

U.S. Union Revitalization and the Missing “Militant Minority”

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Abstract

Debates on U.S. union decline and revival usually focus on policy, technical, or political fixes. Missing are discussions of bringing workers together to act collectively at work. This has historically been the job of a “militant minority,” workplace activists (often leftists) who brought militancy and dynamism to unions, dedication and personal sacrifice in organizing, who linked workplace and community struggles, who were involved in unions’ day-to-day activities, and who connected rank and filers to leadership. This layer is largely missing today, making labor revitalization difficult. In explaining who the “militant minority” was, how it worked, and why it disappeared, we can find clues for rebuilding it.

Keywords

militant minority, socialism, communism, labor movement, strikes

Introduction

U.S. labor unions have been in decline for decades. As of 2018, union density stands at 10.7 percent overall (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018). Union decline has contributed to growing economic inequality and eroded workers’ voice in politics (Farber et al. 2018; Rosenfeld 2014; Western and Rosenfeld 2011). Labor scholars and leaders have long debated how best to reverse labor’s flagging fortunes. Proposed solutions can be grouped into three categories: (1) policy fixes, particularly labor law reform; (2) technical fixes, including sophisticated organizing techniques and comprehensive

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campaign strategies; and (3) political fixes, including electing sympathetic politicians and winning regulatory reforms like minimum wage hikes.

Each of these approaches has merit, but they are limited by flawed conceptions of how unions build power—conceptions rooted in an elite-led theory of social change from above (McAlevy 2016), whether by legislators, jurists, policymakers, or union staff and leadership. This ignores the sources from which unions have traditionally drawn power: social mobilization and organizing at the workplace. During key periods of growth—the private-sector upsurge of the 1930s and 1940s and the public-sector upsurge of the 1960s and 1970s—union gains resulted from massive social mobilizations that created crises to which elites had to respond. These movements also revitalized unions themselves, bringing forth new leadership layers and fresh ideas. These movements were based in the workplace, relying on workers' ability to join together, withhold their labor, and forcibly extract concessions from corporations and governments. Even when conflict did not escalate to strikes, these workers exerted control over their day-to-day lives at work, often forging "cultures of solidarity" that sustained the union as a vital, ongoing presence (Fantasia 1989; Keeran 1980).

In each of these periods of explosive growth, unions were aided by mass social movements, which could not be willed into existence. Nonetheless, examining previous upsurges can provide insights for developing a viable strategy for union revitalization today. This is because the upsurges had a structure to them—a structure that was built before the movements exploded. We can analyze that structure, how it was built, and why it disappeared. At its core, that structure was made of a "militant minority," a small layer of activists in the workplace and recognized as leaders by their coworkers (Post 2016). Not coincidentally, this militant minority was strongly influenced by left-wing ideologies (Moody 2017). They were the hardest fighters, the most dedicated organizers, and the ones that most actively built unions' cultures of solidarity. This group was key not only in leading upsurges but in consolidating their gains.

Today's labor movement largely lacks this militant minority. We argue that rebuilding it is central to labor revival. In order to understand why, we offer an historic analysis of the militant minority: who was part of it, what it did, why it disappeared, and what might rebuild it.

Reversing Union Decline

Debates on reversing union decline tend to focus around (1) policy fixes, (2) technical fixes, and (3) political fixes. Proponents of policy fixes contend that labor must change the exceptionally antiunion U.S. legal regime (Forbath and Rogers 2017). Winning labor law reform has been a fervent hope for the labor movement from the mid-twentieth century to the present, as the legal landscape in the United States has long been more hostile than that of any other wealthy country. Most recently, Barack Obama promised to pass the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) during his 2008 presidential run. EFCA would have made forming a union much easier for workers and stiffened penalties for employers who retaliate against workers for union activity. Unions hoped

the act would reverse labor's declining fortunes, but it went down to defeat, and labor's decline continued apace (Lichtenstein 2010).

While the legal climate is exceptionally hostile for workers, the problem with policy proposals for union revitalization is that they get cause and effect backwards. Labor made its greatest gains when the legal climate was most restrictive: its greatest upsurges were in the 1930s, before the establishment of the modern collective bargaining regime (Goldfield 1989; Rubin, Griffin, and Wallace 1983). Likewise, in the 1960s and 1970s, public-sector workers walked off the job in mass illegal strikes. In both cases, a hostile legal framework did not prevent working-class upsurge; upsurge produced a less hostile legal framework (Eidlin 2018; Post 2016).

Arguments for technical fixes spring from the idea that shifts in the American economy and its integration into the global economy require a shift in labor's organizing strategy. According to this argument, unions' current organizing models are rooted in an outdated conception of the economy that has been uprooted by globalization, offshoring, the growth of the service economy and corresponding decline of the industrial economy, and the decline of stable employment and the rise of the "gig economy" (Hyman 2018; Rolf 2016; Weil 2017). To revitalize, proponents of technical fixes argue that unions must expand their use of strategic research, develop stronger communications and messaging strategies, and deploy innovative organizing tactics. These fixes are important. Strategic research is central to understanding the complexities of today's employers and their vulnerabilities. Likewise, strong communications are a basic part of strong unionism. But unions have often deployed strategic research and communications strategies in ways that have pulled union campaigns further from the workplace, as unions have become laser-focused on exploiting potential vulnerabilities through the strategic research "air war" without building the shop-floor organization "ground war" (McAlevey 2016). Meaningful union revitalization requires a focus on building power on the shop floor, where workers will experience the outcomes of the campaigns unions carry out in their name—and where, ultimately, they hold power (Moody 2017).

Finally, unions have tried political fixes to spark revitalization, including electoral strategies, lobbying, and regulatory reforms. But this strategy has yielded little (Davis 1986; Greenstone 1969; Heideman 2016). Recently, President Obama passed a number of important reforms resulting from labor's close ties with him. But, overall, his presidency was a disappointment for unions (Meyerson 2010). Like policy proposals, relying on political strategies to affect union revitalization mistakes the cause for the effect.

