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Defining Americanism in the Shadow of Reaction

May Day and the Cultural Politics of Urban Celebrations, 1917–1935

In 1925, the Workers (Communist) Party (W(C)P) and its allied labor unions in New York held their May Day meeting at the city's Metropolitan Opera House. As the *New York Times* reported, that day "Reds who cheered for Soviet Russia and a dictatorship of the proletariat replaced those who ordinarily occupy the boxes in the 'diamond horseshoe.'"[1] The choice of venue may have been intended to evoke this sense of carnival: to symbolize the world turned upside down in proletarian revolution. Yet, the radical display came as a surprise to the management of the Opera House, who thought the hall had been rented for a musical and educational program, not a political rally. Nathan Franko, the orchestra's conductor, also expressed his dismay over the communist program. In what the *New York Times* described as a bitter backstage quarrel with the event's organizers, Franko at first refused to begin the program. He argued that as "a native-born American," he would "not have anything to do with this meeting unless the national anthem is played first."[2] After party and union leaders finally agreed to his demand, Franko led his orchestra in "The Star-Spangled Banner." The assembled crowd stood in silence.

The Freiheit Chorus, made up of seventy-five girls and fifty boys, did not sing along either. Just as Franko was determined to demonstrate his brand of patriotic Americanism, so, too, were the crowd and chorus firm in displaying their political radicalism. Only when the orchestra began "The Internationale" did they sing out and cheer. Franko then cut the prepared number of classical pieces that were to follow from ten to two. He and his musicians "left the stage before the revolutionary speeches were made."[3]

About a thousand miles away in Chicago on that same evening of May 1, 1925, more than 2,000 people crowded into the city's Temple Hall for the annual Workers (Communist) Party's May Day celebration. Once the majority of the crowd had made its way into the hall, the meeting opened with the singing of "The Internationale." A contingent from the party's Junior Section of the Young Workers League, made up of young boys and girls ranging in age from seven to fourteen, marched up the center aisle and joined their adult comrades in song. Wearing red neckerchiefs and carrying red banners, the Juniors walked onstage and continued to lead the assembly in revolutionary hymns, helping to set the tone for the fiery speeches that were to follow.[4]

Albert Galatsky, a twelve-year-old boy, delivered the first address of the evening. Speaking about himself and his fellow Juniors, he declared that they represented "more than the children of the working class"; that they were "the Communist children of the working class" who were prepared to join with workers in Europe "in the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism." Galatsky then noted how, despite the laws against child labor in Illinois, many youngsters still found it necessary to work to survive, including newsboys, boot blacks, and store clerks who were in the hall with them that night. The young communist declared that because of their daily struggles under capitalism, these children were committed to supporting the establishment of workers' protections like those instituted in Soviet Russia. Galatsky brought the cheering audience to its feet.[5]

The confrontation that took place at the Metropolitan Opera and the colorful display that party youth presented at Chicago's Temple Hall demonstrate three notable characteristics of May Day during the politically chilly 1920s, when labor and the left confronted the Red Scare and its aftereffects. Both episodes reveal the arrival of a new political movement on the scene of American public life: the Communist Party (CP) would become an increasingly more influential player in annual May Day celebrations beginning in this decade. The story of Nathan Franko's opposition to the communist celebration in New York in 1925 exemplifies the heightened antagonism that May Day demonstrations faced during the 1920s. And the events in Chicago indicate the more widespread and visible presence of children in such demonstrations, a participation that would trigger heated opposition from both political moderates and conservatives.

Those, like Franko, who were offended or frightened by May Day's radical displays, sought to assert their own definition of Americanism during the 1920s. Many of them chose to ignore these demonstrations, just as

Franko and his orchestra did by walking offstage. Others, including many veterans recently returned from the Great War, decided to attack May Day supporters physically. And still others, organized in self-defined patriotic associations like the American Defense Society, tried to create new public events that celebrated a different, more conservative, and martial Americanism to compete with, and hopefully replace, the radical interpretations expressed on May Day.

Despite this opposition, socialists and communists continued to voice their radical political aspirations during May 1 celebrations. Because of the legal restrictions on their ability to assemble and speak out that were enforced during the Red Scare, radicals struggled to maintain their annual observance of May Day against the threat of arrests and deportations. For most of the decade they took their demonstrations behind closed doors into mass meetings, temporarily abandoning the great street parades of previous years. In the process, the holiday's significance as a sign of their solidarity deepened. During the Red Scare and in the years immediately following, this process of radical American self-definition and the May Day holiday on which it took place became part of the larger cultural debate in the 1920s over who should rightfully be considered an American. It was not just in the familiar forums of legal persecution and vigilante violence that such conflict took place then, but also in the realm of the nation's festive culture.

By the 1920s, as the episode in Chicago demonstrates, children and teens had taken on a greater role in that festive culture. May Day celebrations, in particular, became host not only to the unions and political organizations of adults, but also to their youth auxiliaries, like the Junior section of the Young Workers League. While adults staged these events with their own particular political program in mind, children and teens became the special focus of them and participated in large numbers. Like Galatsky, some even seemed to accept the politics of their elders in the process. Although it is difficult to discern precisely how much political awareness or commitment the children embraced, the memoirs of Peggy Dennis, Robert Schrank, and others attest that participation in such celebrations was often a defining moment in their political awakening. Others may have shared in some of the official Communist Party doctrine, too, but mainly turned out to enjoy the festivity and sociability of the occasion with friends and family.

No matter how deeply the children internalized official party doctrine, those outside the political left were disturbed by the mere fact that

youngsters were present during these radical demonstrations each May. While members of the American Defense Society organized alternative civic events in the 1920s to draw the attention of adults away from radical May Day displays, other groups considered the place of children in public life. Beginning in 1920, the Rotary Club and the Boy Scouts organized elaborate Loyalty Day parades in both Chicago and New York, in part to counter the left-leaning May Day celebrations in their cities. A diverse coalition of politicians, public school officials, social workers, and unionists supported the creation of National Child Health Day events in these years as well, partly to undermine the significance of what had become a largely socialist and communist May 1 holiday. These urban parades and festivals were important not only for the children participating in them, but also for the agendas of their parents and elders who saw the events as battlegrounds for the political consciousness of the next generation.

Despite such efforts to derail radical May Day demonstrations and the participation of youths in them, the Communist and Socialist parties maintained the presence of youngsters in their indoor celebrations. For many children of radicals who filled the ranks of the party's junior organizations, these May Day events became defining political moments in their young lives. The reactionary cultural politics of the 1920s, then, may have temporarily driven elaborate May 1 parades off the streets, but they also contributed to the radical identities of many children of socialists and communists, who came of age in this period of repression through the struggle to defend May Day.

Although antiradical sentiment in America did not originate in the twentieth century, as the wave of political repression that followed the Haymarket bombing in 1886 suggests, it achieved a more heightened pitch and a more thoroughly national reach during the Red Scare of 1919 and 1920.[6] Building gradually soon after U.S. entry into the Great War in Europe in April 1917, this intense nativist sentiment gained momentum and took on concrete expression in the legal restrictions, including the infamous Espionage Act of June 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918, that were enforced against radicals and their organizations in subsequent years.[7]

Congress passed such draconian legislation, in part, because of the perceived need for the nation to defend itself against spies and traitors in wartime. Yet, the Espionage Act has remained in effect and the Sedition Act was not repealed until 1921, reflecting the continued existence of antiradical and antiforeign sentiment after the war. In effect, these laws

provided justification for the repression of socialists, anarchists, and communists in America, many of whom were foreign-born immigrants critical of the war effort. With the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in November 1917, fear of socialist and communist organizing power abroad and at home increased in the United States. The great strike wave that hit America in 1919 exacerbated these concerns.[8] And the exposure of an anarchist bomb plot planned for May 1919 only heightened popular fears. The plot targeted officials at the Department of Justice, Congress, and the courts who had passed or were enforcing restrictive immigration acts that allowed for the deportation of anarchists. A group of Italian anarchists, angered at the arrest and pending deportation of their leader, Luigi Galleani, had mailed explosives timed to arrive on May 1, 1919, to thirty public officials and industrialists, including Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. Fortunately for the intended victims, vigilant postal employees intercepted all but one of the bombs and no one was killed.[9] Nevertheless, the incident frightened the public and further deepened popular antiradical sentiment.

