *Social Concern and Urban Realism* (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 1983), 16. The Nazi-Soviet Pact, also known as the German Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty was signed on August 23, 1939 and bound Germany and Russia to refrain from aggressive action or attack against each other, to lend no support to a third party, or to join in a grouping of powers aimed at attacking Germany and Russia. The Pact resulted in the temporary Nazi and Soviet alliance against Allied powers. With the Soviet Union's subsequent invasions of Poland and Finland, Communists now shifted to opposition of both American involvement in the war and American aid to the allies. The Nazi-Soviet pact effectively removed the USSR from the equation as a model of probity, and many American adherents left the party or Popular Front organizations. By the fall of 1941 with the escalation of German military forces along the Soviet border, practically the whole of Eastern Europe was under Hitler's authority and the pact eventually deteriorated.

ongoing debate on the role of art and politics. Despite his past differences with Gold at the *Liberator*, Dell became a contributing editor of the *New Masses*. In June 1929, after Gold assumed editorship, Dell resigned and wrote in his resignation letter that he initially kept his association with the magazine “because it represented a partly Communist and at any rate rebellious literary tendency, with which I am in sympathy.” Dell, however, wanted to end all ties with the magazine since “what it seems chiefly to represent is a neurotic literary and pictorial aestheticism with which I am completely out of sympathy.” Dell broke with the *New Masses* because of its policy of publishing almost exclusively proletarian writing and art—the same problem that prompted McKay’s resignation from the *Liberator* and Dell’s public disagreement with Gold. At the *Liberator*, however, Gold was never the sole editor and Moscow did not guide decisions. The July 1929 issue of the *New Masses* printed the resignation letter and appended a two-page unrestrained character assassination of Dell by Gold. Gold accused Dell of being “just another victim of American prosperity,” of being “an artistic and moral failure” and at no time “a real revolutionist.” By the late 1920s Dell became increasingly disenchanted with communism. Gold’s attack, more than any other incident, served to detach Dell permanently from the radical mainstream and in the 1930s he renounced communism and the Soviet Union altogether.¹⁰

Upon returning from his European trip in the spring of 1927, Eastman joined the staff of the *New Masses*. Presuming the magazine would carry the lineage of its successors; Eastman almost immediately ran afoul of the editorial policy. Loyalty to Soviet Russia led Gold and Freeman to decline the continued publication of Eastman’s theoretical critiques of the Soviet bureaucracy. “The editors, now dominated by Gold, Gellert and Freeman, made it clear that no more ‘free expression’ on my part was wanted,” wrote Eastman. Furious at the silencing,

See Geoffrey Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War: Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1933-1941* (London: MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1995).

¹⁰ See Dell resignation letter, and Gold, “Floyd Dell Resigns,” *New Masses*, July 1929, 10-1, and Clayton, 253-254 & 274-279. In 1935 Dell began writing documents for WPA administrators, working in

Eastman resigned from the editorial board. In his letter of resignation dated January 1928, Eastman called the editorial policy “harmful to the advancement of a genuine revolutionary culture in America,” and dismissed the publication, claiming it “was not an inheritor of the spirit, body, or editorial staff of the old *Masses* and the *Liberator*.” Ironically, at the *Liberator*, Eastman himself had defended his editorial policy of silencing voices critical of Soviet policy in the early 1920s. Years later, in 1956 Eastman reported that the old editors had not been consulted in the launching of the *New Masses* and that “nothing but the name was borrowed.” Eastman concluded: “It would be hard to invent two vehicles of expression more radically contrasted.... to put over a ‘party line’ unthinkable.” In *Love and Revolution*, Eastman characterized Mike Gold, Joseph Freeman, and Hugo Gellert as “obedient priests of the new cultural bigotry developing in the Kremlin,” and severed all bonds with the *New Masses* and his former colleagues.¹¹

In the early 1930s, even though Eastman renounced communist orthodoxy, he nonetheless maintained his commitment to socialism and proletarian class struggle. Because of his prolific writing and criticism of Stalin, Eastman became a dangerous opponent of the communists. Despite the opposition, he would gain the respect of a few anti-Stalinist left intellectuals for his support of Trotsky and critiques of dialectical philosophy. In 1928 Eastman translated and published documents of the Trotsky left opposition entitled *The Real Situation in Russia*. In 1932 he was instrumental in solidifying left opposition to Stalin in the United States by translating Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution* into English, a text that summarized Trotsky’s indictment of Stalin for the miscarriage of the revolution. “Artists in Uniform” (first published in the August 1933 *Modern Quarterly* and in 1934 as a book), Eastman’s inflammatory essay was considered to be the most condemnatory analysis of party cultural politics that had yet

various departments of the agency in Washington, including the WPA Information Service. Even though the agency was disbanded in 1943, he continued employment until 1947.

¹¹ See Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 493 & 598. Eastman’s resignation letter to the *New Masses*, was not published in the magazine; however, Eastman included the published version for the first time in

to appear in the United States. Eastman insisted that Lenin held affirmative views regarding the role of art in communism and disapproved of the collectivization of art as a class weapon or art as party propaganda. In the book, Eastman reaffirmed his position on the role of art; it was to be creative, to educate, and to be accessible to the masses. It should contain the personality, individuality and self-expression of the artist. Eastman concluded that under Stalin individualism had been obliterated. His study provided one of the most penetrating and influential arguments for a thorough re-evaluation of the relationship between art and politics under party dictates.

The 1934 essay, "Art and the Life of Action," allowed Eastman an opportunity to elaborate on the preservation of freedom of self-expression, suppressed under Stalin's dictatorship. Eastman argued that the defining feature of art was to heighten consciousness; art did not have to serve some contemporary purpose and needed no justification. While Eastman attempted to establish basic premises for a socially relevant American art during his editorship on the *Masses* and *Liberator*, he never deviated from advocating freedom of expression and always celebrated individuality, only stopping short at accepting abstraction. By the late 1930s, Eastman was preoccupied with denouncing Stalin and Comintern policy and by 1940 he had arrived at the conclusion that communism in all its manifestations, including Lenin's method, was a failure. In time, Eastman renounced most all of his former associates at the *Liberator*, and the magazine itself, claiming that after it submitted to the "authority" of the Workers' Party, "the last trace" of similarity to the *Masses* had vanished.¹²

The New Masses, *Partisan Review* and *Art Front* were among the foremost publications in the late 1920s and 1930s, which addressed the issue of politically relevant art.¹³ Others

Love and Revolution, 493-494. See also Eastman to George Kennan, TLS, 22 October 1956, Max Eastman Papers, and *Love and Revolution*, 601.

¹² Eastman to George Kennan, TLS, 22 October 1956, Max Eastman Papers.

¹³ *Art Front* (1934-1937), the official publication of the Artists' Union was inaugurated in 1934 and edited by Ben Shahn and Stuart Davis. The monthly magazine adopted a politically active, though nonsectarian position, addressing artist concerns during the mid-thirties. Distinguished from other radical publications of the time, *Art Front* was written specifically by and for visual artists. See Marquardt, *Art*

included the *Daily Worker* and its Saturday supplement, the *New Magazine* and, to a lesser degree, the *Workers Monthly* and the *Modern Quarterly*. The *Daily Worker*, edited by Minor, was a New York daily founded in 1926 that attracted many of the former *Liberator* illustrators: Weed, Glintenkamp, Ellis, Gibson, Gropper, Young, Becker, and Gellert. The newspaper was an organ for the Communist Party and devoted most of its space to political reportage. It appeared as *The Worker* after 1955 and was superseded in turn by the *Daily World* in 1968. The *Workers Monthly*, the magazine that dissolved the *Liberator*, continued as an explicit party line paper perpetuating Comintern policy. In its early issues, the magazine included work by Becker, Ellis, Dehn, Gibson, Gropper, Minor and Young, but by the end of 1925, illustrations had given way to photographs. The journal was reorganized in March 1927 into *The Communist: A Magazine of the Theory and Practice of Marxist-Leninism* (Chicago, March 1927- December 1944) published by the Workers' Communist Party of America. This transformation of the *Workers Monthly* into an organ of the party was a complete departure from the liberal heritage of the *Liberator*.

Eastman judged the real successor of the *Liberator-Masses* tradition to be the *Modern Quarterly* (1923-1940), reorganized in February 1933 under the editorship of Victor F. Calverton. In March 1934 Eastman joined the editorial board of the magazine. Politically nonaligned intellectuals gravitated to the *Modern Quarterly* after the adoption of a pro-communist stance by the *New Masses*. Calverton asserted that proletarian art was defined by a working class ideology and not by political content. The broad interpretation of proletarian art attracted intellectuals who remained independent from the pro-Stalinist *New Masses*. Reflecting its anti-Stalinist position, the *Modern Quarterly* appointed Diego Rivera its art director in June 1933 and added Thomas Hart Benton and George Grosz to its art staff in March 1934. Even though Grosz and Rivera were

and Journals on the Political Front, 234-235. For a discussion of *Art Front* and the Artists' Union, see Tyler. *Partisan Review* (1934-1983) was one of the longest surviving publications for the discussion of literary radicalism. The foundation of the magazine in 1934 took place in part as an expansion of the institutional framework of the Communist literary movement, but also as a reaction to the failure of the *New Masses* to perform its anticipated cultural function. See Gilbert, 109. Most scholars distinguish *Art Front's* early years under the communist party and its later years as an independent leftwing journal.

internationally renowned as Communists, by the early 1930s, both artists were estranged from the Communist Party under Stalin. Disillusioned by the direction the party had taken, Grosz gradually distanced himself from the KPD after 1932. Rivera was expelled from the Communist Party in 1929; however, he remained a Communist supporter of Trotsky and became one of the foremost advocates of the artist's role in the Communist movement. Rivera remained art director of the *Modern Quarterly* until December 1937, while Benton and Grosz were on its staff until the last issue of the fall of 1940. Grosz was sympathetic to Eastman's anti-Stalinist position and accepted Eastman's offer in January 1934 to become a regular contributor and artistic director of the *Modern Quarterly*. While Grosz only contributed one frontispiece for the April 1934 special edition of the journal, he was listed among the artistic directors until the magazine ceased publication in 1940.¹⁴

By the end of the 1920s the proletarian movement had turned on its own origins to attack its bohemian heritage. The radical intellectuals of the 1930s often condemned the atmosphere of Greenwich Village in the 1920s as bourgeois.¹⁵ The Communist movement became increasingly intolerant of the preoccupations of the 1920s and paradoxically, of its own historical roots. Despite the fact that so many young radicals (including Gold and Freeman) had been bohemians, the *New Masses*, as the chief party intellectual organ, disparaged the idea that bohemia had anything to offer the young intellectual. Likewise, both John Reed, the namesake of the JRC who sacrificed the greater part of his life for revolutionary convictions and was later extolled by radicals and communists of the 1930s, and Robert Minor, who abandoned art to devote himself

¹⁴ Rivera's expulsion from the Communist Party was due to several factors; however, the underlying reason was his support of the Trotsky faction within the Soviet Communist Party. See Desmond Rochfort, *The Murals of Diego Rivera* (London: Journeyman Press Ltd., 1987), 64. According to Hurlburt Rivera had been expelled from the Mexican Communist Party in 1929 for his support of the rightist Calles administration. See Hurlburt, 98-99. For a recent discussion of Mexico's relations with the Soviet Union, see Daniela Spenser, *The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia and the United States in the 1920s* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999). For further information on the *Modern Quarterly*, see Marquardt, *Art and Journals on the Political Front*, 245. Further details of Grosz's activity with the journal are unknown. See McCloskey, 232.