The flaw behind these proposals is their understanding of building worker power. They start from the idea that such power can only be built once workers are given permission from forces from above. Only once elites open the gates for workers to organize—through the right politicians, laws, and/or techniques—can workers build that power. Labor then emphasizes constructing an agenda for those elite forces to fulfill. Rank-and-file workers become passive agents—those who "are organized" rather than organize themselves. The source of labor movement dynamism moves outside its actual members. Thus, the three proposed fixes to labor's decline are not just

offered as an alternative to building militant unions at the rank-and-file level but are in direct conflict with building that kind of unionism, since they operate according to an alternate and even competing logic.

What is needed for labor's revitalization is not an immediate shift in the legal and economic terrain. Nor is it a savvy new set of tools that can bypass the need to organize workplaces. Rather, the focus needs to be on building a workers' movement that has the power to create crises and use disruption as a source of dynamism. Creating such a disruptive movement will require viewing the workplace as the site of building power at which workers can create "cultures of solidarity" (Chibber 2017; Moody 2018). Seizing opportunities for labor's revitalization requires building a class-conscious, combative layer of workers in workplaces—a "militant minority." This layer has been at the heart of past episodes of union growth. Today, it is largely absent. As such, understanding who made up the militant minority, what it did, and why it disappeared can offer clues for a viable strategy for union revitalization today.

Who Was the Militant Minority?

Montgomery (1987, 2) defines the militant minority as that segment of the working class that "endeavored to weld their workmates and neighbors into a self-aware and purposeful working class"—those members of the working class who played key roles in turning their fellow workers from a class *in* itself to a class *for* itself (Marx 1973). Post (2016) calls the militant minority "a layer of workers with a vision and a strategy for how to organize, fight, and win." The militant minority's presence and vitality made the key difference in many unions that took up militancy in the Great Depression and New Deal era; their continued presence helped some unions buck the tide of conservatism and bureaucratization that labor experienced during and after World War II (Horowitz 1997).

Who made up this militant minority? The composition varied depending on location and industry. In meatpacking, for instance, black workers composed an important segment, pushing the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) to adopt a broad unionism that included taking on white supremacy. So did a segment of class-conscious white ethnics (Horowitz 1997). But the groups who historically played the most important role in forming and maintaining strong unions as part of the militant minority were radical leftists: Communists, socialists, Trotskyists, anarchists, and others who held explicit political commitments to militant unionism. While these radicals have played key roles throughout American labor history, they achieved the most in the heyday of the CIO. The United States had seen previous periods of labor upsurge. But the upsurge of the Great Depression/New Deal and World War II eras coincided with an era of strong leftist organization across ideological perspectives in workplaces around the country. The particular strand of radical left organization that proved dominant varied depending on the given union or industry or region (Dobbs 1973; Dollinger and Dollinger 2000; Horowitz 1997), but the Communist Party proved the most influential during industrial unions' formative years (Davis 1986), constituting "the main expression of native, working-class radicalism in the United States" (Laslett 1981, 115).

What Did the Militant Minority Do?

The fact that a layer of workers held radical left beliefs was not enough to make unions dynamic. It is what they *did* that made a difference. First, their left ideology infused their union activity with a militancy and dynamism in the workplace and their unions. Second, they were labor's most seasoned, dedicated organizers. Third, they served as a link between workplace and community struggles. Fourth, they were closely involved in the day-to-day activities of their unions. Fifth, they connected their unions' rank and file to leadership, both keeping members informed and involved, and holding leaders accountable.

Ideology and the Militant Minority

The militant minority was strongly engaged in the day-to-day practice of unionism, focusing on practical union tasks rather than winning over workers to their ideological vision of a different world (Keeran 1980; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003). But that ideological vision informed their unionism, making it militant, dynamic, and powerful.

Radicals' beliefs in the illegitimacy of management's authority on the shop floor led to their refusal to cede control of shop-floor conditions to management. This differed from liberal unionists who believed unions should fight for better pay and benefits, but that decisions about the pace and nature of work were management's prerogative (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003). The nature of radicals' ideology drew opposition from other ideological groups like the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists (ACTU) in unions where leftists held strong influence. And the conflict that these ideological struggles generated led to internally democratic unions. That is because for radicals to gain and keep power, they had to use democratic means, showing the union's members that their model could deliver the goods—often against organized anticommunists who sought to push them out of leadership and discredit them (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003). The same dynamic was not true for liberal or anti-communist unionists who, while couching their antiradicalism in a commitment to democracy, often were highly undemocratic unionists themselves. These groups were not committed to building the kind of militant shop-floor power that radical unionists were (Seaton 1981; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003). Thus, it was not merely ideological competition within these unions that led to internally democratic practice and militant organizing. Other ideological groups organized on shop floors throughout American workplaces in the 1930s and 1940s, but did not create durable, effective organizing or internal democracy. Radicals did.

We can see the difference an organized, ideologically coherent militant minority made by comparing unions in similar industries that had radical leadership with those that did not. Kimeldorf (1988) compares the waterfront workers' unions in San Francisco and New York. Although the unions faced different objective conditions, the presence of a small number of radical workers, mostly Communists, transformed unionism on the San Francisco docks. The San Francisco case shows just how small of

a minority the militant minority can be to exert decisive influence: a reform-minded worker study group called Albion Hall began organizing in 1933, starting with just fifteen workers and growing to about fifty. Only “ten or so” were Communists, yet they put the party “in a position to shed its outsider status,” influencing events on the docks and then drawing in leadership from veteran dockworkers—including Harry Bridges, who became one of America’s most important labor leaders in America and a lifelong Communist “fellow traveler” (Kimeldorf 1988, 87). Communists played a major role in the 1934 San Francisco general strike and shaped the union’s class-struggle culture for decades. By contrast, a militant minority never established a foothold on New York City’s docks. The result was a union that eschewed militancy, was mired in a culture of corruption on the New York docks, and did not deliver strong gains for members (Kimeldorf 1988).

Even where unions did not succumb to outright corruption, as with the East Coast dockworkers, the lack of a militant minority exacted a cost. Take the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC), the 1936–1942 precursor to the United Steel Workers. Spearheaded by John L. Lewis under the CIO, the home of labor’s dynamism at that time, radicals, especially Communists, played important roles in the SWOC. But they did so primarily as full-time staff; Communist Party USA (CPUSA) leader William Z. Foster estimated at one point that at least sixty of SWOC’s 200 staffers were Communists. Their positions as staff rather than rank and filers allowed Lewis to keep radicals on a short leash, using their organizing prowess and dedication to build the project before firing them—summed up in Lewis’s famous quip justifying hiring Communists, “Who gets the bird? The hunter or the dog?” with the newly organized union being the bird, the hunter Lewis and other CIO leaders, and radicals the dogs. After delivering Lewis his bird, he quickly discarded the dogs (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 1989).