Beginning in May 1919 but accelerating in November, law enforcement officials on both the local and the national levels stepped up their raids on the homes and offices of known radicals and radical groups, shutting down presses, disrupting party organizations, and rounding up hundreds of individuals.[10] In December, 249 Russian- and foreign-born aliens were deported, including the anarchist feminist Emma Goldman.[11] By the spring of 1920, anarchist communities in America were greatly weakened, and Socialist and Communist party factions were under siege in the shadow of reaction. With many of their leaders in jail, their presses raided or closed, and their elected politicians ousted from office, these radicals still found ways to continue their observance of May Day.[12] In these commemorations, they both protested their political persecution and heralded what they hoped would be their eventual redemption through a socialist order brought about by their continued organization.

For the Socialist Party of Eugene Debs, the May Day celebrations of 1919 were rallies of resistance at which those gathered were to demand "Open Jails for Political Prisoners!"[13] Because of the nation's new sedition laws, many of the party's leading figures had been imprisoned for speaking out or writing against the war and the government. Debs' address at Canton, Ohio, in June 1918 resulted in his receiving a ten-year sentence in the Atlanta Penitentiary, which he began in Moundsville, West Virginia, in April 1919. Kate Richards O'Hare, a prominent party organizer and

speaker, entered the Jefferson City, Missouri, jail that same month and began a five-year sentence. Rose Pastor Stokes, a supporter of the party's left wing and a writer for its press, also was sentenced to the same prison for a ten-year term.[14] William Kruse, director of the Young People's Socialist League, and Adolph Germer, the party's executive secretary, were each sentenced to twenty years in Leavenworth.[15] For most of these socialists, May 1, 1919, was spent behind bars, but they worked to see that the day did not pass in vain. Not only did they support each other through their correspondence in jail, but they also welcomed the "letters from comrades all over the country with May Day greetings."[16] They maintained their spirit of defiance against what they believed were the unjust laws that placed them in jail, and fostered a spirit of unity in the wider community of socialists around their separate but simultaneous observances of the radical holiday.

Most of the imprisoned Socialist Party (SP) leaders commemorated May Day by releasing special messages to the party. SP members, who met behind closed doors during these trying times, would read such messages aloud at local May Day meetings around the nation. In the process, they remained connected to their imprisoned leaders, and those leaders maintained a link to the socialist community beyond the prison gates. In 1919, the SP's Department of Organization and Propaganda in Chicago gathered these dispatches into a program it published along with a guide to coordinating a "successful holiday meeting." It sent the booklet out to party locals across the country.[17]

In each of their separate addresses, party leaders such as Eugene Debs and William Kruse lamented the state of their political persecution, casting themselves and their party as martyrs to the cause of justice. They also voiced hope for the restoration of that justice through the full realization of what they understood to be the true promise of 1776: the achievement of socialism. These radical leaders thus laid claim to an American identity by voicing their unique interpretation of the nation's democratic heritage and revolutionary history. Just as other political movements drew on certain aspects of the Revolution to create their own story about 1776, socialists expressed support for that heritage at the same time as they rewrote its history. Men like Debs and Kruse located the class struggle at that history's center, arguing that their party would complete the *economic* revolution that they believed was necessary to make America a truly free nation. Using the materials of ritual and memory, these socialist leaders advanced their new definition of Americanism in the speeches the party printed and distributed on May Day.[18]

While these socialists claimed the heritage of 1776 in their demand for the reestablishment of their basic American rights, others in the party invoked international fellowship. Rose Pastor Stokes, for example, heralded May Day as the annual reaffirmation of socialists' "solidarity with our brothers in revolutionary lands."[19] Indeed, by 1919, May Day had become an important annual holiday in Bolshevik Russia, where its supporters stood in solidarity with socialists and communists around the world.[20] The 1917 Revolution had become another touchstone in radical political discourse for rebellion against tyranny, and the Soviet state was looked to as a living example of radical change. Some American socialists incorporated these new realities into their rhetoric. They characterized the sedition laws and the Federal Bureau of Investigation not only as manifestations of autocracy or of the Prussianism recently defeated in the Great War, but also of the czarism overthrown by the Russian revolutionaries and the "White Terror" that then threatened the nascent Soviet state.[21]

Associations between American socialists and the new Bolshevik order in Russia were not limited to the rhetorical. Personal connections were also forged among the more internationally minded members of the SP, like Stokes, who left it to form the new Workers (Communist) Party in 1919, and among those in the Russian branches who established their own Communist Party faction. Consequently, although the SP may not have forged such links to Soviet Russia, the popular association of Bolshevism with all things politically left of center deepened in these years of reaction at home. Even when Debs, Kruse, and other socialists invoked the tradition of the American Revolution and its political heritage of freedom and rights on May Day, most Americans quickly painted them with the same antiradical brush as they did the communists. They considered them all the domestic advocates of the more recent Bolshevik Revolution instead, and thought of May Day as the celebration of a dangerous and foreign political creed.

As a result, by 1919, May Day demonstrations were met with both official and popular opposition. In terms of the official repression, the parades became the special focus of police restrictions that were ostensibly intended to suppress violent outbreaks, but which actually suggested the persistence of antiradical sentiment in the wake of the Red Scare. In 1919, for example, the Chicago police denied local Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) organizations parade permits and banned all other processions on May Day throughout the city. Because of the recent imprisonment of

the IWW's leadership under the sedition laws, the police were more concerned than usual that radicals might stage an unruly protest.[22] Police went so far as to station rifle squads and federal agents at "strategic points" and to organize "larger numbers" of men at police headquarters and various substations "for quick movement to any part of the city."[23] When twenty-five people tried to hold a parade, they were quickly arrested.[24] For the time being, then, the police were able to push Chicago's radical May Day observations off the streets and behind closed doors.

State-sanctioned opposition to May Day also had reached a new height in New York between 1919 and 1921. In those years, parade permits were denied, the ban on the public display of the red flag remained in effect, and radicals were arrested for distributing May Day literature.[25] But, in New York, radicals also confronted popular opposition: the challenge of intense vigilante violence during the early days of the Red Scare. All through the day and into the evening of May 1, 1919, a group of approximately 100 uniformed military men and recent war veterans roamed the streets harassing and beating radicals who had gathered to celebrate May Day. The group came together around Louis Kulke, a Victory Loan speaker, who was addressing the crowds at Grand Central Station. After whipping the men into an antiradical frenzy, Kulke led them over to the Rand School, where they broke in and forced a man there to kiss the American flag. They then continued down to East Fifteenth Street, where the Russian branch of the SP regularly held its meetings and, as Kulke later described it, they found "15 or 20 men and we beat 'em up pretty badly."[26] After this initial round of assaults, the men headed for the new offices of the *Call*, where they broke in and attacked a group of some 400 men, women, and children who had gathered in an upstairs room to hear party speakers praise the new press facility. Kulke later noted that they "kicked hell out of the men there."[27]

Despite the persistence of these forms of hostility, socialists continued to observe May Day. The grand parades of the 1890s and 1900s may not have been possible, but the many different SP foreign-language and neighborhood branches, including an African-American assembly in Harlem, held their own separate indoor rallies throughout New York and Chicago.[28] In addition, in New York, some 200,000 men and women represented by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, and the International Fur Workers began to take the day off as an official union-recognized holiday. They coordinated their own indoor gatherings with speeches and musical

entertainment each year.[29] May Day thus remained important as a labor day for the union locals allied with the Socialist Party. They continued to observe it, albeit in these more subdued ways, even during this period of heightened opposition.

The nascent Workers (Communist) Party of America, which remained underground and divided among its multiple factions for the first four years of its existence, also organized May Day demonstrations in the early 1920s.[30] In its press, the W(C)P proclaimed May 1's potency as an annual rallying point for workers around the world. And it also constructed a revised memory of the holiday in which it designated itself as the party at the vanguard of that international worker solidarity. It used this newly minted memory to assert itself as the leader of the revolution and new world order that the spring holiday heralded. In so doing, the W(C)P clearly embraced the transnational potential of May Day, ignoring the holiday's roots in America. It chose to look outward to a global communist community rather than to forge, as Socialist Party members and their union allies had, any form of hybrid radical American identity at this time.