¹⁵ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 94-95 and Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 67.

exclusively to Communism, were part of that bohemian tradition. The issue of bohemianism set off a sharp debate over the nature of Greenwich Village and the meaning of the *Masses-Liberator* heritage.

Eastman himself contributed to the misreading of bohemia and the role of the *Liberator* in radical history. In Eastman's shift to anti-Stalinism and later anti-communism, he essentially disinherited the *Masses-Liberator* tradition. As the years went by and Eastman observed the use of art and propaganda under Stalin's regime, he revised his memories of the *Masses* to emphasize its original goal of "free expression." He contended that most of the editors never had clear political goals in mind. Eastman remarked on the implications of the intellectual-radical mixture and concluded that "while maintaining an editorial policy essentially Marxian it drew into its pages the works of wide circles of the intelligentsia who had revolutionary feeling, but no understanding of such a policy and very little conception what it was all about." Even though Dell had disengaged himself from radical activity, in the 1950s he took offense at Eastman's position, claiming it was absurd to attribute such naivete to their efforts and to men such as Art Young. Eastman came to view the period as innocent and the *Masses-Liberator* as incapable of sustaining its political convictions. As a fierce opponent of communism, he eventually denied any overtly radical element in either the *Masses* or *Liberator*. In so doing, he not only refused to acknowledge a consensus among many Americans toward radicalism, but also misled scholarship by minimizing the overtly political and pro-Soviet stand of the *Liberator* under his directorship. The result was a false portrayal of the magazine as one that fell into the hands of communist dictators after his departure, but before then was simply a free-spirited bohemian magazine, given over to misguided individualists.¹⁶

¹⁶ See Eastman to Ely Estorick, 13 May 1931, quoted in V.F. Calverton, *The Liberation of American Literature* (New York: Scribner's, 1932), 454; Young, *On My Way*, 293; and Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 67.

In *Echoes of Revolt* of 1966, Irving Howe, and William O'Neill, as well as Eastman looked back nostalgically at the *Masses* and all but denounced the *Liberator* as a shadow of its predecessor. O'Neill claimed that the *Masses* contributors "were utopian socialists who hoped for a good society that owed more to William Morris and H.G. Wells than to Karl Marx." Further, O'Neill denied that the *Masses*' artists had any similarity to proletarian art of the 1930s: "Many of the items printed in the *Masses* were intended to express nothing more than their creators' sense of fun." The artist Maurice Becker disputed O'Neill's recollection of the *Masses*' artist strike of 1916 and stated: "I never belonged to the 'bohemian artist faction' led by Sloan or any other escapist. Where the hell did O'Neill or whoever get that notion?"¹⁷

Much has been made of whether or not the *Liberator* achieved an integration of art and politics. Ultimately, the same conclusions are drawn; in its juxtaposition of revolutionary articles with poetry and purely artistic illustrations, its goals were contradictory. According to Daniel Aaron: "It was not, at bottom, the personal frictions among the literary staff that finally killed the *Liberator*, but the still-unsettled war between art and revolution, between the free, undisciplined writer and the disciplined, responsible party member." In addition, Aaron claimed that the magazine's commitment to Bolshevism left no room for an artistic venue. Fitzgerald argued that the magazine was unsuccessful at defining and integrating art and politics, stating, "their most significant failure was their continual inability to provide a deeper analysis of the role of art and politics in the culture." Ironically, the *New Masses* succumbed to the same criticism as the *Liberator* and the *Masses* before it. None of these critiques have suggested what precisely constitutes a successful art integrated with politics and have thus forgotten the ongoing struggle of artists to define a socially relevant art while maintaining artistic quality and continued political commitment.¹⁸

¹⁷ See O'Neill, *Echoes of Revolt*, 19-20, and Maurice Becker to Ben Goldstein, ALS, 9 July 1970, Ben Goldstein Papers (reel 3957, frames 1149-50), Archives of American Art, New York.

¹⁸ See Aaron, 95 and Fitzgerald, 10.

Part of the problem for the staff at the *Liberator* was that the Communist movement never developed a fully coherent political program for art. In the 1920s cultural matters were peripheral to the greater economic concerns of the Soviet Union. While Russia maintained and supported its large and influential cultural organizations, it never offered a specific strategy as it did for those directly involved in trade union work, anti-racism campaigns, and social reform. The party, however, had no clear dictates on art and literature until the promulgation of “socialist realism” at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934. “Socialist Realism” was encouraged because it was thought to be a style easy for the masses to understand without being an exact transcript of nature. The term was heavily debated in the 1930s and was referred to as both a style and a method. After the Russian Revolution its objective was to support the Soviet state, be socially useful, socially dynamic, propagandistic and educational. Socialist Realism later came to mean an art dominated by the party line, cliché ridden, stilted and considered inferior art. Despite Trotsky’s interest in the theory and criticism of art, the Comintern was not unified in its theoretical position nor did it sufficiently define the importance of art in the revolutionary movement. Likewise, in America the arguments surrounding the complexities and nuances of reconciling art with politics remained polarized and unresolved. In American social art, there was a proletarian emphasis without a clear attachment to party programs.¹⁹

The conflict between art and revolutionary politics was not due to the theoretical incompatibility of aesthetics and radical ideas, but to the inherent dilemma and bias generated in

¹⁹ For a full discussion of Socialist Realism in the visual arts, see Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting*, 140-141. Many of the debates surrounding socialist realism were grounded in literary scholarship. For an overview of the cultural debates, see Schwartz, *Marxism and Culture*, 8-9, and 15; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992); and Fitzpatrick, “Culture and Politics under Stalin: A Reappraisal,” *Slavic Review* 35 (June 1976): 211-231. According to Shapiro, Social Realism in America and Socialist Realism in Russia were different from each other. He contended that Social Realism in America was opposed to the ruling class and selected as its subject matter the negative aspects of life under capitalism; Socialist Realism as it developed in Russia supported the ruling class and selected as its subject matter the positive aspects of life under socialism. See Shapiro, 28-30. According to Bown, in the 1930s there were more similarities than differences between American and Soviet art. See Bown, xv. For further information on the development of Social Realism in America, see Matthew Baigell, *The American Scene: American Painting of the 1930s* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974).

the attempt to merge the two. If the goals of the *Liberator* appeared contradictory it was because the editors were unwilling to sacrifice art for politics and vice versa. It was precisely because the magazine was nonsectarian that it was able to reach a broader audience than the radical periodicals of its day and address pertinent social events ignored by the arts and literary magazines. When the magazine became more politicized after 1922, it was criticized for subordinating art to politics. Before 1922, the *Liberator*, and the *Masses* before it, was criticized for retaining an intransigent bohemian orientation. The majority of artists at the *Liberator* were political, perceived themselves as political, and produced a political art. The issue was not whether the *Liberator* achieved that integration, but whether art and politics could effectively be integrated at all. Part of the problem confronting radical publications seeking to preserve the creativity of individual artists as evident in the *Masses*, the *Liberator* and the *New Masses*, was the ongoing debate concerning the role of art and propaganda. Propaganda was, and continues to be viewed by the majority of critics as pejorative. Even though most art engages in propaganda to some extent—it is the overtly political and doctrinaire type that many critics have always found objectionable. According to Brown, the decline of socially relevant art was due in part to the irreconcilable dilemma of art and propaganda.²⁰

Another aspect of defining the role of a socially relevant art was the formal direction it took and its involvement with European modernism. The thirties saw a renewed debate among theoreticians of the Marxist left about the nature of modernism, particularly the role of abstraction and its ability to communicate to the masses. It was argued that modern movements bore the stamp of bourgeois intellectuals retreating into an abstract, formalistic dominion, without concretely depicting and opposing the sources of capitalist oppression. Modernism came under attack from those convinced by Soviet ideology that a revolutionary art should be linked to realism and classicism. Many leftist theorists in America who followed the Communist Party line

²⁰ See Henry A. Millon and Linda Nochlin, *Art and Architecture in the Service of Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980), ix, and Brown, *Social Art in America*, 13-14.

tended to reject modernism on the grounds that it was just another manifestation of an idealized romanticism. Louis Fraina, one of the founders of the American Communist Party, viewed avant-garde art forms, such as Cubism and Futurism, as expressions of a capitalistic reality. Fraina felt that, however valid capitalistic art forms might be for capitalist societies, socialism must eventually produce its own art forms, its own methods for representing the changing relations of production. Artists and writers of the *Liberator*, along with their more oft cited counterparts in the realm of fine arts, contributed to a national identity based on a socially relevant premise.²¹

For the most part, scholarship on politically relevant art in American graphic magazines argues that while editors advocated revolution against tradition on many fronts, the challenges posed by modern art were alien to their concerns. These assumptions of modernism were limited to a definition based solely on formalism and aestheticism or avant-garde abstraction. More recent scholarship, particularly literary and sociological studies of the 1920s, has broadened the scope and definition of modernism. For instance, Adam McKible offers a different model for modernism and one that is relevant to the *Liberator*. His dissertation, “The Space and Place of Modernism: The Little Magazine in New York,” challenges the inaccuracy of historical and critical accounts of modernism that rely on unproblematized conceptions of identity and suggests that a suitable approach to examining modernism in America is through the often unutilized “little magazines.” Little magazines offered a way of reading modernism that had more historical specificity and insight into the complexities of the era than a single work produced by a single artist. According to McKible, modernism for the artists and writers of the *Liberator* was “found

²¹ In Germany many of the arguments involving abstraction centered on the modernist movement of Expressionism and have been interpreted as the left's debate on the nature of modernism as it attempted to form a “popular front” against fascism. Many charged that Expressionism could not be a revolutionary art form and that as the product of imperialist capitalism it bore the responsibility for fascism. In the 1934 essay of Marxist theoretician, Georg Lukács, “Expressionism: Its Significance and Decline,” Lukács published the argument that Expressionism had facilitated the Nazis' rise to power. Ernst Bloch disputed Lukács' theory in the 1934 essay, “Discussing Expressionism” and argued that Expressionism challenged traditional values of art and society and drew from the folk art of many people. For a full discussion and reprint of the essays, see Long, 312-327. For a discussion and reprint of pertinent primary source documents relating to the American left response to cultural policies, see Suggs, 13.