Because the militant minority concentrated in SWOC’s staff, militants could not build shop-floor power independent of leaders like Lewis that would later be harder to dislodge. The SWOC and the CIO were part of labor’s more progressive wing in that era, but without a shop floor–based militant minority, the vitality and power of those unions dissipated. This pattern held across unions where radicals held strong influence: CIO unions in which the Communist Party had strong workplace-level concentration of militants instead of staffers saw higher levels of internal democracy and militancy (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003). That dynamism and internal democracy was never as present in SWOC when radicals were on staff, and they did not emerge after they were purged. Later, the absence of an active militant minority in the 1960s and 1970s was a key reason why, in contrast to the upsurges of the 1930s and 1940s, the spikes in strike activity and other militant action did not produce consolidated gains for workers (Moody 2017, 76–77). There were exceptions, most notably in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), where a strong militant minority composed of an alliance of organic workplace activists and radical leftists who entered the union to agitate founded Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). Despite pushback from entrenched conservative leadership, TDU built a militant and democratic current in the Teamsters and eventually helped achieve major reforms (La Botz 2010). But

overall, the Left of that era either did not make serious attempts at putting the working class at the center of their organizing or failed in their attempts to do so (Allen 2017; Brenner 2010; Levy 1994). This contrasts to Western European countries, where a “much more powerful explosion of rank-and-file workers’ movements against employers and entrenched union officials” strengthened their respective movements and resisted the worst of that era’s neoliberal attacks (Brenner 2010).

The case of the Lordstown, Ohio, General Motors (GM) plant in 1972 shows the problem of lacking a coherent militant minority at a time of widespread militancy. Dissatisfaction with the mind-numbing work, combined with the general culture of radicalism at the time, produced strikes, slowdowns, management defiance, and shop-floor sabotage that was characterized nationally as the “blue-collar blues.” But without a shop floor–based militant minority to guide these organic expressions of militancy, and without a coherent current within the United Automobile Workers (UAW) that could consolidate similar expressions throughout the country (Jones 2010), the militancy did not translate into long-term gains (Child 1980; Serrin 1982).

The Militant Minority as the Most Dedicated Organizers

Scholars of many ideological stripes have acknowledged the key role that leftists played in the founding of American industrial unionism (Zieger 1995). This was no accident. At a time when the legal and political climate for labor was particularly hostile, leftists were among the core of workers willing to endure firings and even violence to organize.

This meant two things. First, in moments of movement retreat, the militant minority kept vital organizational infrastructure alive, built trust and confidence among workers, and formulated ideas and strategies that could be put to use when conditions improved—even when they lost. Describing the Communists’ role in a 1926 textile mill strike, Cochran (1977, 32) wrote that the party “showed they could conduct a big strike under big, virtually hopeless circumstances, that they could operate effectively the complicated machinery of mass picket lines, soup kitchens, legal defense, national publicity, strike meetings, and financial solicitation.” In the auto industry, radicals played key organizing roles in early organizing efforts. Keeran (1980) notes that the Communists “waged an almost single-handed effort to bring an industrial union to the auto industry” in the 1920s. A “small nucleus” (peaking around 500) gained influence in auto, establishing “party units” in a dozen factories and producing shop-floor newspapers in as many, “pav[ing] the way” for industrial unionism in auto (29, 58–59).

In mining, the United Mine Workers’ (UMW) organizing drive in Harlan County, Kentucky, was crushed in 1921. The union gave up on the region until a decade later—only to suffer another crushing defeat in 1931. The UMW backed out, but the Communists stepped in. Party efforts bore little fruit. They led another disastrous strike, unable to overcome the mine owners’ “systematic reign of terror” in Harlan County. But as in auto, party efforts laid the groundwork for eventual success, with mining later becoming a hotbed of militancy (Cochran 1977, 54–57).

Long before the CIO organized unions on an industrial model in the mid-1930s, Communists did. Through the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL) and its successor, the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), they laid the groundwork for industrial unions in several sectors (Johanningsmeier 2010; Ottanelli 1991; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003, 33-34). TUEL and TUUL never exceeded a tiny minority of workers, and radicals often lost the strikes they led in these “lean years” (Bernstein 1969), but their organizing pierced the myth of worker contentment that employers used to explain why workers had not unionized (Cochran 1977, 65).

Second, in moments of upheaval, the militant minority was positioned to channel worker unrest into concrete organizational gains. Its combination of ideological commitment, practical know-how, and dense workplace organization in the 1920s proved invaluable once worker unrest spread in the 1930s. Similar to Trotsky’s ([1930] 2017) description of how Bolsheviks functioned in the Russian Revolution, members of the militant minority saw themselves as the piston box guiding “the energy of the masses,” the “steam.” Leadership and organization were necessary to ensure the steam would not dissipate, but ultimately “what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam.”

Because leftists held a shared political vision and strategy, they approached organizing in a cohesive, disciplined way. Their organizing, thus, had an impact disproportionate to their numbers. Writing about the role of Communists in the formation of the CIO, anticommunists Howe and Coser (1957, 357) wrote, “Never were the Communists more than a minority among the CIO organizers. . . . But the Communists were the best-organized. . . . The devotion, heroism, and selflessness of many Communist unionists during these years can hardly be overestimated.” The Communist Party and other left groups made labor organizing a principal organizing activity (Cochran 1977, 20), positioning them to play influential roles in many organizing drives, strikes, leadership elections, and day-to-day union business, despite small numbers. The critical role of this militant minority became apparent as class conflict heated up in the 1930s—most notably in the famed strikes in Toledo, San Francisco, and Minneapolis that epitomized the “eruption” of 1934 (Bernstein 1970). Different groups of leftists—the American Workers Party (AWP) in Toledo, the Communist Party in San Francisco, and the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party in Minneapolis—played key roles in all three upsurges. Cochran (1977, 88) describes these strikes as follows: (1) all were led by radicals in the face of constant attacks; (2) all were physical contests, in which the side that best engaged in street battle won; (3) strikers enjoyed strong support from the public; (4) the conflicts led or nearly led to general strikes, often over conservative leadership’s opposition; and (5) all three were victorious and helped produce strong labor movements in their respective cities.