Such an international communist focus was evident in the party's iconographic representations of May Day throughout the 1920s, as seen in a 1929 illustration from the *New Masses*, where a disciplined line of mostly faceless marchers follows a red flag with the hammer and sickle insignia of Soviet Russia, not the Stars and Stripes of the United States.[31] This focus was also clearly articulated in speeches delivered at communist May 1 celebrations and in articles party leaders published in the *Daily Worker*. These W(C)P leaders insisted that May Day originated in Paris at the Second International in 1889, not in America in 1886.[32] Influenced by their contemporary concern to support the fledgling Soviet state, these communists also asserted that the holiday had reached a new historical turning point in Russia since 1917.[33] With the Bolshevik Revolution, the first workers' state was established, and May Day soon became one of its most important holidays. Harrison George, an editorialist at the *Daily Worker*, eagerly proclaimed in 1924 that the "voice of the proletariat is raised today in every land and every clime—in the chant of 'The Internationale.' The flags they march under are red, my comrade, and—led by the Communist International, they march to victory!"[34] The party, which at this point was made up mostly of new immigrants, including an entire branch of Russians, was clearly distancing itself from the American associations that May Day had taken on since its origins in 1886. Instead,

Figure 4.1. This May Day issue cover of the New Masses *from May 1929 shows the Communist (Workers) Party's iconographic representation of May Day as an event that had its focus on the Soviet Union and the party's disciplined ranks, rather than on the holiday's American roots. Courtesy of the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.*

these communists had their political eyes on Russia, evoking 1917, not 1776, as their revolutionary touchstone. May Day still functioned as a forum where radicals could create and express their political identities but, for these immigrant communists, the process resulted in a heightened version of internationalism, with almost no American connection.

Many Americans found such an agenda far too radical to embrace. By touting this cause on May Day, which they defined as an international holiday, these communists further alienated themselves and the May 1 event from the American public. During the 1920s, the W(C)P and its internationalist May Day became the foil for much more conservative definitions of nationalism. In particular, the urban business elite, the Rotary Club, the Boy Scouts, and an array of progressive reformers concerned with the fate of the nation's children quickly cast communists as an object of scorn. As these groups came to define the meaning of Americanism for themselves, they did so in opposition to the "un-American" communist May Day.

The American Defense Society (ADS), an association established among prominent business leaders in New York City during the Great War, was one such group that opposed May Day. The ADS originally carried out its mission to "Serve at Home" by compiling proposals for Congress that included the internment of alien enemies and pro-German sympathizers and the banning of German-language publications.[35] After the war, the organization continued its propaganda campaign, shifting its focus to the Americanization of immigrants and the political repression of radicals under its new slogan, "Eternal Vigilance Is STILL the Price of Liberty."[36] One of its main targets became the May 1 holiday.

Beginning in 1920, the ADS attempted to rename and reclaim May 1 as "American Day." This would be the first of many attempts by those who disdained socialism and communism to redefine May Day as something other than a day for radicals and workers. Working in conjunction with the National Security League, the ADS planned patriotic-themed parades and mass meetings around the nation, similar to those that had been coordinated for the preparedness campaign in 1916.[37] Richard Hurd, president of the Lawyer's Mortgage Company and chairman of the ADS Committee on Revolutionary Movements, oversaw the coordination of the American Day meetings by 1921.[38]

Hurd argued that by organizing the "American Day" events, "May 1st [could] thus be most advantageously utilized as the occasion of a program of public activities as well [as] to show how we can preserve our

Americanism against the sinister infiltration of anarchy and lawlessness." The new holiday would "also. . . . afford an opportunity for all patriotic citizens to re-consecrate themselves to the ideals and institutions of all those things that have made us a great and united people." Hurd insisted that this rededication of loyal Americans would have the greatest effect if it were to take place on what had become the radicals' holiday. A direct attack on the "forces which threaten our Government today," as Hurd described "communism, IWW'ism or Bolshevism," was believed necessary to counter their "deep-seated conspiracy against civilization." He and his committee of arrangements at the ADS argued "that a mobilization of patriotic Americans on May 1st will be a great discouragement to the disloyal propaganda with which the Communists now strive to destroy our free and independent nation."[39]

According to one of the American Day meeting programs, the celebration would give all patriotic citizens a chance to take such action: "to reconsecrate themselves to the duty of preserving Americanism" against the influence of socialists and communists.[40] In both the details of the celebration and the rhetoric of the printed program, the ADS placed those political radicals beyond the pale of "patriotic citizens," grouping them all as lawless anarchists instead. Even the *New York Times* reported the gathering at Carnegie Hall as a "meeting of protest against the 'reds.'"[41] The organizers purposefully coordinated the events of the day to celebrate such nativist patriotism. ADS members voiced this sentiment, along with their xenophobia and isolationism, when they sang along to Grace Hawthorne's hymn, "March on America!" Together they praised their nation as the "land of truth," where Americans teach "the children of [their] Saxon race" to honor the Stars and Stripes, the great flag that waved over a nation whose "future is thine own!"[42] In addition to this meeting in New York, the ADS coordinated similar gatherings in more than 800 cities throughout the continental United States, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Alaska in its "campaign against anarchy and Bolshevism."[43] Through such public demonstrations, these patriotic citizens celebrated their own version of a socially and politically exclusive America.

Central to this definition, and to the American Day program, was the American flag. The ADS meeting opened with a salute to the Stars and Stripes, the singing of the national anthem, and the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. These acts not only symbolized how those gathered publicly rededicated themselves to their nation, but also signified their rejection of other allegiances, be they to another country or to alternative

political values. The ADS reinforced this point in its published program when it reprinted "The Last Public Message of Theodore Roosevelt." The former U.S. president, who was also honorary president of the ADS, asserted that in the battle to Americanize the immigrant there could be "no divided allegiance." He insisted that, "we have room but for one flag, the American flag, and this excludes the red flag, which symbolizes all wars against liberty and civilization, just as much as it excludes any foreign flag of a nation to which we are hostile."[44]

The ADS's interpretation of the American flag, then, was one-dimensional. For Hurd and others in the society, the flag stood for undivided loyalty to and an unquestioning faith in the nation and left no room for political dissenters. This position differed greatly from the dynamic meaning socialists had given to the flag, and to the nation, since the 1890s. What members of the SLP had advanced in 1898, what Hillquit defended in 1912, and what Debs adhered to as late as 1919 were different versions of a hybrid radical Americanism: they cherished the Stars and Stripes as a symbol of democracy and freedom, which they believed was necessary and complementary to the development of socialism. The conservatives in the ADS rejected such interpretations of the nation's political heritage. They also clearly objected to the forthright internationalism the communists advocated on May Day as equally dangerous.

ADS members instead constructed a reactionary event during which they imbued the American flag with conservative, nativist meaning. Their definition of Americanism was shaped by their rejection of the dissenting political visions that radicals had tried to assert on May Day in the recent past. Rather than a democracy that would bring socialism to fruition, the ADS understood America to be a nation of assimilated citizens who were loyal to the state and its system of free enterprise. In their annual celebration of American Day from 1919 to 1921, this voluntary organization of self-defined patriotic citizens temporarily challenged the dominance of radical demonstrations on May Day in New York. Through the creation of a competing public festival, they also tried to restrict symbolically the definition of those whom they believed could and could not rightfully be considered American.

Loyalty Day parades held on May 1 during the early 1920s were another of the alternative civic events that had the effect of displacing radical May Day demonstrations, but they were specifically concerned with the participation of children and provided a more progressive definition of

Americanism than that which the ADS offered. The Rotary Club organized these parades in New York City from 1920 to 1925 and in Chicago from 1921 to 1924.[45] The event marked the beginning of seven days of special programs held throughout each city for the "United Boys' Week," which the Rotary Clubs sponsored as part of their general service work with children.[46] In place of the "red-bannered parades of orators counseling sedition" on May Day, there was to be a march of loyal boys, America's rising generation.[47] This substitution took place in Manhattan in 1920, for example, where, because of the heightened state of alert caused by fears of a possible recurrence of the 1919 anarchist bomb plot, municipal authorities in Manhattan denied parade permits to both the Socialist and Communist parties.[48] The Rotary Club and its allied supporters secured a permit for their demonstration, however, because they had no radical ties or aspirations. Loyalty Day supporters were able to capture this political space partly because the state's repression of communists and socialists had cleared the way for them.