in the lived experience of historical change.” He argues that the time and place of historical change defines modernism. After the war and the Russian Revolution, America was undergoing enormous changes, particularly New York, which became a place of uncertainty and revolutionary instability. Despite the upheaval, there were countless possibilities. McKible wrote: “Little magazines were the ground zero of modernism; if modernism exploded upon American culture, then its initial points of detonation were little magazines.”²²

Aimee Marcereau’s thesis, “The Avant-garde in America, 1911-1917: A Study of the *Masses*, *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Collier’s Magazines*,” contends that radical artists and writers were a part of the avant-garde revolt, which took its most apparent form in politically charged graphic magazines. She asserted that the *Masses* contained the two basic tenets of modernism—radical style and politics. Stylistically, the *Masses* artists adopted the nineteenth-century graphic imagery of the European avant-garde and politically, they rejected tradition and embraced contemporary radical socialist reform. According to Martin Green in his study of the IWW Paterson Strike Pageant and Armory Show, radical politics was a metaphor for the modern experience as it transcended the individual self and nineteenth-century bourgeois notions. Likewise, in her analysis of Max Eastman, Nickle also concurred that radical intellectuals were modernists, since art was integral to the project of personal and social liberation and regeneration. If radical politics, the time and place of historical change, as well as personal and social regeneration constitute aspects of modernism, then the *Liberator* and its artists were at the very core of the modern American experience of the 1920s.²³

²² Zurier, the scholar who has written the most comprehensive artistic study of the *Masses* stated: “The *Masses* presented an art that was contemporary but hardly modern—radical, perhaps, but not avant-garde.” See Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 161. See also McKible 1-28, 18-22, and 233.

²³ See Aimee Marcereau, “The Avant-garde in America, 1911-1917: A Study of the *Masses*, *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Collier’s Magazines*” (MA thesis, Michigan State University, 1995), 1-2, 68-70; Martin B. Green, *New York 1913: The Armory Show and the Paterson Strike Pageant* (New York: Scribner, 1988), 6; and Nickle, 70.

Artists and editors of the *Masses* and *Liberator* did not find the use of realism inconsistent with modernism. When Eastman and Gold called for artists to return to their native American roots via the tradition of Walt Whitman, they were indirectly manifesting the avant-garde interest in native indigenous art. A defining aspect of avant-garde modernism in the early twentieth century was to explore alternative art forms that included a re-discovery of nationalistic folk traditions. Diego Rivera would later assert that peasant or folk tradition “will be of great utility to the proletariat in developing its own art.” After World War I, American nationalism in art had increased, reflecting in part an essentially non-chauvinistic effort by artists to find a national identity in competition with more prestigious European artists. The renewal of interest in American art was evidenced by the opening of the American wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1924, the opening of the Intimate Gallery, dedicated exclusively to American artists in 1925, the founding of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929, and the opening of the Whitney Museum in 1931. While it could be argued that a greater interest in American art may suggest xenophobia, and by extension anti-Bolshevik and anti-radical sentiments, the *Liberator* and its artists represented the new surge of politicized artists who provided the historical link between the past and present. Their interest in American tradition, while seemingly ethnocentric, was an effort to explore a rich tradition of American culture uncorrupted by bourgeois and capitalist standards. For the *Liberator* circle, looking back to the American grassroots tradition held the promise of a transformation in culture and society.²⁴

Despite the resistance to European abstraction, illustrators of the *Liberator* were not unaffected by contemporary avant-garde trends. While under the editorship of Eastman, the

²⁴ See Diego Rivera, “The Revolutionary Spirit in Modern Art,” *Modern Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (Autumn 1932): 51-57 as quoted in Shapiro, 59-60. See also Brown, *Social Art in America*, 7-8. Unlike Brown, Matthew Baigell argues that the renewed interest in a national identity in American art of the 1930s was nativist and restrictive. He wrote, “The quest for national identity in art became institutionalized rather than inciting conscious rather than intuitive, and thus became something other than the quest that had begun earlier in the century.” See Baigell, “American Art and National Identity: The 1920s,” *Arts Magazine* 61, no. 1 (February 1987): 48-55.

Liberator avoided abstraction. In 1922, with the presence of its new staff of editors, there was an attempt, while tentative, to embrace European modernism. *Liberator* artists pursued the theme of the machine, a subject regarded as the worker's enemy at the *Masses*. Industrial scenes of gas tanks and factories became the subjects of several illustrations by Dehn, included on the covers and inside the magazine in 1921 and 1922. Dehn's scenes of industry, with their emphasis on isolation, do not celebrate the machine, but rather suggest its domination on the changing American landscape (fig. 72). The pristine beauty of the machine, as portrayed by the Precisionists, or the dynamic potential of the machine as portrayed by the Futurists, were not evident in Dehn's industrial landscapes. Lozowick's 1924 industrial drawings, by contrast, exhibit a more progressive concept of machines as bold symbols of the future (fig. 73). Lozowick employed solid cubist forms of skyscrapers in the tradition of Fernand Léger and compositional shapes reminiscent of Constructivism. Lozowick, later art editor of the *New Masses*, played a central role in generating interest in Constructivism in the United States. In addition, Stuart Davis, William Gropper and Hugo Gellert also experimented with the vanguard styles of European modernism; Gellert's work shows a marked Cubist and Futurist influence and Gropper's work an understanding of Dada and German Expressionism. Stuart Davis was experimenting with European modernism, particularly cubist theory of faceted planes and formal compositional space as early as 1913. While his work for the *Liberator* was never abstract, his drawings reveal an interest in flattened form and complex spatial relationships that mark his modernist impulse.²⁵

²⁵ Dehn's industrial drawings were featured on the September 1921, December 1921, October 1922 covers and inside the July 1921 issue. Lozowick's machine drawings were included in the June, September and October 1924 issues. Lozowick (1892-1973) was born in the Ukraine, came to the United States in 1906, and travelled to Europe in 1920-24. While in Europe Lozowick was exposed to Cubism and influenced by Léger's series of ink drawings known as "Machine Elements" and "Compositions." During his visit to Berlin from late 1920 to 1923, Lozowick came under the influence of the Russian Constructivists, particularly El Lissitzky's architectonic designs (Prouns). During a brief trip to Russia, around 1921, he met Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, and other Russian artists. Lozowick exhibited with the Constructivists in Dusseldorf in 1922 and had his first one-man exhibition that same year in Berlin of his "Machine Ornament" drawings. His work has been associated with Precisionism in its evocation of cubist geometric forms and flat surfaces, his subject matter of skyscrapers and highly

The *Liberator* and its contributors anticipated the various socialist programs and radical theories formulated in the late 1920s and 1930s. Historically, the magazine was already acknowledged as being the best disseminator of news from Soviet Russia and it thereby greatly influenced the next generation of radical intellectuals. Ideas about the nature of radical art, conclusions drawn from an analysis of American culture and definitions of the relation between the artist and society became central to the 1930s. In its seven years of publication the *Liberator* and its artists dramatized the shift from a general opposition to conventions and socialist reforms toward active engagement in specific Communist related programs. All the while the magazine managed to maintain its own identity, separate from segments of the organized political left. The *Liberator* was able to retain its identity precisely because it existed at a moment in history when bohemian idealism moved into political activism, before it fell prey to rigidly interpreted doctrine. As such, the *Liberator* and its artists, freely committed to politically relevant issues, were able to openly pursue and explore areas of concern unhindered by party demands. Artists slowly evolved from illustrators opposed to a generalized capitalist exploitation to supporters of revolutionary Soviet Russia and by extension, Communism. The artists of the *Liberator* were among the first to undertake the subject of the new Soviet Union, define Bolshevism, introduce communist principles, disclose the exploitation of labor, advocate African American civil rights, and expose the tyranny of censorship. They developed the laborer as the symbolic metaphor for the working class hero, and pioneered the labor cartoon. In its ongoing debate between the role of

structured arrangements, and dynamic glorification of the city. In 1924 he returned to New York to work on his "City Paintings," and continued to work on the "Machine Ornament" drawings (exhibited in 1926 at J.B. Neumann's New Art Circle in New York). It was also in 1924 that Lozowick met Zigrosser who exhibited his lithographs at the Weyhe Gallery in October 1928. Lozowick lectured on modern Russian art in 1925 for the Société Anonyme. See Janet Flint, *The Prints of Louis Lozowick: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: Hudson Hills, 1982) and Williams, "Weyhe Gallery Between the Wars," 203-204. See also Joseph Freeman, Joshua Kunitz and Louis Lozowick, *Voices of October: Art and Literature in Soviet Russia* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1930), Lozowick, "Artist in the Soviet Union," *The Nation*, 135 (13 July 1932): 35-36, and Marquardt, ed., *Survivor From a Dead Age: The Memoirs of Louis Lozowick* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997). For information on Davis' early work, see Karen Wilkin, *Stuart Davis in Gloucester* (West Stockbridge, MA: Hard Press, 1999), and William C. Agee, *Stuart Davis (1892-1964): The Breakthrough Years, 1922-1924: Exhibition November 4-December 26, 1987* (New York: Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, 1987).

art and politics, the magazine was successful in defining a nation in the 1920s and its place in the aftermath of war and revolution, all of which are critical to our understanding of American cultural identity and its role in modernism. Americans were well aware that their nation and national identity were undergoing enormous changes, and nowhere was that more evident than in the pages of the *Liberator*. The entire history of the magazine, through its successive editors and successive causes, was an endeavor to reconcile the clear demands of left militancy with aspirations for broad cultural authority.

Bohemia merged with the left in the 1930s. The influences of two previous decades of radical history remained at the heart of the proletarian movement of the 1930s. Milton Brown and David Shapiro, foremost scholars of American social content art, both acknowledged the contribution of radical periodicals to the Marxist theoretical foundation of socially relevant art. Further, Brown maintained that the *Liberator* sustained the American realist tradition, which unfolded as Social Realism of the 1930s. Social art in America was primarily tied to newspaper and magazine illustration and to graphic media. In the graphic arts, the *Masses* and *Liberator* were recognized as having “a profound influence in this decade [1930s], not only through what was often inflammatory prose but also through the style of their staff artists . . . this style informed works of artists in the 1930s.” Likewise, literary historians acknowledged Eastman, Freeman, Dell and Gold as important to understanding the context of radical letters in America. During the 1930s proletarian art became a cultural force that invaded the sacred precincts of fine arts to become a broad expression of culture in the United States.²⁶

²⁶ See Gilbert, 86-87; Brown, *American Painting From the Armory Show to the Depression*, 32; and Field, Richard S., et al., *American Prints, 1900-1950: An Exhibition in Honor of John P. Axelrod, B.A., 1968* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1983), 70.