In 1933, on the San Francisco docks, the Communist Party had a tiny presence, as previously mentioned: ten rank-and-file longshore workers when the party first began organizing. Yet these ten played a key role within the small reform group that reinvigorated a newspaper covering conditions on the docks, agitated against company unions, and soon called for and organized a brief strike of 400 workers that built to a general strike, and led to the International Longshore and Warehouse Union’s (ILWU) formation

(Kimeldorf 1988, 87-89). In Toledo, radicals, mostly AWP members, organized the Toledo Auto-Lite strike, which saw five days of pitched street battles between autoworkers and the unemployed on one side and the National Guard on the other (Bernstein 1970; Zieger and Gall 2002). The Communist Party supported the strike, propagandizing on a massive scale, organizing union organizing meetings and rallies at factory gates, a soup kitchen for strikers, and basic picketing logistics (Keeran 1980).

The key role socialists played in Toledo can also be seen in the targeted nature of government repression: they arrested AWP and Socialist Party members during strike negotiations, so the most shrewd, experienced leaders would be removed from the scene. But radicals also proved willing to resist that repression: after a judge's injunction limiting pickets to twenty-five at each Auto-Lite gate, they deliberately flouted the injunction. Their willingness to challenge the authorities galvanized the community, bringing thousands into the streets in support of the strike (Dollinger and Dollinger 2000, 8-12; Keeran 1980).

In 1930s Minneapolis, a cluster of Trotskyists got jobs in local coal yards with the idea of organizing the local trucking industry and making open-shop Minneapolis a union town. Against Teamsters policy, they insisted on an industrial organizing strategy that included not only drivers but lower-skill, lower-paid warehouse workers. The Trotskyists' strategic vision and tactical innovation in the face of fierce employer resistance helped unite Minneapolis trucking workers and mobilize the community behind the strike. After eight months of conflict, the strikers won a contract that broke the open shop (Dobbs 1972; Palmer 2013; Walker [1937] 2005). What the Trotskyists did after winning the strike was in some ways even more impressive. Building on the strike's momentum, they transformed the somnolent Teamsters Local 574 into a combative union that led the revitalization of the Minneapolis labor movement and transformed the IBT. Locally, they breathed new life into the Minneapolis Central Labor Union (CLU), transforming it into a voice for Minneapolis's working class. In the depths of the Great Depression, Local 544 (as Local 574 was later known) organized a Federal Workers Section (FWS) with backing from the CLU, which organized Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers and fought layoffs and established minimum wage rates for Minneapolis WPA workers (Dobbs 1975, 249-74). They also took on broader community concerns, organizing a "Local 544 Union Defense Guard" in the late 1930s to counter organized fascist groups (Dobbs 1975, 175-87).

Within the IBT, the Trotskyists tackled organizing over-the-road truck drivers on a regional basis. By 1938, they built the North Central District Drivers Council, made up of forty-six locals in eleven states, and created a master agreement covering 175 locals representing roughly 125,000 workers and signed by 1,700 trucking companies. This paved the way for the National Master Freight Agreement, which at its peak covered nearly 450,000 members and formed the core of the Teamsters Union (Dobbs 1973; James and James 1965). While the radicals were eventually purged, their organizing vision and strategy permanently transformed the Teamsters (Eidlin 2009; Haverty-Stacke 2016; James and James 1965). But their purge came at a price: the removal of this militant minority left the field open for more conservative, corrupt

elements to solidify control over the union. Those elements had long been present in the IBT, but radicals had mitigated their influence (Dobbs 1973).

In auto, the Communist Party pursued a strategy of “concentration” in key Michigan auto factories in the 1930s, filling both shops and non-workplace, pro-union roles like strike support coordinators in the early organizing drives (Keeran 1980, 4). Many of these workplace leaders and activists were on the front lines of the UAW’s formative battles. Socialists and Communists played key roles in crafting the strategies that shut down multiple Flint GM auto factories in 1936 (Lichtenstein 1996). Communists first introduced the idea of a sit-down strike to workers on the shop floor in Flint (Keeran 1980, 155-56). Leftist shop floor-based militants were also central to the physical contest of the factory occupations, from fighting police in the streets to occupying key buildings at key moments to organizing strike support logistics (Dollinger and Dollinger 2000). The Communists were decisive in the sit-downs’ victory, as they were determined to continue the strike in the face of union leaders’ recalcitrance (Keeran 1980). Their strike contributions were rooted in their political independence from union leadership, who wanted nothing to do with the sit-downers’ militancy.

Later, Communists and other radicals were instrumental in organizing meatpacking. Radicals in the UPWA helped keep the insurgent spirit of the 1930s alive past the high watermark of class struggle in that decade, shaping a sense of what Giddens calls “conflict consciousness” in a majority of members in the union who did not believe in the basic socialist tenets of the need to reshape society but did believe in the necessity of confronting management (Giddens and Held 1982). A range of radicals in a variety of locales, from Communist Party members in Chicago to Socialist Party members in Kansas City and Austin, Minnesota, played this role. In Austin, for example, leftists led the initial revolt against meatpacking plant owner Jay Hormel’s paternalistic treatment of workers. Inspired by radicals’ demands, other plant workers joined and eventually won a union. This initial act of unionization soon transformed the entire town through wall-to-wall unionization of businesses beyond meatpacking (Horowitz 1997, 42-45). In Kansas City, given that meatpacking jobs were some of the better jobs available to black workers and a long history of employers using blacks as strikebreakers, convincing black workers to join with whites (and vice versa) to organize together was crucial (Horowitz 1997, 86-94).