Needless to say, the city's socialist community was angered by this turn of events. The *New York Call* reported that "the parade was announced to be an antidote for Socialism," recognizing the significance of the Rotary's having chosen May Day for its event's debut.[49] The Loyalty Day supporters had gained access to the city's streets on the most important day in the radical celebratory calendar. Socialists interpreted this choice as a direct attack on their organizational work, especially among the city's working-class youth. The socialists and communists who organized May Day demonstrations were already under heightened pressure from the legal restrictions and popular vigilantism of the Red Scare. Now the radicals had to contend with politically conservative activists and their competing civic event. The Rotary organizers had captured the public space and reclaimed May 1 to set forth their own vision for the nation and for the place of children within it.

In the New York Loyalty Day parade of May 1920, for example, some 25,000 boys participated, led by military veteran General George W. Wingate. Organized into eight divisions, and "subdivided into brigades, regiments, companies and platoons," each with its own "boy officer" in the lead, the young men were accompanied by uniformed bands and several fife and drum corps. They marched downtown from Sixty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue to the Washington Square Arch. It took nearly three hours for the entire line to pass. Both working-class and middle-class boys were represented, walking with their fellows from the city's public

and parochial schools, welfare clubs, or settlement houses. Many of them carried American flags and waved to Mayor John Hylan and Governor Al Smith as they passed by the reviewing stand at Madison Square.[50]

The Rotary Club in New York was joined by the city's Henry Street Settlement, the local Child Health Organization, and the Boy Scouts in its sponsorship of the Loyalty Day parade.[51] In Chicago, the Rotary united with a variety of youth organizations, including the Chicago Commons, the Boy Scouts, the Boys' Brotherhood Republic, and the Jewish Club. In 1921, 50,000 boys marched down Michigan Avenue demonstrating "their loyalty, their courage, and their spirit of Americanism."[52] Beginning in 1921, the Scouts became a central feature of the demonstration. With their military-style uniforms and disciplined ranks, they fit easily into the overall martial structure and tone of the parade. They also sponsored colorful floats that represented the celebration of loyal boy citizens, the central theme of the new civic event. For example, in the 1923 New York parade, the Scouts enacted a scene on a flatbed truck, entitled "Gang Rule vs. Boy Scout Rule." A young boy, sitting on a fence "in a state of indecision first reclined one way and then the other" over a "gang of street urchins" shooting a game of craps on one side and a gathering of Scouts sitting before a campfire telling stories on the other.[53]

The message promoting wholesome citizenship over urban vice could also be seen on the placards that many of the marchers carried in the parade, which heralded: "Boys Are the Backbone of Our Nation" and "The Boys of Today Will Be the Men of Tomorrow."[54] Discipline and self-control were demonstrated in the military-style organization of the parade itself and by the neat uniforms of the Scouts and some of the schoolboys. Habits of health and good hygiene were celebrated in the theatrical displays on the floats sponsored by the Child Health Organization. For example, in 1921 it sponsored a float on which a boy, dressed as a bottle of milk, chased away two other boys dressed as a cup of tea and a mug of coffee, the caffeine-laden "enemies" of healthy childhood development.[55] The importance of wholesome and physically challenging recreation was expressed through the presence of some school-affiliated baseball teams, which marched in their uniforms, as well as the Scouts' display of camping.[56] Moral uprightness was promoted, too, in the production of the "Gang Rule vs. Boy Scout Rule" float, and in the drama of the parade itself. The Loyalty Day organizers intended the precise marching of thousands of the city's boys, carrying American flags and waving in salute to the municipal and state authorities on the reviewing stand, to be

a physical manifestation of the boys' loyalty to the city and the nation. It was to be a celebration of their potential as the next generation of leaders and responsible citizens.

The decision to hold this celebration on May 1 was most likely intentional. For the Rotary Club and the Boy Scouts, at least, the disciplined activities celebrated in the Loyalty Day parades would teach boys good citizenship and draw their attention away from the activities of socialist and communist youth groups on May Day. Inaugurating the "Boys' Week" activities on May 1 with a "Loyalty Day" parade, instead of with a public hygiene seminar or an educational forum on any other day of the year, underscored the Rotary's desire to demonstrate publicly its definition of patriotism in direct opposition to that which the radicals offered. The SP criticized this effort as an attempt to pull boys away from socialism, chiding it as "dozens of psychological tricks [that were] planned for directing the interests, developments and reactions of boys in the way they should go so that when they are old they will not depart therefrom."[57] Of course, the SP did not object to working toward improved health and hygiene or safe and wholesome recreation for children, which the Loyalty Day parades advocated.[58] What it did object to, and what the SP criticized as the cheap "tricks" of this new event, was its overtly martial structure and its celebration of patriotism as defined by loyalty to the nation-state above all else. That precluded the more fluid identification that socialists had created for themselves on May Day as radical Americans. The Rotary Club's and Boy Scouts' public assertion of a more rigid version of patriotism on May 1 intensified radical opposition to Loyalty Day.

The dominant presence of the Boy Scouts in Loyalty Day parades reinforced these radical objections. American socialists had criticized the Scouts since the organization took root in the United States in 1910 for the way it trained boys in military-style exercises and crowd-control techniques. They also railed against the loyalty oaths that Scouts were obliged to take to their parents, their country, and their employers. Radicals believed such oaths undermined the individual boy's ability to think for himself and to question authority. That several wealthy businessmen made substantial donations to the Scouts also became grist for the mill of radical criticism.[59] One socialist even accused the organization of being "a capitalist school for developing scabs and military murder machines for the profit and protection of the capitalist class."[60]

While these accusations exaggerated the power of the Boy Scouts in American society, the SP and the CP were right to be wary of the

organization for its basic opposition to political radicalism, which was also evident in its support for Loyalty Day over May Day. This antisocialist and anticommunist sentiment was not always expressed overtly, however, nor was it the only motivation for the public displays of loyalty on May 1. Instead, the antiradical presumptions of the latter were intertwined with an earnest desire to protect America's children, especially its working-class boys, from being lost to the perceived immorality and dangers of urban street life. This concern was particularly evident in the Scouts' "Gang Rule" float in the 1923 parade. There was also the desire to rescue middle-class boys from the effeminacy many feared would follow from a combination of too much mothering and the sedentary routines of modern urban life. In addition, these concerns were intensified by the nation's recent experience in the Great War, which had resulted in the deaths of thousands of young men to the guns and gas of the Western Front.[61] Consequently, Loyalty Day expressed both the more general, and mostly middle-class, anxieties over the challenges of urban existence that had been common since the turn of the century, and the more specific and recent preoccupations with the fate of the nation's future and security, represented in the lives, and quality of life, of its men.[62]

By 1920, these anxieties were expressed more specifically in terms of support for displays of military-style strength and discipline. There was a championing of the qualities of the dutiful and heroic soldier, yet without the hawkish desire for war. The nation had added Armistice Day to its calendar of events as a holiday ostensibly established to commemorate peace. Yet, its strongest supporter, the American Legion, quickly dominated the event during the 1920s, turning it into a celebration of military discipline and strength and a denunciation of radicalism and pacifism.[63] During this period, other men played the role of the loyal and skilled soldier, but, significantly, without the reality of battle, by becoming Boy Scout troop leaders. As Scouts, their sons embraced this martial mimicry.[64] Working-class men may also have shared in this brand of patriotic sentiment, especially those who had recently returned from fighting in the war. Not only could they have embraced the martial elements of this national pride, but also the antiradical, participating in acts of vigilante violence that targeted "reds" in the city and around the nation,[65] as their boys marched in the Loyalty Day parades with their school or settlement house groups.

As the placards in the Loyalty Day parades proclaimed, it was the sons, not the daughters, who were considered the backbone of the nation. They were its future citizens: its leaders, voters, and defenders. Even by the

mid-1920s, after national women's suffrage had been achieved, the ideal citizen was generally considered, and celebrated in these new parades on May 1, as male. Girls were present, but not in the line of march. Instead, they stood on the sidelines as spectators, or, in some years, assembled on the steps of the New York Public Library and sang to the marching young men as they passed by on Fifth Avenue.[66] Females were relegated to the role of cheering supporters of the male citizen's activities in the public sphere, a role reminiscent of the limited public activity of women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and not reflective of the reality of their place in 1920s public life.[67] The organizers of Loyalty Day thus also struck a reactionary note when it came to the cultural construction of gender: they placed the active male citizen at the center of public life, while relegating women to the periphery.