ILLUSTRATIONS



THE ART STAFF OF "THE MASSES"

Drawn and grouped after caricature sketches of my associates made at "The Masses" meetings, about 1916.

Fig. 1. Art Young, "Art Staff of the Masses," c. 1916, drawing.

June 12, 1919



TEN CENTS

GOOD MORNING



Fig. 2. Art Young, cover of *Good Morning*, June 12, 1919.

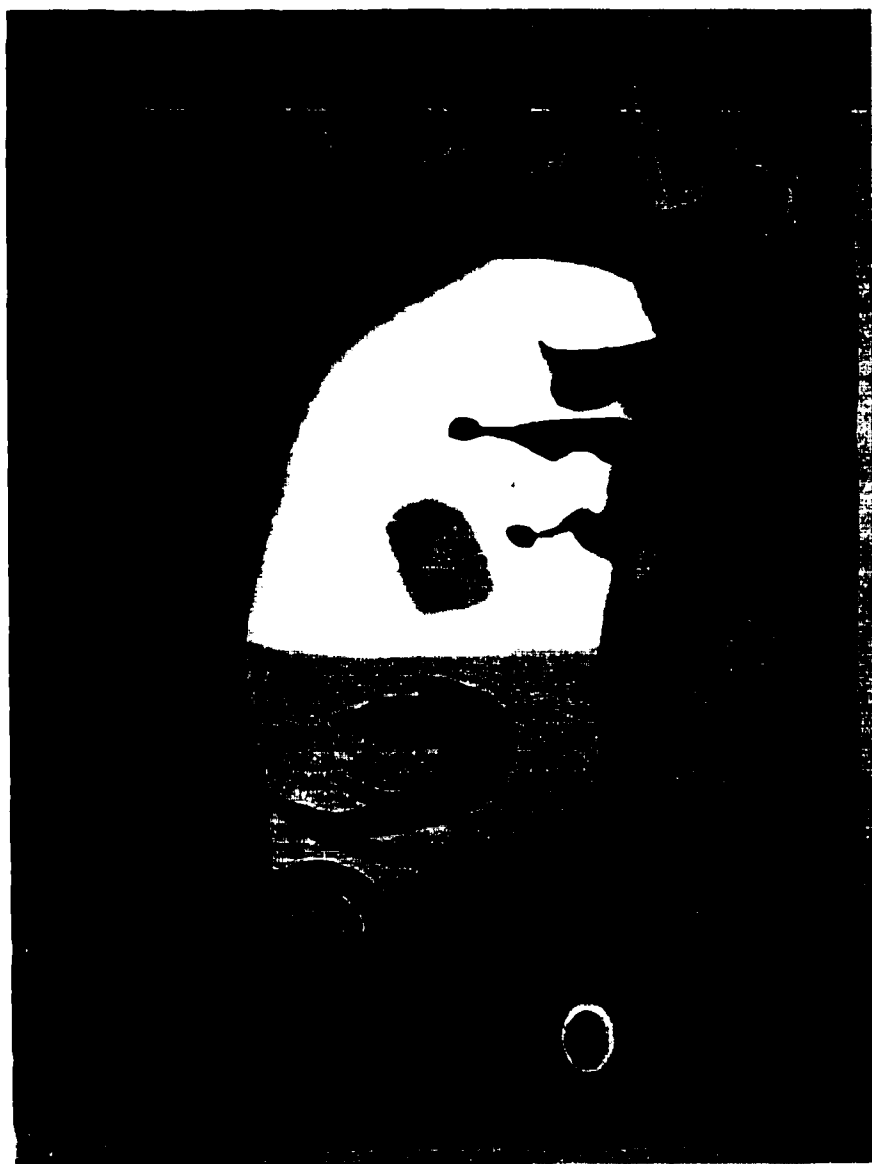


Fig. 3. Frank Walts, cover of the *Masses*, August 1917.

1. Jahrgang Nr. 1 Preis 10 Pfg. 4. April 1896.

SIMPLICISSIMUS

Wöchentliches Satireblatt

UNSERE FEINDE



Fig. 4. Josef B. Engl, cover of *Simplicissimus*, April 4, 1896.



Fig. 5. Young, "Having Their Fling," *Masses*, August 1917.

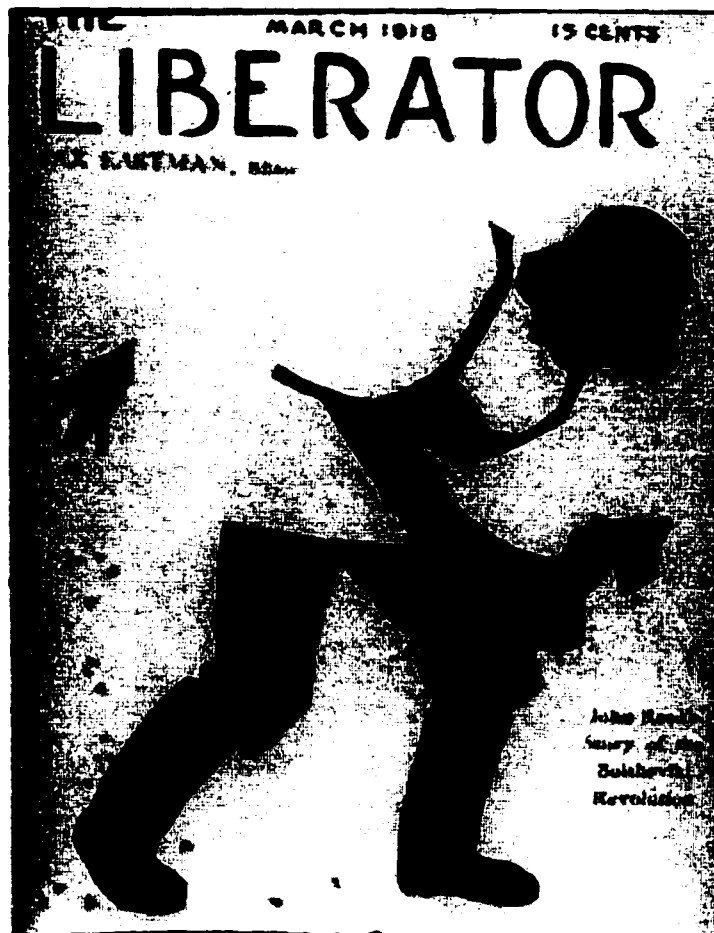


Fig. 6. Hugo Gellert, cover of peasant, *Liberator*, March 1918.

THE WORKERS MONTHLY
A CONSOLIDATION OF **THE LABOR HERALD** **LIBERATOR** **SOVIET RUSSIA PICTORIAL**
NOVEMBER 1924 25 CENTS



Fig. 7. Cover of *Workers Monthly*, November 1924.



Fig. 8. Lydia Gibson, *Portrait of Robert Minor*, tempera, n.d.



Fig. 9. Niles Spenser, "Negro Girl," June 1922.



Fig. 10. Boardman Robinson, "Checkmate, Gentlemen!" February 1920.



You can't do it in these clothes, you know.

Fig. 11. Robinson, "Folly and Oppression," August 1921.



Fig. 12. Robinson, "Soviet Russia," August 1918.

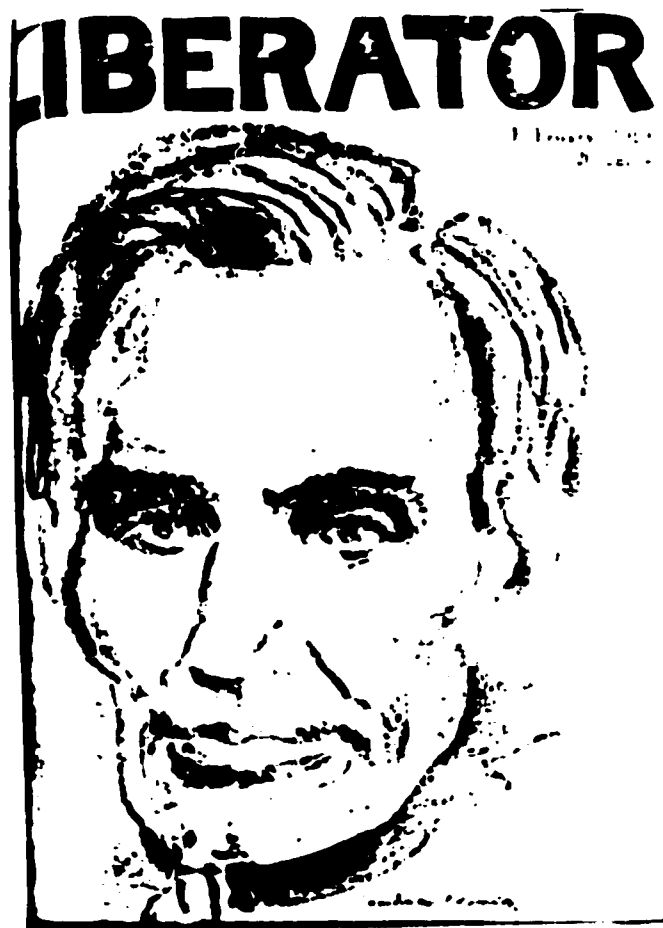


Fig. 13. Robinson, cover of Lincoln, February 1919.