Beyond auto and meatpacking, Communists and other leftists were at the core of some of the toughest organizing battles of the 1930s and 1940s. At virulently anti-union industrial giant International Harvester, they led the charge to break the company union “works council” system and build a militant union—the United Farm Equipment and Metal Workers Union (FE)—that fought the company in the workplace and built a solidaristic shop-floor culture that survived even after the union was absorbed by a by-then-bureaucratized UAW (Gilpin 1992). Workplace-embedded Communists and Socialists were also central to efforts to organize agricultural workers of all kinds, from the cannery workers of the West Coast to the sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and tobacco workers of the South (Grubbs 1971; Kelley 1990; Korstad 2003; Ruiz 1987). More broadly, Communists and other leftists were the ones with the drive and determination to try and organize the South (Goldfield 1993; Honey

1993, 2000). They attracted working-class militants like riverboat worker W. E. “Red” Davis, who recalled that,

When I started organizing the CIO I was called a Communist anyhow, and one thing I noticed was that the Communists were the most dedicated union supporters. In 1939 I wasn't a Communist, just a militant young guy caught up in the class struggle. . . . But I became acquainted with the Communists and I found myself defending them because they were the best organizers. (Quoted in Honey 1993, 117)

Workplace anger and class conflict were widespread in the 1930s and 1940s; radicals did not create them themselves. But they did provide “answers, a program, and a plan of action” for workers who were desperate for them (Keeran 1980, 75).

The Militant Minority as a Link Between Unions and Communities

Radicals embedded in the workplace played frontline roles in leading union organizing drives from labor's earliest days through the 1940s. But they also provided a key link to organizing surrounding communities. Contemporary scholars have argued that strong links to communities beyond the workplace are essential to union revitalization (McAlevey 2016; Uetrict 2014). They were essential for earlier union fights, too—and a militant minority helped establish them.

This was rooted in radicals' broad conception of the working class. Radicals focused on organizing unions not because they saw unions as ends in themselves, but because they were a means to organize the entire working class. Union organizing involves struggling inside of the contained universe of a given workplace, an essential part of building worker power and worker consciousness among those who would not self-select to join a political movement (McAlevey 2016, 13). But radicals' vision of who constitutes the working class extended far beyond unionized workplaces. This analysis led to a commitment to organizing far beyond shop floors into workers' communities—what McAlevey (2016, 19) calls “whole worker organizing.” Such broad organizing made labor appear to many workers as a “class representative,” acting on behalf of all workers' class interests, rather than a “special interest,” acting only on behalf of dues-paying unionists (Eidlin 2018).

Returning to the 1934 Toledo Auto-Lite strike, it revolved principally around strikes at three auto plants, but large numbers of workers and the unemployed joined the striking workers, including from the Socialist Party, the Communist-organized Unemployed Councils, and the AWP-organized Unemployed League. A large number of autoworkers in Toledo were unemployed in 1934. Rather than seeing these workers' unemployment as outside of their purview, radicals' ideological commitment to organizing the entire working class meant that unemployed workers were key to the campaign (Dollinger and Dollinger 2000; Keeran 1980). During the strike, radicals also took leadership roles in violating court-ordered injunctions, then defending those violations publicly. Because of their ties to groups like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), socialist, Communist, and AWP members were able to turn the legal attempt

to squash the Auto-Lite strike into a national cause, grabbing headlines and bringing over 10,000 supporters out to the strikes' picket lines, turning the tide for the strike (Dollinger and Dollinger 2000, 8-10).

Radicals played key roles in transforming the broad shape of working-class struggle in many major cities—both through targeted outreach to working-class communities beyond the shop floor and because the militant actions they organized changed the landscape of working-class organizing. The aforementioned 1934 strikes in Toledo, San Francisco, and Minneapolis transformed unionism in those cities for decades (e.g., Kimeldorf 1988); the leftist presence in Chicago meatpacking radiated into surrounding working-class communities (Horowitz 1997). In Austin, Minnesota, a range of leftist groups composed an “exceptional” militant minority. Hormel was the primary employer in Austin, creating a classic “company town.” But the company town soon became a union town. After Hormel workers openly defied the tight control the company held over them—a fight led by the union's socialist-dominated hog-kill department—the entire town was transformed. Soon after the Hormel victory, workers of all kinds—gas attendants, hotel and restaurant workers, laundry workers, painters—streamed into the Independent Union of All Workers (IUAW), the industrial union that the meatpackers created. Soon, the union threatened boycotts of local businesses that refused to cooperate with closed-shop agreements. The union then spread its model to other meatpacking towns in the region, leading to confrontations between the IUAW's radicals and conservative AFL unionists. The militant minority of Communists, Trotskyists, and socialists in the union's ranks and leadership instilled the idea that fighting for themselves was not enough; reaching out to workers and communities beyond the factory gates became central to the unionism these meatpackers practiced (Horowitz 1997, 42-48). Because the radicals who made up the militant minority held a broad commitment to a working class beyond the workplace, they organized within communities, then mobilized them to support workers' struggles.

Radicals' Involvement in Unions' Day-to-Day Practices

While radicals' picket line heroics attracted more attention from reporters and historians, their steady involvement in the day-to-day practice of unionism on shop floors throughout the country ensured that strike victories translated into concrete gains for workers. It also reshaped the way their unions operated. Zieger (1997, 376) calls the Communist-led unions in the CIO “among the most egalitarian, the most honest and well-administered, the most racially progressive, and the most class conscious.”

Key to that day-to-day presence were dense shop steward systems that provided links between rank-and-file workers and union leadership, while also checking management's authority. Shop-steward networks that managed to survive the CIO's purging of radicals kept their unions more democratic and militant than other unions that had previously had a strong militant minority but were expelled from the CIO or defanged through internal purges (Gilpin 1992; Horowitz 1997; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003). Within the UPWA, various radicals played a central role (alongside militant white ethnics and African-Americans) in “develop[ing] departmental organizations to represent workers in

disputes with supervisors,” creating a “rank-and-file unionism . . . [that] provided a concrete linkage between the outlook and activities of the union’s cadre and the larger rank and file” (Horowitz 1997, 5). Starting with their early democratic organizing at the local level, packinghouse workers insisted that their initial CIO organizing charter be one that could produce “an international union permeable to rank-and-file influence because the locus of power rested at the lower echelons of the organization” (Horowitz 1997, 141). That structure persisted through World War II and after (when nearly all CIO leaders began to consolidate power and expel radicals), producing UPWA leaders who were “highly sensitive to rank-and-file pressure.” At a time when most CIO leaders were attempting to isolate themselves from a restive rank and file, the diverse group of socialists and Communists who made up the UPWA’s militant minority accomplished the opposite (Horowitz 1997, 150).