Consequently, these parades brought together a broad range of contemporary cultural concerns. Begun in the midst of the Red Scare, Loyalty Day in New York and Chicago officially promoted a socially and politically specific definition of Americanism for its young participants. It is difficult to know to what degree the boys who took part in the parade internalized these values, especially since no firsthand accounts have been uncovered. Of course, many of the children joined in the celebration because it was compulsory, a required part of their school day. Newspaper reports also note how some broke free from the rigidly structured demands of the organizers, leaving their appointed divisions to ride down the avenue on roller skates or bicycles, enjoying the day out of the classroom, the colorful flags, and the festive music.[68]

This annual parade of boys was organized for only a few years in each city, even though the Rotary continued to coordinate the other Boys' Week activities for decades.[69] One of the main reasons for the parade's eclipse was that it was soon overshadowed by other patriotic events. The new National Child Health Day parades and pageants on May 1 became the focus of children's activities in the schools by the mid- and late 1920s. Local patriotic civic societies and the Veterans of Foreign Wars revived Loyalty Day celebrations on May Day during the late 1920s and 1930s, but geared them toward adult participants with their own mass meetings and parades.[70] Yet, this transition did not diminish the contemporary importance of the original children's Loyalty Day of the early 1920s. The Rotary Club, the Scouts, and other major sponsors organized the event as an alternative public demonstration to the May Day parades that had filled the streets of New York and Chicago for decades before. They succeeded, with

the aid of the state, in displacing the radical holiday's outdoor presence for several years, and their efforts revealed the deep concerns they held for the fate of their sons and for their sons' place in American public life. If boys were the future of the nation, these middle- and working-class parents, Scout leaders, reformers, and fraternal association members sought to provide what they thought were properly defined values of loyalty, discipline, and patriotism: values they believed were incompatible with the political radicalism they sought to displace from their city's streets.

A different coalition of reform-minded groups came together in the early 1920s to promote the improvement of children's health. Like those who coordinated the Loyalty Day parades in New York and Chicago, these politicians, businessmen, unionists, and social workers ultimately directed their campaign against public assertions of political radicalism each May Day. In its place they proposed that May 1 become known as National Child Health Day.

The original impetus for focusing national attention on the issue of child health in America came from Herbert Hoover, who had been the director of Belgium Relief abroad and of the Food Administration at home during the Great War. During the late 1910s and early 1920s, Hoover became attuned to the concern shared by many American reformers for the welfare of the nation's children.[71] Well-known child-study expert Dr. L. Emmett Holt informed Hoover of the high infant mortality rate that still plagued America.[72] Hoover was disturbed by this reality and in 1923, after meeting with leading child specialists, directed the creation of the American Child Health Association (ACHA). It was to function as an umbrella group for existing scientific and educational organizations already dedicated to child welfare.[73]

Part of the ACHA's work was to gather information on the status of children's health in America. The surveys it conducted in its first year of existence revealed some startling statistics. In Hoover's words, the findings determined that Americans were "far behind what a national conscience should demand for the public protection of the well-being of our children." He argued that even with "all the enlightenment and all the prosperity of our great people," the Association had found "that in five other nations there is a lower death rate among infants." In addition, Hoover cited ACHA's findings drawn from recent medical exams of young men drafted into the military, noting that "something like eighty percent of the men examined were deficient in some particular or another."[74] In his

memoirs, Hoover would explain that while "military service is not the purpose of the nation," the draft had provided "a cross-section that must give us national concern, for the physical and moral well-being of the nation marches forward on the feet of healthy children."[75]

Hoover's reflections on the health status of the nation's youth reveals that he understood the problem not merely as a moral issue, but also as a political one for the entire nation. The failing health of America's children and young adults was related to America's reputation as a civilized society that could provide for the basic needs of its people, as well as to its security as a population that was inadequately prepared to defend itself physically. Along with his newly created association, Hoover argued that the best remedy for the deficient state of children's health was to encourage more community-based health programs and public education initiatives, as well as the better coordination of both on a national scale each year.

One of the association's ardent supporters, Aida de Acosta Root (the philanthropist wife of Elihu Root's nephew, Oren Root), is credited with suggesting that May Day become the rallying point for this new annual, national campaign.[76] She believed that teachers and parents could use the traditional spring rites of May to advance the message of children's health. The maypole dance, the gathering of flowers, and other customary games could be celebrated by schoolchildren with the appropriate lessons of proper nutrition, hygiene, and exercise worked into the amusements.[77] Beginning in 1924, May Day as Child Health Day became a focus of the ACHA's publicity for the health campaign. The daisy and the maypole became two of its symbols.[78]

Various state boards of health quickly adopted this campaign. Their Child Hygiene Divisions organized immunization, safe-milk, sanitation, and normal-weight campaigns on May 1. These local boards became the driving force behind the May Day activities in most states, each with its own May Day chairman and committee. Local schools also joined the crusade, organizing special parades, pageants, and field days to focus on and celebrate child health, appropriating existing May Day spring fêtes to serve the new Health Day cause.[79] In New York City, 500 schoolchildren joined in a 1928 celebration in Central Park, where "two of the healthiest preschool children in the city were crowned King and Queen of Health." Others distributed flowers to sick children in area hospitals, and one "healthy New York boy" was appointed City Health Commissioner for the day.[80]

Initially, the ACHA's main impetus for selecting May 1 as the focus of its national campaign was the date's traditional cultural associations with

springtime rebirth and renewal. As suggested by the activities they carried out on Child Health Day, reformers found this theme easy to apply in their campaigns for the improvement of child health. But Hoover was not blind to the political implications of the choice of May 1. He noted in his memoirs that, while "the Communists had previously appropriated [this] ancient festival of May Day for their demonstrations," he "took special satisfaction in giving them this particular competition."[81] The American Federation of Labor (AFL) shared in this satisfaction, too. It gave its support to the ACHA campaign and specifically sought to focus it on this antiradical purpose.

In terms of sharing the general concern over the physical welfare of the nation's children, the AFL's position was clear. In March 1924, Samuel Gompers wrote to the Child Health Association expressing his support for its goals.[82] At its Forty-Seventh Annual Convention in Los Angeles in October 1927, the AFL's Executive Council recommended that the federation present a joint resolution to Congress "similar to that which created Mother's Day," which would request that May 1 be declared Child Health Day. It was hoped that this measure would "attract nation-wide attention" to the cause and campaign already being carried out by local schools and health boards with the support of the ACHA.[83] The Executive Council justified its support for this measure by noting how organized labor had long been an advocate for child safety and welfare, opposing the evil of child labor and supporting compulsory education.[84]

In terms of sharing Hoover's antiradical agenda, the AFL also made its position clear in the language of the joint resolution it proposed. It believed that the Child Health Day initiative could be used to safeguard more than just the physical well-being of the nation's youth. It also implied that a rejection of political radicalism was essential to the welfare of children and, by extension, the future of the nation. The original resolution that the federation proposed to Congress reflected these assumptions. Asserting first that "the quality of the adult citizenry of a country depends upon the opportunities for wholesome development provided in childhood," the federation argued that it was "essential that provisions be made for a year-round child health program." It insisted that this would be "effectively achieved by setting aside one day for this purpose as 'child health day.'"[85] The original resolution then called on Congress to authorize and request the president "to issue a proclamation calling upon the Government officials to display the United States flag on all Government buildings, and the people of the United States to display the flag at their

homes or other suitable places, on May 1 of each year."[86] Lastly, the resolution asserted that "May 1 shall hereafter be designated and known as May day [sic] child health day and it shall be the duty of the President to request its observance as provided in this resolution."[87] It would seem that the federation hoped an overt display of American patriotism and an official redefinition of May 1 as Child Health Day would symbolically purge the date of its socialist and communist meaning. The federation clearly understood the Stars and Stripes to be indicative of the type of patriotism it cherished, one that encompassed a loyalty to American democracy and freedom, while disavowing international Marxist commitments. The AFL's call for the display of the American flag on May 1 as part of the Child Health Day program was a manifestation of its broader antiradical political agenda, and a new addition to the ACHA campaign. It became the focus of discussion at the congressional hearings held on the joint resolution in the spring of 1928.