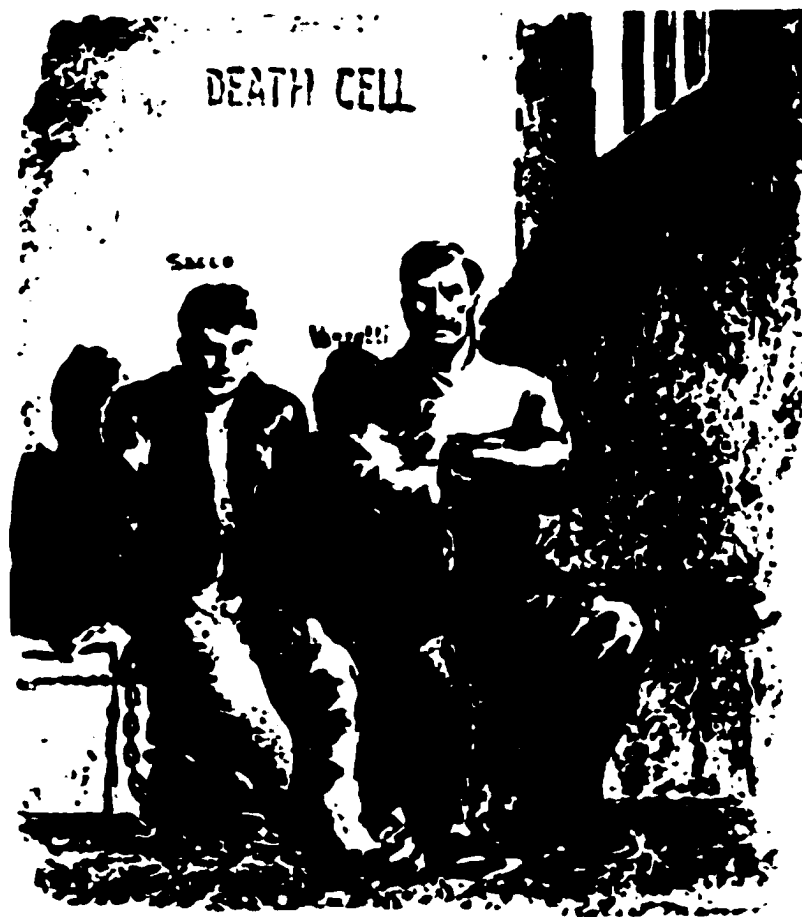


Fig. 14. Robert Minor, *Death Cell: Sacco and Vanzetti*, (not published in *Liberator*), drawing, c. 1923. International Publishers, New York.



Fig. 15. Minor, "Knight of the Round Belly," August 1922.



Fig. 16. Minor, "The Dying Wage," December 1922.



Fig. 17. Minor, "At Last a Perfect Soldier," *Masses*, July 1916.



Fig. 18. Minor, "Prometheus Bound," June 1924.



Fig. 19. Minor, "Labor Gets Up," August 1923.



In Tahiti

Fig. 20. Gibson, "In Tahiti," March 1921.

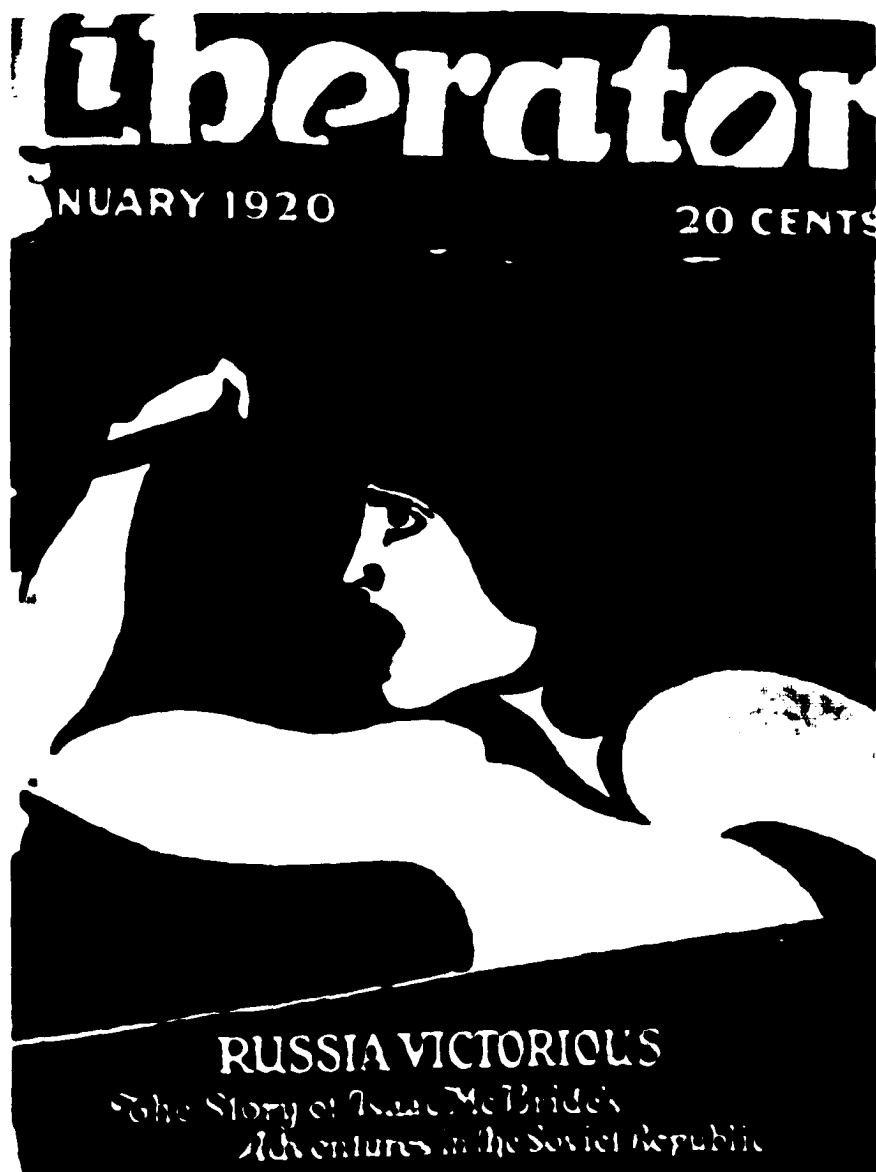


Fig. 21. Gibson, cover of female warrior, January 1920.



5844

All Hail, Soviet Russia!

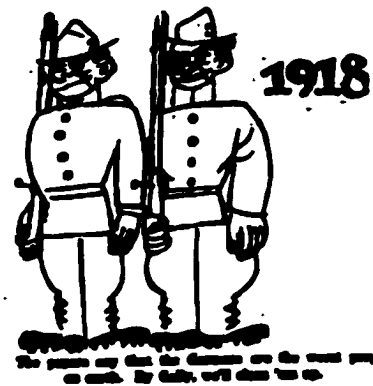
Fig. 22. Gibson, "All Hail, Soviet Russia!" December 1922.



Fig. 23. Gibson, cover of leaves. October 1924.



Fig. 24. Gibson, cover of lovers, June 1920.



The History of
Five Years
by
William Gropper

Fig. 25. William Gropper, "History of Five Years," November 1921.

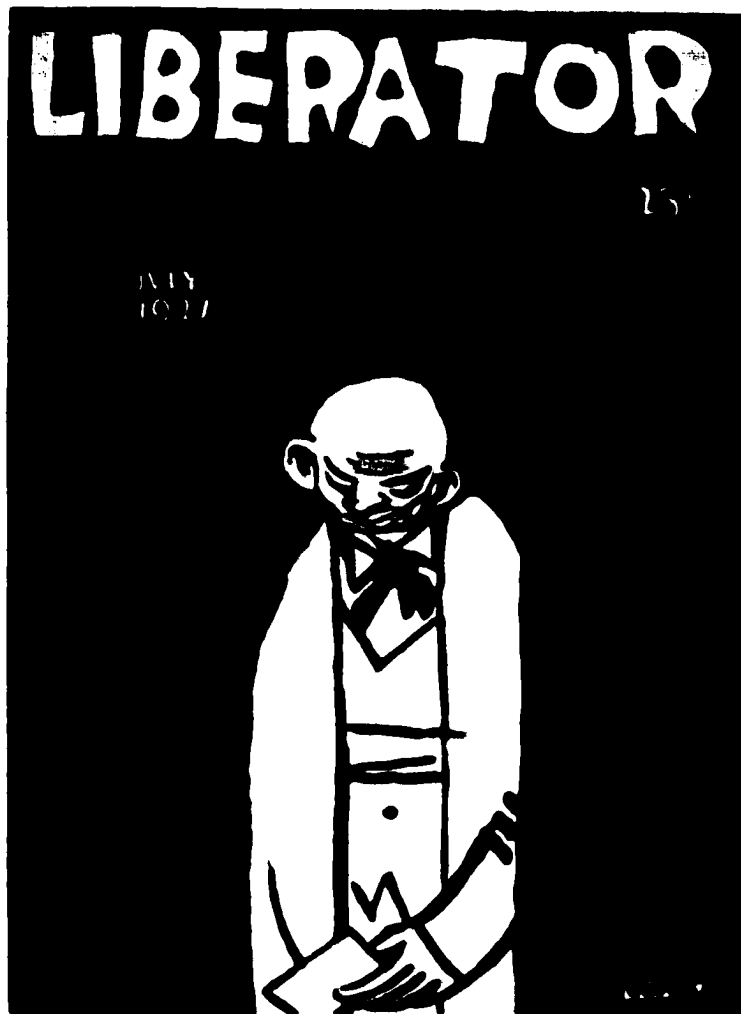


Fig. 26. Gropper, cover of William Hays (Postmaster General), July 1921.

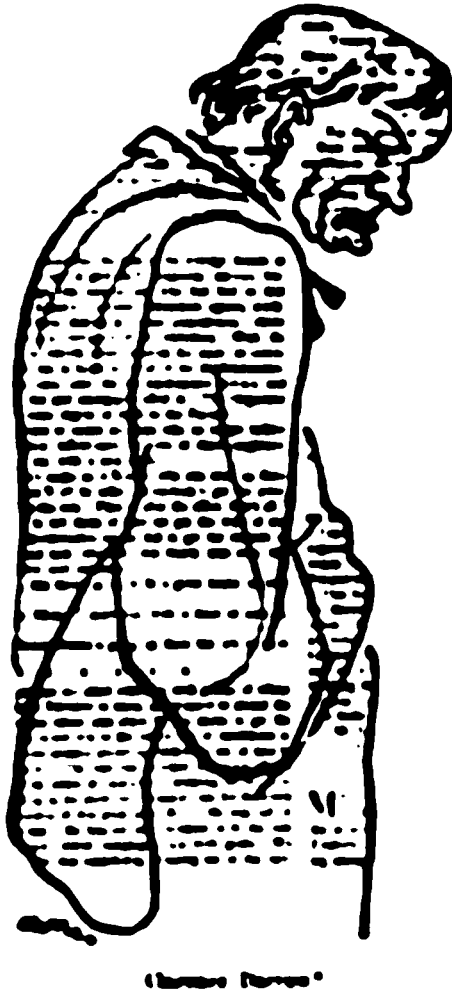


Fig. 27. Gropper, *Clarence Darrow*, March 1920.



Fig. 28. Gropper. "Fruits of Wilson's Russian Policy," April 1922.



William Gropper

**"One must have the courage to deliver Europe from
the Bolshevist plague"**

—Conrad, murderer of Vorshilov

**Fig. 29. Gropper, "One must have the courage to deliver Europe from the Bolshevist plague,"
June 1923.**



Fig. 30. George Grosz, "Prost Noske!," cover of *Die Pleite*, 1915/16.



Fig. 31. Gropper, cover of miner, May 1922.