Similar strong shop-steward practices were present in other unions like the United Electrical Workers (UE). Their policy was for each shop to have one shop steward for every company foreman. Generally, they maintained a much lower ratio of workers to shop stewards than other CIO unions that were not under radical leadership like the UAW and the United Steelworkers of America (USWA; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003, 177).

Beyond simply standing up for aggrieved workers and enforcing contracts, the emphasis on strong shop-steward networks in unions like the UE and the UPWA was part of a broader refusal to cede control of shop-floor conditions to management. This was in contrast to unions like the UAW, whose president Walter Reuther successfully marginalized the militant minority so important to the union’s early years. The 1950 “Treaty of Detroit” he negotiated with GM ceded shop-floor control in exchange for high wages and benefits for autoworkers (Lichtenstein 1995). Reuther respected the “hegemony of capital,” management’s prerogative to carry out whatever action it deemed necessary. But for leftist union leaders and rank and filers, “‘management rights’ [were] neither ‘inherent’ nor legitimate; on the contrary, such alleged rights [constituted] . . . a quasilegal form of illegitimate class power” (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003, 132-36). Operating under this assumption, radicals challenged managerial authority over workers’ daily lives.

Another key aspect of radicals’ day-to-day work involved shop-floor education and agitation, particularly through newspapers. In Austin, Minnesota, a group of leftist Hormel meatpacking workers founded *The Unionist*, a paper that transformed not only the factory but the entire town, providing the first voice of opposition to its ruling elite in Austin’s history (Horowitz 1997). Minneapolis Teamsters launched *The Organizer* during their 1934 strike, which later became the *Northwest Organizer*, the official organ of the Minneapolis Teamsters Joint Council. It mixed political analysis of current events in the union and community with practical tools like publishing union contract language (Dobbs 1973). Radical dockworkers in San Francisco created the *Waterfront Worker*, a paper dedicated to agitating around rank-and-file issues (Kimeldorf 1988, 88-89). Radicals produced a wide variety of such papers across UAW shop floors, in the pre-CIO period of the 1920s, during the upsurges of the Great Depression, and after. These newspapers disseminated information about shop-floor

issues, provided a political analysis of class-struggle unionism, and proved an agitational tool that helped lead to worker upsurges (Dollinger and Dollinger 2000; Keeran 1980).

The strategies and structures that the militant minority built had a lasting impact, in some cases surviving the postwar Red scares and purges. In the UE in 1951, few members of the Communist Party remained in the factories where the union represented workers. Yet the shop-floor leaders who remained had had “their political personalities . . . shaped by [the] struggles” of the 1930s and 1940s and kept alive the spirit of combative unionism that they had learned from organized leftists (McColloch 1992, 184). In unions that kept radical leadership, like the ILWU, the experience of engaging in militant mass struggle, particularly the 1934 general strike, produced a generation of “34 men” who then set the class-struggle agenda for years to come (Kimeldorf 1988, 99-100).

During the postwar Red scare and after, critics often charged that radicals had used underhanded means to obtain leadership in unions where they held power. But contemporary assessments have found that in unions like the ILWU, radicals rose to power by winning over other workers to their program (Ahlquist and Levi 2013; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003). Once they achieved power in the ILWU, they democratized its constitution (Kimeldorf 1988). This kind of democratic practice created and sustained a “sense of common identity among the membership [that] transform[ed] the union into a close-knit working-class political community” (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003, 267).

Connecting the Rank and File and Leadership

Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin’s (2003, 59, 56) study of CP-led and -influenced CIO unions found that three key features necessary for internal democracy—a democratic constitution, institutionalized opposition to existing leadership, and an active membership—were all present in these unions. “Democracy in the CIO’s international unions,” they conclude, “was nourished by radicalism.” More specifically, the militant minority nourished these unions’ democratic practices. As an intermediate leadership layer independent of the officialdom, it served as the unions’ connective tissue, binding workers together in a broadly construed “community of fate” that brought the union to life as a force that fought not only for members’ own interests but others’ (Ahlquist and Levi 2013). It created connections of trust and accountability between members and leaders, channeling information within the union and creating a means for members to exercise voice. This, in turn, enhanced these unions’ strategic capacity (Ganz 2000).

How did unions with a strong militant minority accomplish this? One way was through the aforementioned commitment to fighting for shop-floor control, even when other unions were giving up such fights. The FE in the 1930s and 1940s provides an example. Despite repeated aggressive campaigns by the UAW to raid the union, members repeatedly voted to stay with FE. Part of the way the union maintained this commitment was through its refusal to give up on the battle over the production process. Unlike unions like the UAW that, a few years later, agreed to stop attempting to wrest

control of production from management in exchange for higher wages (Lichtenstein 1982), the FE continued to wage such battles. At International Harvester, management maintained a complicated piece-rate system for workers (Gilpin 1992, 114). The union fought it, refusing to cede this issue to management. Likewise, FE won the extraordinary measure of preventing management from forcing workers to work overtime hours. Fighting for control of production was what these workers wanted their union to struggle over: "On the shop floor at Harvester, therefore, a union was measured largely by how often, and how effectively, it intervened on the workers' behalf in piecework disputes" (Gilpin 1992, 115). Because of this, workers remained deeply loyal to the union. For workers of all kinds, basic issues of control over conditions on the shop floor are at the heart of day-to-day frustrations at work (Eidlin and Uetrict 2018); by refusing to abandon the struggle over those conditions, the union stayed in touch with the issues that mattered most to their members at work.

FE leaders realized that the only way to effectively carry out that fight, connecting the issues that mattered to rank-and-file workers to the union's leadership, was through a strong steward system on the shop floor. At Harvester, union stewards spent the majority of their time fighting management over piece rates and time studies. Workers even walked off the job at the Farmall Works factory in 1944 in defiance of the World War II no-strike pledge to win recognition of a large steward body (Gilpin 1992, 112, 124-25, 150). That steward system was so central to members' conception of their union, and to union leaders' conception of what good unionism looked like, that FE leaders used it as a key talking point in fighting off the UAW's attempt to raid them (Gilpin 1992).