The Senate had already passed the original version of the resolution when the hearings were held before the House Committee on Education on April 13 and 20, 1928.[88] Representative A. H. Greenwood of Indiana introduced the proposal there. Echoing the sentiment of its AFL sponsors, he stated that the intention of the resolution was to place the full "influence and prestige" of the federal government behind the Child Health Day movement already taking place in many states. Greenwood reassured some of his fellow congressmen, who had expressed doubt about the measure in their questions, that the resolution would lead neither to any formal centralization nor to compulsory activities for the local schools. He reiterated that the purpose of the measure was solely to create a focal point on May 1 for all the existing child health activities by granting them the recognition of the Congress and the president. It would make the day an annual rallying point for the other year-round activities, the details of which would remain based in local communities.[89] He argued that the federal government had a duty to support the issue of child health in this way because the children were the future and security of the nation.[90]

Despite such reassurances, some committee members remained uncomfortable with the flag-raising stipulation and with Greenwood's argument for congressional and presidential recognition of the day, especially since the grassroots health programs were already proceeding apace on May 1. The question of why there was such an *urgent* need for this was finally answered when the AFL's representative at the hearings, Edward McGrady, testified. He acknowledged that the federation had drafted the

resolution and had "hoped to get it adopted by this 1st of May." Ultimately, McGrady admitted that the federation was "very anxious to have this put on May 1" because it was "confronted every year with the fact that May 1 had been generally recognized as a radical day when all the radicals of the world get together and talk world revolution." He argued that "on May 1 for the last 15 or 18 years there have been anywhere from 1,500 to 2,000 meetings held in this country by the radicals," who were "calling for a revolutionary program, denouncing the Government, asking for a change of Government, and rule by the proletariat." McGrady emphasized how "they have always centered upon May 1."[91] The AFL hoped to change the meaning of this day.

When asked by one congressman if the AFL were "inspired by a desire to neutralize" the radical May Day, McGrady said yes. He argued that the federation wanted "to get the workers thinking not of world revolution," but of "the most valuable thing the Government has, the health of the children." Choosing May 1 and displaying the American flag on that day would aid this shift in focus. Everyone would then know that "the day had been dedicated to the health of the children of our country."[92] McGrady admitted the antiradical agenda of the federation in supporting the original resolution.

Although some of the representatives responded favorably to McGrady's defense of the measure, what passed in the House later that spring was a significantly altered version. Due to the concern of many in Congress over the mandated display of the American flag, that stipulation was dropped. Instead, Congress resolved to authorize and request that the president issue an annual proclamation "setting apart May 1 of each year as Child Health Day" and inviting "all agencies and organizations interested in child welfare" to coordinate their educational activities on that day.[93] President Coolidge followed suit, issuing a proclamation that echoed the language in the congressional resolution, setting aside May 1 and inviting all the local organizations to observe the new National Child Health Day.[94]

The American Child Health Association celebrated this national recognition with special publications that detailed the history of Child Health Day and suggested ways that the new national May 1 holiday could be used to advance the many existing yearlong health campaigns. The association noted how different state-based boards of health could continue their immunization drives, safe-milk campaigns, and child weigh-ins.[95] It also proposed that schools should conduct special "May Day as Child

Health Day" pageants and how the Boy Scouts could become involved, integrating their camping and hiking activities more closely with lessons on proper physical exercise.[96] In another report, the ACHA described how the National Child Health Day effort had already received commercial support. Department stores, like J.C. Penney, decorated their shop windows with sunsuits for children, designed to encourage healthful outdoor play, and the A&P market advertised specials on food products deemed especially nutritious.[97]

Although the president's proclamation and the final congressional resolution did not stipulate the display of the American flag in these Child Health Day observances, the AFL still claimed victory for its antiradical cause. In its report to the federation's 1928 convention in New Orleans, the Executive Council celebrated the significance of recognizing May 1 as National Child Health Day by contextualizing the redefinition within a revised history of the May Day holiday. Noting how May 1 traditionally had been the day when many union contracts were renewed (and was, therefore, a time when many strikes occurred), the council argued that this practice of striking gradually had died down by the turn of the century as unions increasingly changed the dates for making their agreements. Denying the role of the predecessor of the AFL in creating the first labor May Day in America in 1886, it attributed the birth of the spring holiday to the European labor movement in 1890. The Executive Council insisted that the "American trade union movement" had chosen to observe the September Labor Day instead beginning in 1884 and had remained dedicated solely to it ever since. In this revised history, the council essentially denied the presence of AFL affiliates in May Day celebrations during the 1890s and early twentieth century. The federation not only sought to purge the radical holiday from the nation's streets by supporting the competing National Child Health Day in its stead, but also aimed to erase May Day from American history through its revised version of the past. The AFL's Executive Council reinterpreted the past under the weight of contemporary values in a way that serviced its current political agenda of presenting itself as the moderate, loyal, and respectable face of organized labor.[98]

The un-American quality that the federation attributed to May Day by the 1920s was thereby cast back in time to the event's founding in this revision of its history. The council claimed that the May 1 holiday was and always had been an event for Europeans and radicals, effectively denying the annual celebration's rich history in America. It noted how "the communists still maintain May 1 as Labor Day." Now, with the presidential

proclamation that "May 1 will be known as Child Health Day," the council celebrated what it hoped would be May Day's final transformation in America: "May 1 no longer will be known as either a strike day or a Communist Labor Day," but a time to focus on the protection and health of America's children.[99]

Of course, while the president's proclamation asserted this designation, and although many local and national organizations observed National Child Health Day on May 1, the socialist and communist May Day holiday did not suddenly disappear. Instead, these radicals continued to hold their separate observances. But now they also focused much of their criticism of American capitalism on what they believed was the fundamentally misguided effort of National Child Health Day.

As the ACHA's campaign to define May 1 as National Child Health Day gained support in the mid-1920s, members of the Communist Party protested. Alongside the usual articles in the *Daily Worker* celebrating the international solidarity of the party's annual May Day demonstrations, there were now editorials criticizing efforts to remake the radical holiday into a didactic campaign for children's health. In 1927, one communist noted how in some states this campaign included "prizes for the best fed children," and sarcastically remarked that the "children of the great masses, who are compelled to go to work before they are physically developed" were unlikely to be among the winners.[100] As far as the Communist Party was concerned, Child Health Day was a misguided idea at best, and an obstruction to revolution at worst.[101] In line with their Marxist ideology, CP leaders argued in the party press that the only way to truly ensure the health of all the nation's children was to overthrow the capitalist system, which they deemed the root cause of poverty and its associated social and physical ills.[102] By choosing May 1 as its focal point, the health campaign reinforced the survival of capitalism by distracting workers from the "real" significance of May Day: the demonstration of international worker solidarity that would eventually overthrow capitalism and establish the communist order.[103]

Like much of the Communist Party rhetoric from the late 1920s and early 1930s, this criticism of the palliative effects of reform was intense. If taken literally, it also sacrificed the intermediary benefits of such reform for the sake of ideological purity. The rejection of Child Health Day as a capitalist sham was based on an interpretation of Marxist-Leninist ideology that assumed revolution would result from the Great Depression that

began in 1929. The Comintern's Sixth Congress believed that the Depression was evidence of the collapse of capitalism after its so-called third and final period of expansion. It argued that revolution would be the inevitable next stage of development. The party's official position was that it had to lead this revolutionary movement by winning the support of a majority of the working class.[104] Especially from the late 1920s until the slow shift to the "united front from above," beginning in 1933, party leaders in America defended this doctrinal orthodoxy. This position isolated them from officially supporting intermediate reforms, like those represented in the child health initiative.

Instead, the CP leadership tried to assert the party's authority as a protector of child welfare in both the present and the future, by arguing that only workers' solidarity and revolution could truly eradicate the problems of poverty and poor health. Consequently, they deemed the continued organization of communist May Day demonstrations essential to resist the expansion of Child Health Day. Yet, even during the so-called third period, when the party's official rhetoric was intensely orthodox, local party branches actively engaged in work that would help improve the lot of workers' children as well as advance the cause of revolution. From 1929 to 1933, these branches not only agitated on the shop floor for stronger unions, but also led hunger marches and demonstrations against evictions, high rents, and poor housing in New York, Chicago, and other major cities.[105] Recent research by historians like Randi Storch has uncovered such complex relationships within the CP at the city and neighborhood level. Storch has identified this central "tension that existed at the party's local level between independent action (and sometimes resistance), on the one hand, and party leaders' efforts to rein in the rank and file, on the other," noting how the ranks "followed their minds, sometimes broke the rules, and created the diversity that characterized the local Communist experience."[106] So, even while CP leaders continued to condemn National Child Health Day as misguided and limited in its palliative purpose, its members carried out reforms at the grassroots level to improve the lot of children and their families.