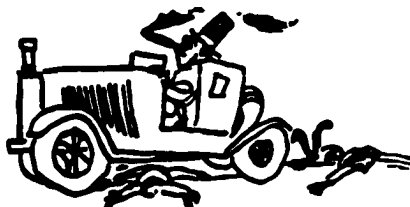


"My son, what are you reading? You should remember that your ancestors have been Americans ever since 1776."

Fig. 32. Robinson, "My son, what are you reading?" September 1921.



A taxi unloading ammunition down Broadway
(No cop in sight)



(No cop in sight)



(No cop in sight)



Puzzle -- (find a cop)



Opium Smokers
(N. C. I. S.)



To the Liberator Ball

The Crime Wave

By William Gropper

Fig. 33. Gropper, "The Crime Wave," June 1922.

NEW MASSES

DECEMBER, 1929 15 CENTS



A WARTIME XMAS

In this issue: John Doe Fusses • Josephine Herbert • Carlo Tracca
Upton Sinclair • E. L. Potomkin • Tom Medoff • Art Young

AMERICAN JUNGLE NOTES • By MICHAEL GOLD

Fig. 34. William Gropper, cover of *New Masses*, December, 1929.



Fig. 35. Minor, "Cain," April 1918.

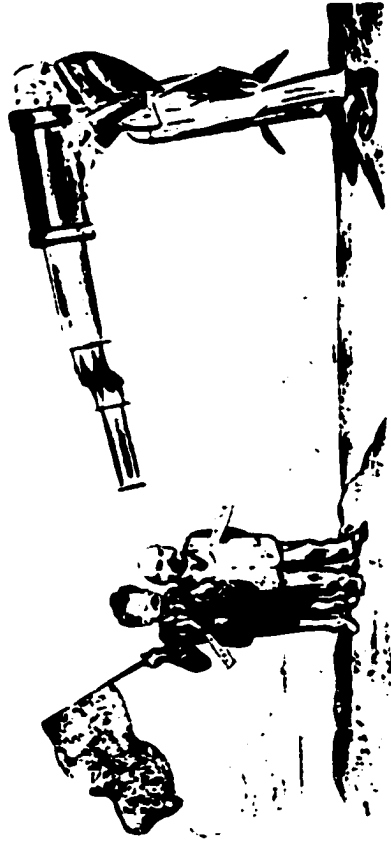


Fig. 36. Young, "Boys I Can't Hardly Recognize You," July 1919.

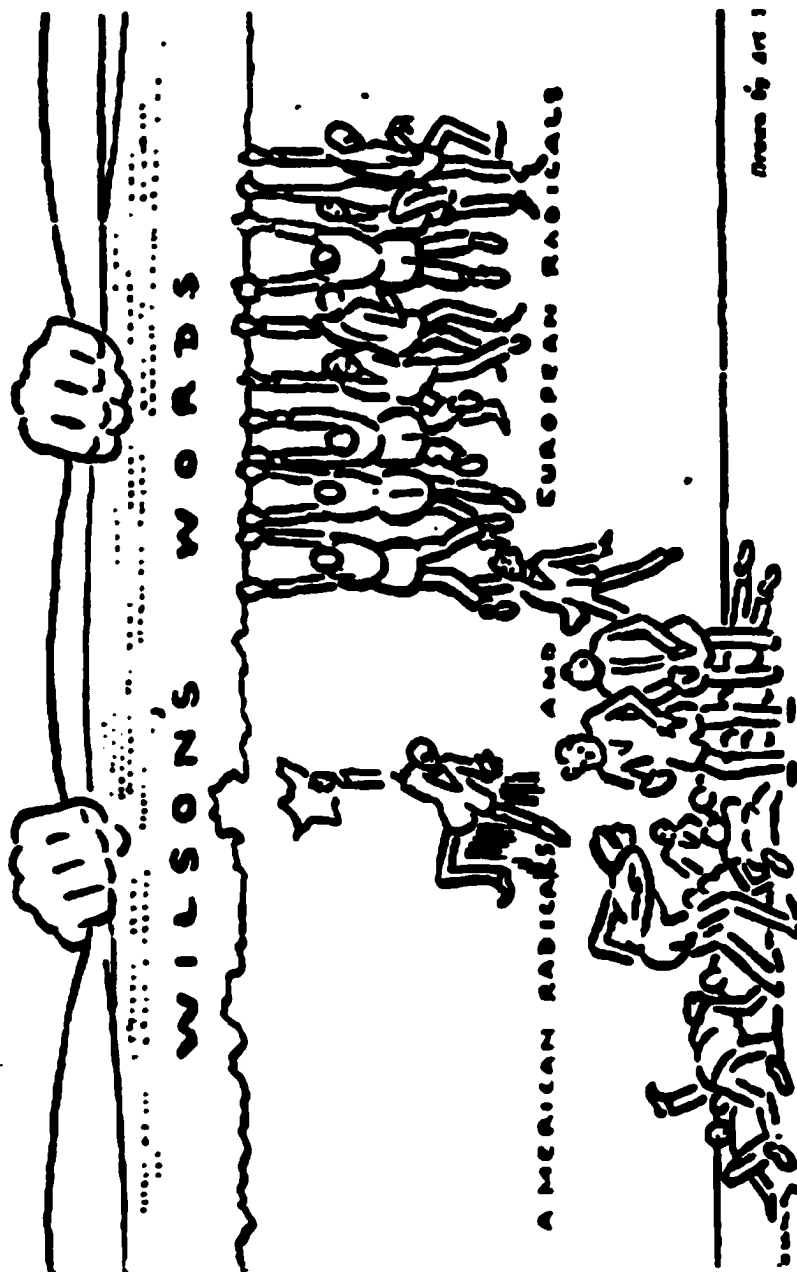


Fig. 37. Young, "Wilson's Words," February 1919.



Fig. 38. Kenneth Chamberlain, "Why?" March 1919.



Fig. 39. Käthe Kollwitz, "Germany's Children are Starving," January 1924.



COLD
HUNGRY
HOPELESS

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

is lifted out of the realm of vague phraseology when it is converted into concrete aid from the workers and farmers of one country to the workers and farmers of another

HUNGER BREEDS REBELLION — STARVATION FOSTERS LETHARGY

The German workers have passed from hunger to the other. Capitalists in and out of Germany are uninterested in starving the workers. They believe in the sword and death sentences. Workers and farmers of America are interested in helping Germany's workers out of their present lethargy. Use a coupon which will cause them to do this.

The German workers ask NO CHARITY. They ask only what will help them help themselves. It is to this spirit that we ask you to contribute and judge your support for the maintenance of the

AMERICAN SOUP KITCHEN IN GERMANY

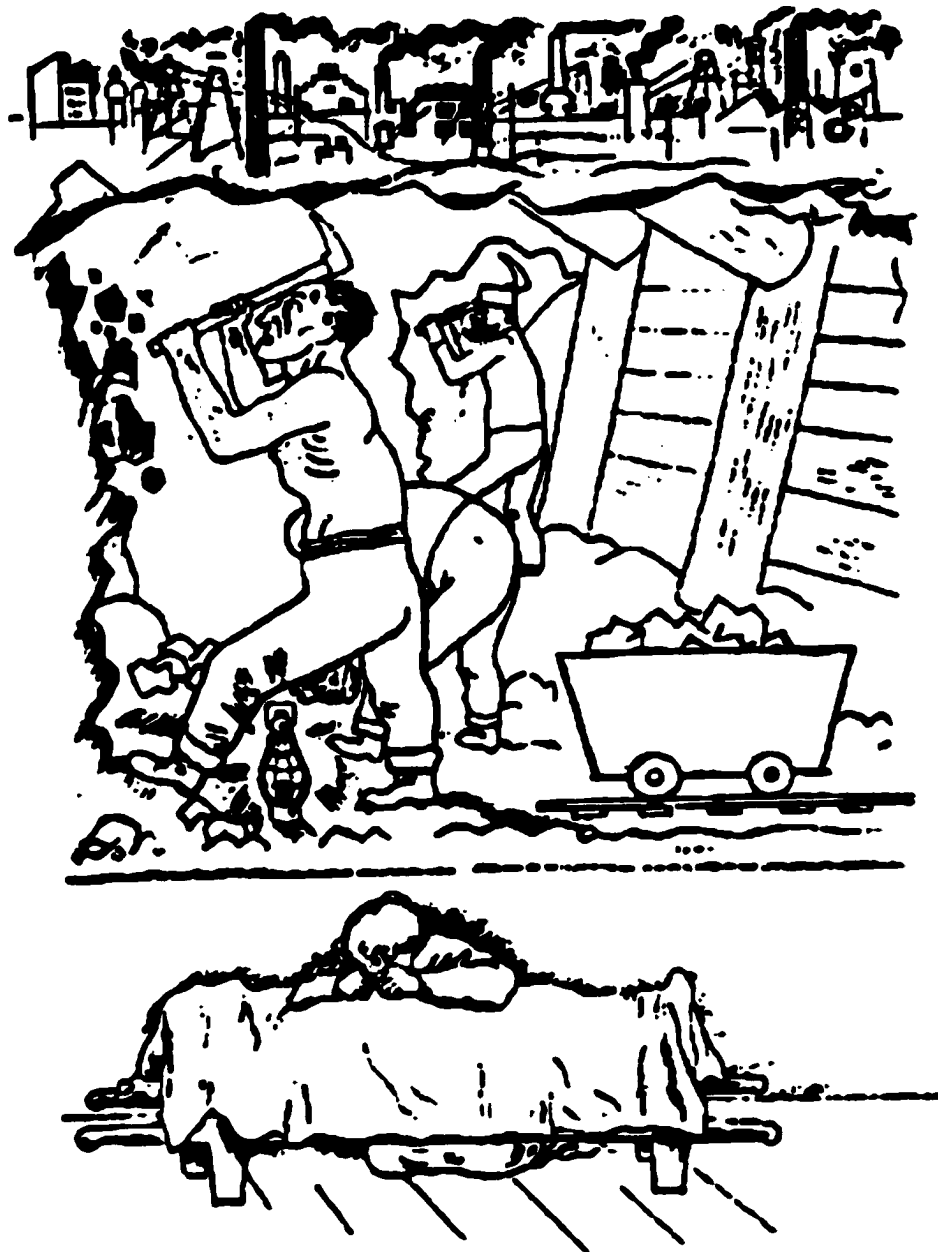
Germany's famine was caused by a national phenomenon. Germany's future is caused by capitalist greed. Don't let your German brothers be starved into complete submission to the greed.

6000 initial outlay and \$2,000 for February support of the American Soup Kitchen in Germany have already been called. A shipment of boxes and beans was also made.