The militant minority also fought for union structures that would allow for a dynamic interplay between the rank and file and union leadership and fought against proposals for union structures that would sever that connection. Despite repeated overtures, the UPWA refused to merge with an AFL affiliate over workers' worry of losing the responsiveness to shop-floor concerns that was central to UPWA unionism. UPWA members had similar worries about joining the CIO, but eventually forced the federation to grant a charter on the UPWA's terms that was still permeable to rank-and-file influence. This limited the development of a powerful bureaucracy in the union while maintaining strong local control. The militant minority fought for and won internal mechanisms in the union that kept union leadership connected to its membership; in the process, given the importance of black workers and class- and race-conscious white workers in the UPWA, the union developed a broader vision that included fighting racism in meatpacking and society (Horowitz 1997).

Socialists held leadership or significant influence in key CIO unions, but they also proved a check on those leaderships. The early CIO is often remembered as the home for militant, progressive trade unionism in the United States, in strong contrast to the conservative, parochial AFL. But this kind of analysis mistakes the militant spirit that the CIO successfully *captured* for something that its leaders *created* (Davis 1980, 47). Essential to that capturing was the leadership's battles against leftists in their unions as they worked to end the unpredictable, militant unionism the leftist militant minorities led (Lichtenstein 1982). This produced numerous conflicts between radicals and

existing union leadership, first in the AFL, then the CIO. Davis (1980, 50) writes, “There was a visible *radicalization* of the rank-and-file movement expressed both by the growth of left-wing groups, and, especially, by their ability to lead masses of workers in broad struggles like the 1934 strikes.” Breaking from the AFL, the Left provided “an alternative pole of leadership” to the labor movement at the time—an alternative pole the CIO struggled to catch up to.

Why Did the Militant Minority Decline?

The Left eventually declined within labor, and with it the militant minority. That decline came as a result of many injuries—some self-inflicted, others from without. Most important was the postwar Red scare that drove Communists from unions, and radicalism from much of the American body politic. The 1947 Taft-Hartley Act required unions to enforce a no-Communist pledge, leading to the expulsion of Communist unionists and Communist-led unions. But it was not just the Right that engaged in McCarthyite anticommunist attacks. Many liberal and social-democratic union leaders saw in these purges an opportunity to rid their unions of their most strident critics. For example, despite being a one-time member of a socialist group himself, allying with Communists within the union early on, and even spending two years working in a Soviet auto factory, UAW leader Walter Reuther embraced attacks on radicals to consolidate his power within the union (Lichtenstein 1997).

But the Left itself was not blameless. The Communist Party made a number of key errors during and after World War II that alienated them from the rank and file they had helped organize, out of fealty to the party line handed down from Moscow. The party’s wild shifts in strategy hurt them in the eyes of many workers. Keeran (1980) lists six distinct periods between 1923 and the end of World War II in which the party oscillated wildly between strongly militant, anticollaborationist rhetoric denouncing capital, non-leftist union leadership, socialists, social democrats, and other leftists and liberals, on the one hand, and collaborationist calls for unity with the same actors they had previously denounced. The shifts were sudden, contradictory, and related little to workers’ struggles on the job (Cochran 1977, 44). Workers were suspicious of these erratic shifts. During the Popular Front period, for instance, when the Communist Party put forward its most conservative line, arguing against workplace militancy and insisting that it was as American as apple pie, the party grew, but it likely would have grown more if American workers did not remember the party’s support for the Hitler-Stalin pact (Cochran 1977, 246-47). If the party could turn on a dime from arguing for a tactical alliance with the architect of the Holocaust to jingoistic American patriotism against Hitler, who knew when they might shift again?

Kimeldorf (1988) argues that the party’s success in the ILWU was rooted in leaders’ willingness to buck Moscow’s directives, holding on to much of its historic militancy at a time when Soviet leadership ordered labor peace on the docks, and refusing to adopt ultraleft rhetoric about employers and other unionists when Soviet leadership demanded it. The party’s role on the West Coast docks was paradoxical: its cadres were union leaders that created and maintained a culture of militancy in the union, but

the leadership's close engagement with the rank and file and fealty to *their* interests rather than Moscow's led them to avoid many of the mistakes of other Communist-led unions.

Additionally, soon after playing key roles at the rank-and-file level in the working-class upsurges of the 1930s, the Communist Party shifted its orientation toward the fledgling CIO union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party, aiming to ingratiate itself to political and labor power brokers rather than build shop-floor power (Davis 1986). This reorientation essentially meant that the party gave up on playing a key role in the militant minority. But it did not save them from the Red Scare. The CIO's purge of its radicals meant that the union organizers and rank-and-filers committed to "whole worker organizing" were eliminated from the unions (McAlevey 2016); with them went much of the basis upon which labor was seen as a "class representative."

The success of postwar Red scares in purging radicals helped sever the historical link between socialists and the working class. Despite a renewed interest in socialism in the 1960s, there was little tradition of socialist working-class struggle for them to draw upon; radicals turned instead to domestic racial minorities and Third World anti-colonial struggles as agents for social change (Elbaum 2002). While many New Left radicals outside the United States in countries like Canada pursued similar trajectories, the lack of such a devastating Red scare, as well as the presence of a social-democratic party that absorbed the new radical energies of the New Left era, meant that the historic link between labor and the Left, as well as the presence of the militant minority, was not ruptured as it was in the United States (Eidlin 2018; Isitt 2011).

Conclusion: Revitalizing the New Militant Minority

In many ways, the U.S. radical Left is, like labor, at historic lows. Radicals have historically held negligible (at best) influence within the Democratic Party, even at times of social movement upsurge like the 1960s and 1970s (Heideman 2016). Meanwhile, the lack of a labor, socialist, or social-democratic party has meant that unions and leftists have not had a dependable political vehicle to advance a working-class agenda (Davis 1980; Eidlin 2016). Recent social movement upsurges such as Occupy Wall Street have impacted U.S. political discourse, but the movement's "horizontalist" nature meant that much of its energy quickly dissipated (Milkman, Luce, and Lewis 2013).