Officially, however, the CP remained committed to its belief that only revolutionary change would effect such lasting improvements, and thus it sustained its rejection of the holiday. In 1935, the party's affiliated benevolent organization, the International Workers Order (IWO), published a play that dramatized this criticism.[107] It included Sam Pevzner's drama, *The Gang Learns About May Day*, in a volume of "true to life" productions

designed for children.[108] The IWO intended the play to be an educational and recreational tool for its local IWO Juniors, the fraternal association's youth section.[109] At the center of the play were an expression of the party's objection to Child Health Day and its celebration of May Day as the "real" workers' holiday.

"The Gang" in the play's title comprises of a group of working-class friends: Spike, Marty, Pinky, Skinny, and Anna. As the curtain rises, they are found playing on the stoop of their tenement. Their neighbor, Mr. Morris, returns to his apartment, explaining to the children as he passes them on the stairs that he is on strike against his employer, the Finchley Wire Works Company. In the distance, the boys and Anna hear the voices of some older neighborhood kids who are members of the Young Pioneers, the CP youth group. Butch, one of the Pioneers who is admired by Skinny but disliked by Spike, urges the gang to follow him and his friends to the park, where the mayor is officiating over the Child Health Day activities. Butch and his fellow Pioneers tell the gang that they plan to demonstrate for unemployment insurance instead of joining in the maypole dance.[110]

Scene Two opens with the youngsters in the park, standing to the side of a large, festooned maypole that J. B. Finchley, owner of the wire works company, has donated to the city. After the mayor dedicates the pole for the occasion, the local schoolteacher, Miss Milhooey, begins to lead all the children who have special tickets in the maypole dance. Because Spike has intimidated a fat rich boy out of his ticket, Elsie Morris, the gang's neighbor and friend, is able to join in the promenade. When Miss Milhooey discovers this breach, she at first moves to notify the police, but is interrupted by screams from the crowd as the young, delicate Elsie suddenly collapses to the ground by the side of the maypole.[111]

The Gang then reaches its didactic climax when Butch rallies his fellow Pioneers to Elsie's side. Although Mr. Finchley quickly tries to quiet the crowd by explaining Elsie's collapse as an accident, Butch climbs on the shoulders of Spike and Skinny and delivers his interpretation of the event as a young communist. He argues that Elsie had collapsed because she has not eaten that day, and that she has not eaten because her father, Mr. Morris, is on strike against Mr. Finchley's company. Butch explains that Morris had to go on strike because Finchley pays him "such lousy wages." As the mouthpiece within the play for the CP's position, the Young Pioneer then asks the crowd, "If Mr. Finchley loves us kids so much, why don't he give our fathers enough pay to live decently so that we don't drop from starvation."[112]

Butch ends his speech by praising the Young Pioneers and the "real" May Day, which he and his comrades observe by fighting for unemployment insurance so that children like Elsie will not starve. His words prove powerful enough to sway even the originally skeptical Spike, who stands up next and declares that he is "going to the May First demonstration." Asking the assembled crowd in the play, and, by extension, the audience, "who's with me?," Spike leads the children away from the shamble that has become the Child Health Day party in the park to the "real" May Day march on the streets of the city.[113]

Butch, the Young Pioneer hero, exemplifies the active, politically engaged youth that the Communist Party hoped to cultivate in its children's programs. With the support of his comrades, he not only exposes the hypocrisy of Child Health Day, but also wins over the local working-class kids for the radical May Day celebration in the city. The play taught other lessons, too: to question authority figures, like Milhooey, Finchley, and the mayor, and to view society as divided fundamentally by class. The working-class gang is set apart from the fat rich kids with their special mayoral tickets for the maypole dance. The play also advanced a masculine militancy in the character of Butch and in the banners and chants of his Pioneer brethren. They were poised in opposition to the florally festooned maypole, the effeminate and weak fat boy whom Spike intimidates, and the maypole dance, which Skinny mocks as girlish. Here the political left characterizes the wealthy as unmanly in their idleness (the fat boy) and their indifference (Finchley), while casting itself as the virile, young working-class boys, Butch and Spike. Communists thus also presented a masculine figure as the ideal political agent, just as the organizers of the Loyalty Day parade had done in the previous decade. Although women may have marched in the streets of May Day parades when they were held outdoors again in the 1930s, they were still not represented in much of the literature of the left as central players.[114] The same was true in leftist iconography, as Figure 4.2 shows.[115] As in Pevzner's play, the *ideal* representation was still one of men and boys taking the lead.

In some instances, real-life Butches did rise to the occasion, speaking out at May Day demonstrations in favor of the party line. During the mid- to late 1920s and into the 1930s, radical working-class children and teens took increasingly active roles in communist May Day celebrations. Despite the attempts of Hoover, the AFL, and the real-world Milhooeys, not all youngsters were drawn away from the radical displays. Instead, a

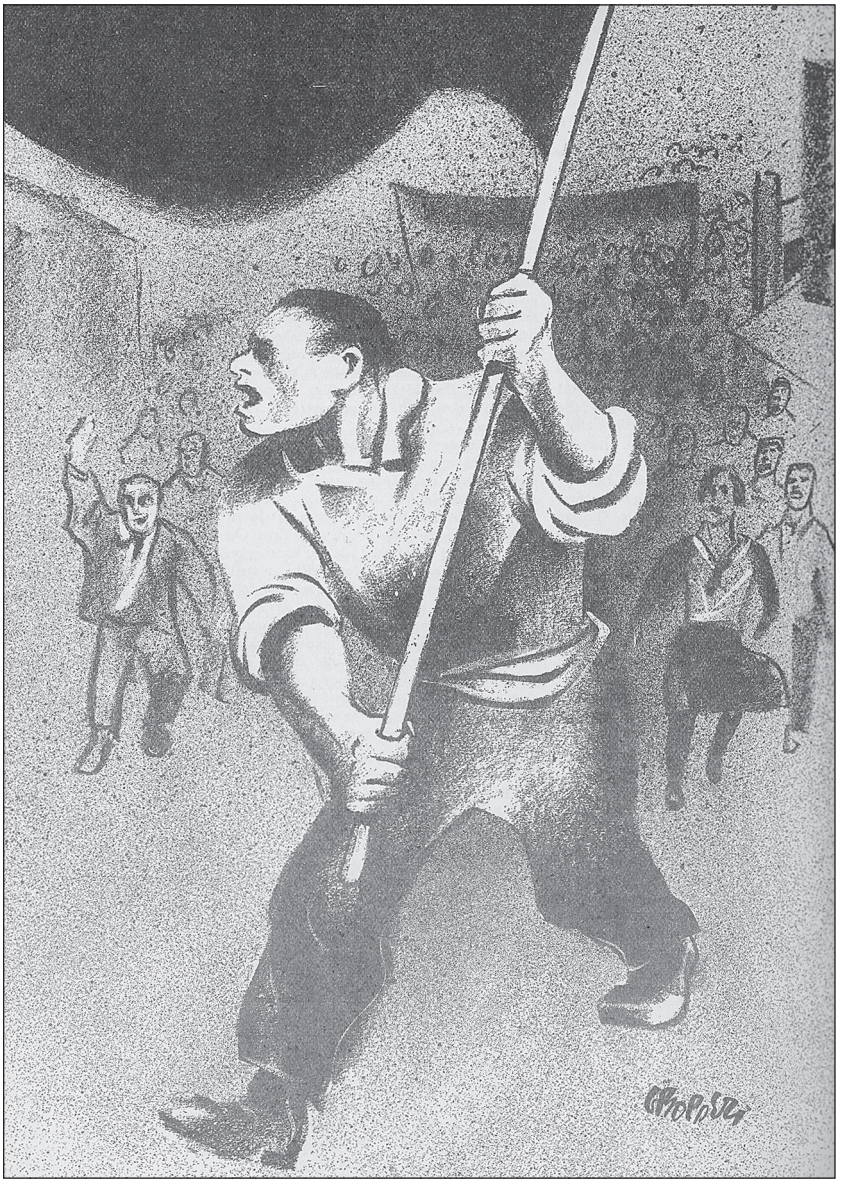

Figure 4.2. Although women marched in May Day parades, the brawny male worker was still the favored iconographic representation of labor for the left, as seen in this William Gropper cartoon from the New Masses, *May 4, 1937. Courtesy of the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.*

new generation of native-born, working-class American radicals came of age politically in the annual real-life dramas each May 1.