Friends of Soviet Russia and Workers' Germany
 21 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.
 Enclosed find \$ — to help support the AMERICAN SOUP KITCHEN in Germany which was started by you on January 22, 1924.
 I judge most to — each of the most suitable for the maintenance of the Kitchen.
 Enclosed as a REAL COUPON BOOK (100 or 500)
 NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____
 Trade or Profession _____

COMMITTEE FOR INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' AID

Fig. 40. Gibson, "Cold, Hungry, Hopeless," advertisement for the Committee for International Workers' Aid, March 1924.



41 *Where the Dividends Come From—*

Fig. 41. Grosz, "Where the Dividends Come From—Where They End Up," March 1922.



Fig. 42. Grosz, "Where They Go to," March 1922.



Fig. 43. Adolf Dehn, "Viennese Street Scene," May 1924.



Fig. 44. Weed, cover of Lenin, January 1919.

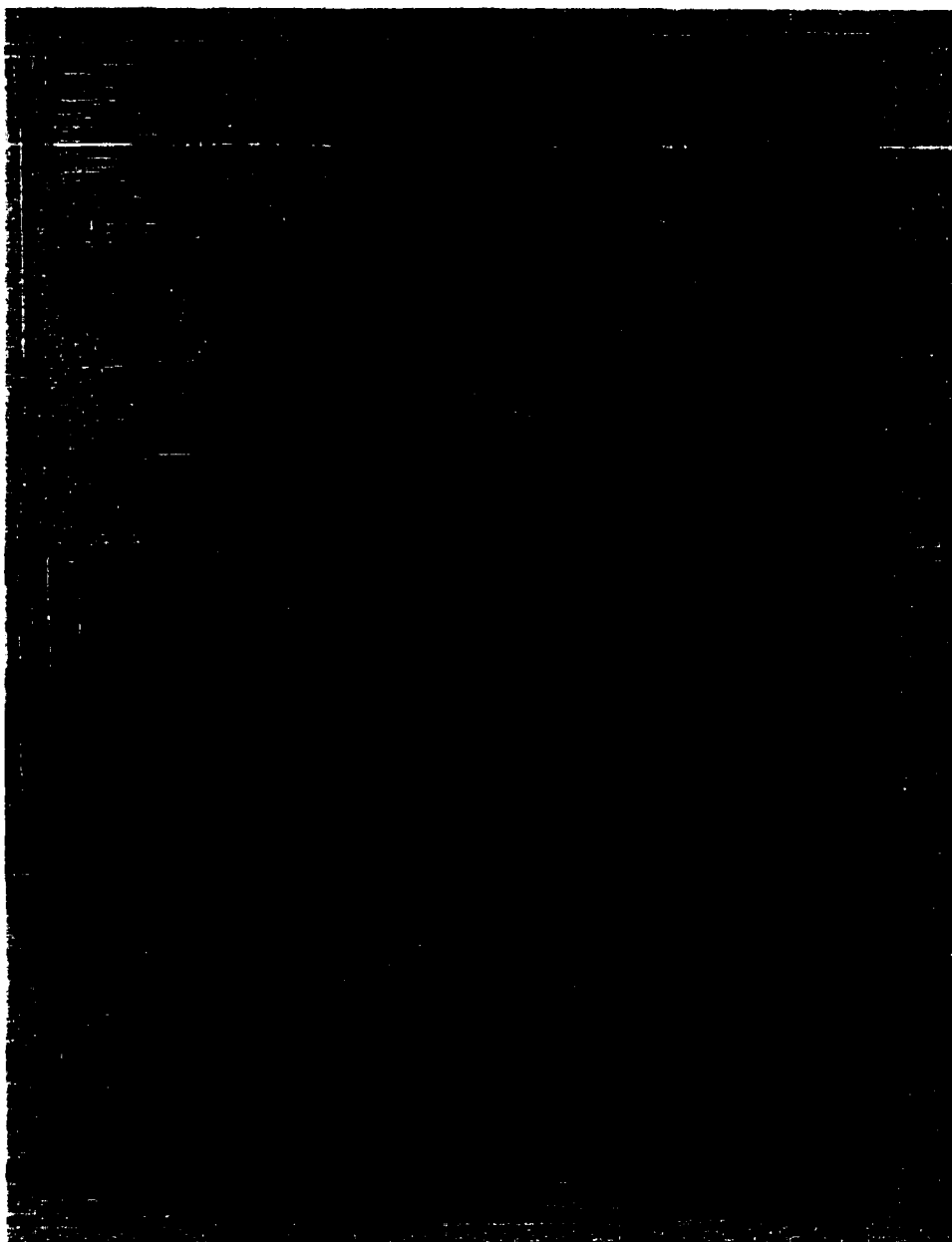
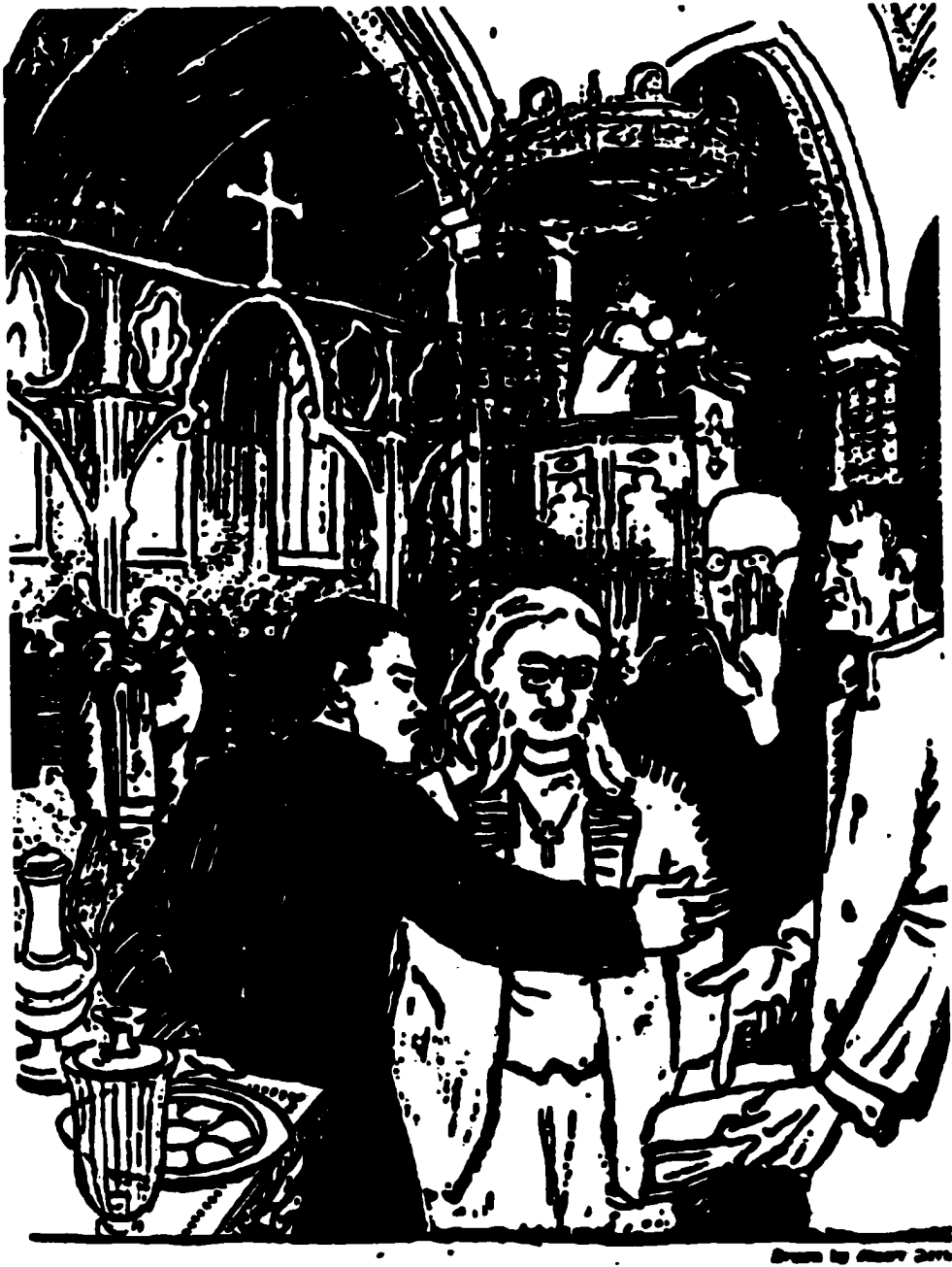


Fig. 45. Stuart Davis, "Bolshevism in Bohemia," February 1919.



Bolshevism Hits America

Fig. 46. Davis, "Bolshevism Hits America," February 1919.



Fig. 47. Weed, "I know what this Bolshevism means," July 1919.

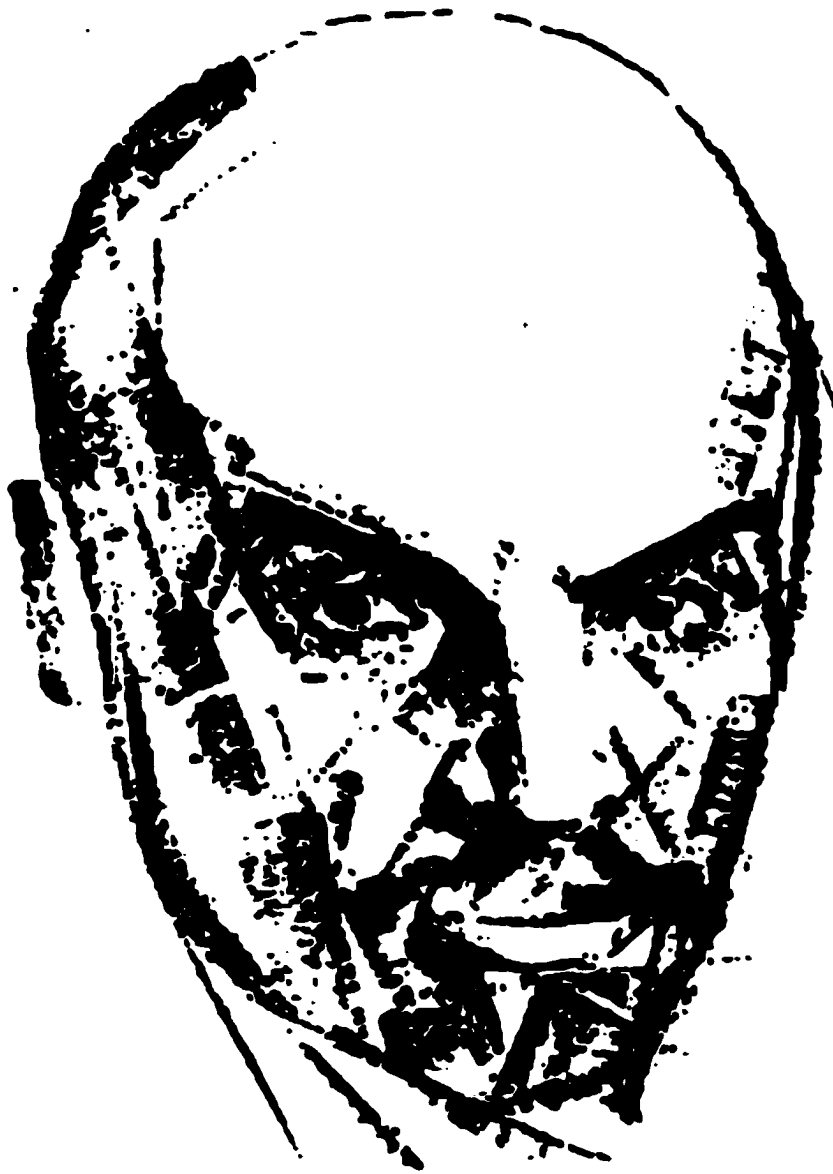


Fig. 48. Gellert, cover of Bolshevik, May 1921.