However, there are positive signs. Bernie Sanders' presidential run and movements spawned in reaction to President Donald Trump's election, along with increasing concern with economic inequality and the historic distance provided by nearly three decades since the end of the Cold War, have sparked new interest in socialism. This has translated into growth for several radical left organizations—most notably the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which has grown from 8,000 members before Sanders's campaign to over 50,000 (Resnick 2018). This growth, combined with continued growth of Labor Notes, an organization dedicated to training and cohering a less explicitly socialist militant minority within the U.S. working class, has the potential to re-form a strong core of the militant minority in the twenty-first century.¹

There are barriers to such re-formation, however. Consistent with patterns of left organization in the post-World War II period, DSA's growth has largely come from the middle class (though many are downwardly mobile with dim future economic prospects). This poses a significant problem for re-forming the militant minority within the working class, as well as orientation toward the working class generally (Chibber 2018). One organized current within the organization ran for national leadership on a platform urging a focus on members working in strategic industries with strong potential for building working-class power, but it is too soon to judge what will come of these efforts (DSA Momentum 2017). The decidedly mixed legacy of previous generations of leftists in the 1960s and 1970s who made similar attempts gives reason for pause (Brenner, Brenner, and Winslow 2010; Elbaum 2002).

But if labor is to revitalize, rebuilding a militant minority will be key. And past experience strongly suggests that socialists and other leftists will be essential to rebuilding that militant minority. In the Great Depression/New Deal era, such radicals did not singlehandedly produce the working-class upsurges of the time. Likewise, radicals in the twenty-first century will not singlehandedly produce working-class upsurges today. But a restiveness seems to have spread through the U.S. working class that offers radicals new opportunities for struggle. Recent years have seen successful, militant strikes in cities like Chicago, where teachers walked off the job shortly after a new radical caucus took power within the union. Key to this victory was the cohering of a militant minority within that union in which socialists played principal roles (Uetricht 2014). And West Virginia teachers showed a surprising (and successful) militancy in their recent unlawful walkout. On-the-ground reports indicate that socialists were central actors in the militant minority that played a catalyzing and central organizational role in that strike (Blanc 2018). Inspired by the West Virginia example, teachers in at least five other states subsequently engaged in similar strikes.

Momentum, then, seems to be growing within the working class—perhaps in ways similar to past periods of U.S. worker upsurge. Whether such upsurges can produce a broader labor revitalization will depend on the organization and coherence of a militant minority and a strong radical leftist current within it. But revitalization of that leftist current will continually butt up against proponents of the three proposed fixes—policy, technical, and political—that continue to dominate discussion of union renewal.

Past attempts to implement these fixes while ignoring the problem of developing a militant minority and its potential disruptive power have come up short. Much of the rhetoric during Obama's campaign and first term around the attempt to institute EFCA saw the reform as a prerequisite for revitalization. At the time, workers exercising their disruptive power through actions like strikes was rare, and rebuilding that power was not a priority for national labor leaders. It was unsurprising, then, that the Obama administration shunted off the EFCA bill until Democrats lost their filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, thus losing any chance they had at passing it. Union leaders thought they could rebuild the labor movement through a policy fix, only to run up against the reality that passage of such a law was not a policy debate but a power struggle. Labor did not have enough power to force their agenda through.

Similarly, a suite of proposals for major overhauls to labor law by a diverse group of labor thinkers, convened by the Harvard Law School Labor and Worklife Program, will be rolled out in full by 2020. The group's proposals are ambitious and wide-ranging, and many would be strongly beneficial to American workers, including a move to sectoral- rather than firm-level bargaining, reconception and expansion of workers' legal rights to collective action, exploration of new forms of worker organizations, and more (Block and Sachs 2018). But the proposals are anchored in the same assumption that labor law will lead to union revitalization rather than following from an upsurge in workers' disruptive power.

Given current dwindling union budgets, we may see a decline in the kinds of technical solutions that have become popular among many unions. Major corporate campaigns like United Food and Commercial Workers' (UFCW) OUR Walmart campaign and Service Employees International Union's (SEIU) Fight for 15 campaign have recently been spun off or scaled back, with union leadership changes leading to changing budgetary priorities (Jamieson 2018; Moberg 2015). But even after the *Janus v. AFSCME* Supreme Court decision, which will further decimate public-sector unions, many continue to act as though technical fixes will save unions. A recent job posting from SEIU—one of the American labor movement's leaders in attempts at technical fixes to labor's woes—sought an “innovation specialist” whose tasks and desired experience were rife with vague Silicon Valley-speak: “implementing and leading innovation projects or design sprints,” serving as an in-house “expert in innovation methodologies, particularly human-centered design, lean startup and agile” (Union Jobs 2018). Less than two years earlier, upon learning of Trump's election as president and anticipating the antiunion rulings that were to come, the union announced an immediate 10 percent budget cut, rising to 30 percent by 2018 (Eidelson 2016). Perhaps the union believes it can “innovate” itself out of its current hole.

Many in labor are, at the time of this writing in fall 2018, joining many liberals in putting great hope on a “blue wave” of Democratic 2018 midterm victories in response to revulsion to Trump's presidency. While few are so optimistic that they think widespread Democratic wins would provide an actual political fix, there is hope at least for a political reprieve. That wave may, indeed, come. But as previously noted, Obama's 2008 victory was part of a larger blue wave that gave Democrats control of both houses of Congress and a veto-proof majority in the Senate, but did not produce much pro-labor legislation to speak of, much less a broader change in labor's fortunes. That should serve as a cautionary tale. And while labor has had success passing important policies like minimum wage hikes, those gains do not seem to have produced a broader turnaround in labor's fortunes—and many of those gains were undermined the moment Trump stepped into office.

The problem with labor revitalization proposals that are not anchored in a commitment to reinvigorating a militant minority is that they do not address the class nature of the struggle for labor movement revitalization. Worker power, at its core, comes from its ability to disrupt profit accumulation and business as usual (Burns 2011; Piven and Cloward 1977). The extent to which labor law that governs those workers or policies governing wages and workplace conditions favor workers over their bosses

depends on the amount of disruptive power those workers are able to wield. Labor revitalization proposals, then, should prioritize, above all, building that disruptive power—and the militant minority that has the capacity to organize it.

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Note

1. While it is easy to dismiss such organizations as too small to meaningfully impact working-class organization as a whole, it is important to recall that past militant minorities were quite small. What is important is that they be (1) embedded in the workplace and (2) located in strategic industries. The first ensures they have the trust and confidence of coworkers to elicit the levels of commitment necessary to engage in militant, sustained organizing, while making it harder to dismiss them as “outside agitators.” The second ensures their actions can have an outsized influence on working-class organization more broadly.

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