Not Slipping.

Fig. 49. Maurice Becker, "Not Slipping," April 1921.



V. G.
GELLERT

Fig. 50. Gellert, Portrait of Lenin, December 1922.



Fig. 51. Young, "Communist International," July 1919.

Liberator



Fig. 52. Comelia Barns, "Strike," cover, April 1919.



Tired

Fig. 53. Barns, "Tired," May 1918.



Today

Fig. 54. Kenneth Chamberlain, "Today," May 1918.

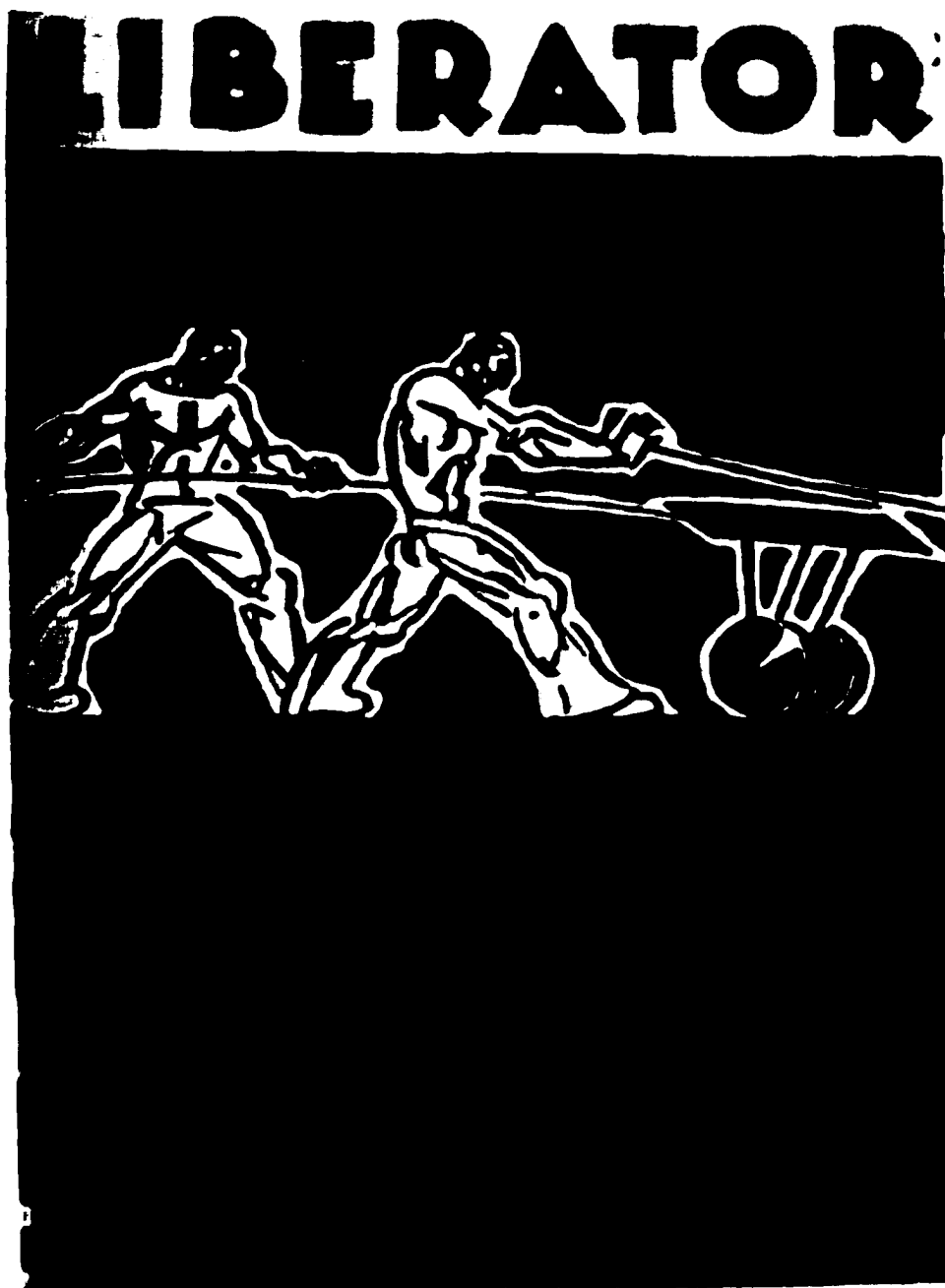


Fig. 55. Gellert, cover of miners, January 1924.



Fig. 56. Robinson, "The Sailing of the Buford," February 1920.



Fig. 57. Robinson, "Simon Legree Palmer," March 1920.



Fig. 58. Young, "To Courts, Jails and Exile," February 1920.



Citizen: "I want a newspaper that contains the whole truth."

The System: "Mister, your ration has been reduced to 5% in each newspaper."

Fig. 59. Gropper, "Read the Daily Bluff," October 1918.



The Return of the Soldier

Fig. 60. Davis, "Return of the Soldier," March 1919.



Fig. 61. John Barber, "After Church in Harlem," July 1921.



The True Purpose of the Ku Klux Klan

Fig. 62. Maurice Becker, "The True Purpose of the Ku Klux Klan," September 1921.



Fig. 63. Minor, "In Georgia—The Southern Gentleman Demonstrates His Superiority," cover of *Masses*, August 1915.

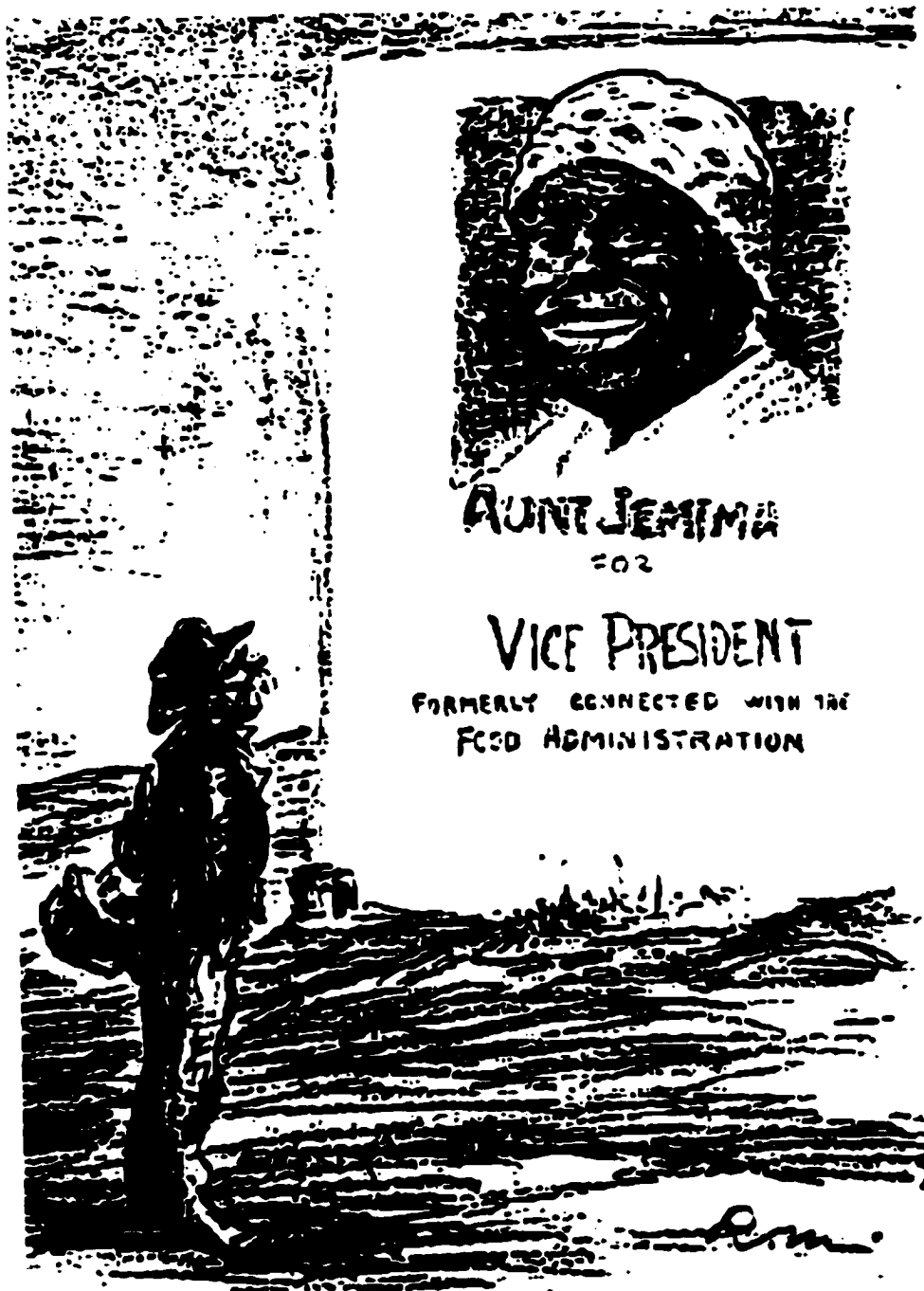


Fig. 64. Minor, "Aunt Jemima for President," May 1920.



The Exodus from Dixie

Fig. 65. Minor, "The Exodus from Dixie," June 1923.



IF NEGRO RACE "GUILTY" M. S. C. P. I. ASPIRE. I THINK YOU WERE MY FRIEND. BUT WHEN I SAW YOU WERE FROM "YIPPIE"

Fig. 66. Gibson, "Goodbye Miss GOP," July 1924.



Fig. 67. Dehn, cover of factory, December 1921.



Pittsburgh

Louis Lozowick

Fig. 68. Louis Lozowick, "Pittsburgh," September 1924.

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