Youngsters had participated in these radical May Day demonstrations since the early years of the twentieth century. During the 1910s, for example, there were the lively "little parades" of the Socialist Party's Sunday schoolchildren held in Manhattan and Brooklyn each May 1.[116] During the early to mid-1920s, and continuing into the 1930s, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party created additional special youth groups for the children of their party members.[117] Through these clubs many youngsters joined in annual May Day demonstrations for the first time, thereby both enlivening those celebrations and gaining direct exposure to radical politics in action. For some who looked back on these events in their memoirs, they remembered the experience as a politically defining moment in their young lives.

One of the most active of the radical youth groups was the Communist Party's Young Pioneers (YP), to which the character Butch belonged in Pevzner's play. Founded in 1922 as the Junior Section of the Young Workers League, the YP took its new name in 1926 when the Workers (Communist) Party came fully above ground and changed its name to the Communist Party, USA (CPUSA). The Pioneers were originally "intended to include working-class children whose parents were not Communists": children who were to be recruited from the neighborhoods and the schools. The hope was that these children, like the fictitious Spike and his gang, would become active in the YP, join the Young Communist League (YCL) as teens, and ultimately enter the party as young adults. However, "in reality, most Young Pioneers were children of Communist Party members and sympathizers."[118] Working-class children of parents who were not radical were educated by the city's public schools or Catholic parish schools, and socialized within neighborhood networks dominated by these antiradical institutions. They generally did not enter the ranks of the party.[119]

For the children of radicals who generally did join the party's youth organizations, the activities they participated in educated them in their parents' politics. YP groups held their own meetings, usually supervised by a member from the YCL. They contributed to the organization's magazine, the *Young Pioneer*, and participated in local campaigns for issues that were of interest to them as radical children. Through leafleting their schools and attending demonstrations, for example, they both protested

what they believed was the imperialist propaganda of the public school curriculum and fought against child labor.[120]

Like Butch, the fictional Pioneer, most YPs also came out to demonstrate on May 1. Not only did they march in the May Day parades, but they also distributed party literature on the streets and, like Albert Galatsky, the twelve-year-old communist orator, spoke during the party's mass meetings.[121] A year after Galatsky's speech in Chicago, another Pioneer took the stage at the party's annual rally in 1926. Before a crowd of 8,000 in the Coliseum, Jack Cohen warned working-class parents of the dangers inherent in the public schools, which, he argued, were really capitalist educational institutions. He urged them to send their children to the Pioneers, where they would be taught to recognize such dangers and how to protest them.[122] In 1927, at the party's May Day meeting in New York, the fifteen-year-old "boy communist," Irving Lifschitz, voiced a similar charge against the Boy Scouts. In a fiery speech, he argued that the Scouts was an "organ of the capitalist class used to poison the minds of the children" with its martial aesthetic and its required loyalty oath.[123]

Lifschitz's sharp rhetoric, and the logic espoused by Cohen in his speech, echoed the official language of the party and may not have been penned independently by the boys. In part, they were probably mouthing the party line that they had learned from adult communists. Lifschitz's words also might have been exaggerated by the report in the *New York Times* that portrayed him as a young zealot. While it is unclear if Lifschitz and Cohen took to heart what they said at these meetings, it is clear that their presence was of value to adult party members. They supported this public demonstration of the children's politicization. It is also clear that this same politicization (however deep it ran) unsettled those outside the radical political left, who heard the words of the "boy communists" as evidence of their indoctrination into a dangerous orthodoxy.

To reach working-class children whose parents were not affiliated with the CP, and who were not in the meeting halls to hear the speeches of Galatsky, Cohen, or Lifschitz directly, the Pioneers coordinated school boycott campaigns each May 1. Party leaders helped the Pioneers organize the annual walkouts and described them as "school strikes," akin to the strikes many working-class radical adults waged against their employers on May Day. While the children of political moderates and conservatives mimicked the soldier as their masculine hero during Loyalty Day parades, those of political radicals modeled themselves on the brawny, striking factory hand in their May 1 boycotts. It was hoped that such action

would set an example for the other working-class children in the schools, but more often than not, the Pioneers left the classrooms on their own.[124] Some even ended the day at the police station, arrested for distributing party leaflets on the streets outside their schools.[125] From such accounts, a certain amount of commitment to the cause on the part of the youths themselves seems evident. Despite these difficulties, the Pioneers carried on their demonstrations each year from the late 1920s into the 1930s.

During these same years, children of SP members carried out similar activities each May Day. The Socialist Pioneer Youth, like the Communist YP, was a youth club organized along neighborhood lines that socialized children into the workings of the party. It also ran summer camps outside New York City as politically alternative recreational facilities for radical families.[126] Perhaps because the Pioneer Youth emphasized the social and recreational elements of its programs more than direct political activism, its members were less directly involved in May Day celebrations than the CP's Young Pioneers. Instead, within the SP it was the older members of the Young People's Socialist League, or "Yipsels," who enthusiastically joined in the annual May 1 demonstrations.[127] They coordinated annual meetings at the Rand School with guest speakers from the party and from local unions, and distributed thousands of leaflets at SP May Day gatherings, which they also helped to organize.[128]

The literal and symbolic significance of the Yipsels within the SP was made manifest at these May Day meetings. Not only did the young radicals perform the physical tasks of coordinating displays and handing out party literature, the basic trench work of party organization, but they also signified the viability of the next generation of the party. The Yipsels were the base of the party's young, and increasingly more militant, membership. Within the CP, the Young Pioneers and the YCL filled similar roles. In their demonstrations, they both represented the party's future and actively touted the party's political line in speeches, dramatic presentations, and the school-strike campaign. Through their May Day activities, these youths publicly asserted their affiliation with the CPUSA and its agenda, and physically engaged in the practice of political action on the streets of their cities.

This political socialization of its youth was precisely what each radical party wanted. It was the motivation for the organization of these junior groups and for the encouragement of children's participation in annual May Day events. Yet, in addition to this official version of the meaning of the youngsters' role in the May 1 demonstrations, there was, of course,

a range of vernacular interpretations held among the youths themselves. For all the individuals who later recorded their childhood memories, the connection of their family to either the SP or the CP was cited as the primary determinant of their own politics.[129] But their participation in May Day celebrations became their first public assertion of this nascent political identity.

Memoirs provide insight into what these events meant to the children when they first experienced them. Peggy Dennis recalled how she and her sister "stayed out of school on May First, International Workers' Day of Solidarity and Struggle." From her parents, Dennis argued, she learned at the time that "it was important to make it clear to teacher and classmates the socially significant reason for [their] absence that day," and noted how "neither [they] nor [their] parents would use the easy 'she was sick excuse.'"[130] Raised in a community of left-wing immigrants in Los Angeles, Dennis learned the meaning of May Day from her Russian-Jewish socialist parents, who guided her and her sister in the etiquette of radical civil disobedience. For Dennis, staying out of school on May 1 was initially not the result of her affiliation with the party, which came later as a pre-teen when she joined the Young Pioneers. Instead, it came from her family's politics—what she defined as their "belligerently atheist, internationalist, and anti-imperialist" position—which led her into the activities of the party. Her sense of belonging to this radical tradition, first within her family and later within the party, gave Dennis the courage to boycott school on May Day, against the regulations of the district and the objection of her teacher and classmates. She noted how her political values, reinforced by her family and later by the party, made her feel "special and superior" to what she then believed was the "narrow-mindedness of [her] block, [her] school, and [her] community" as she walked out of the classroom as a young child.[131]

Not all children of politically radical parents felt so special when they boycotted school each May 1. In his autobiography, Robert Schrank recalls feeling somewhat "embarrassed" at having "to stand alone against the authority of the school."[132] Like Dennis, Schrank was raised in a home steeped in socialist thinking. His father was a Jewish radical who "leaned toward the Wobbly or anarcho-syndicalist position that the world ought to be run by workers' councils."[133] As a young boy in the late 1920s, Schrank was "kept out of school" by his father "to participate in the parade and celebration of the workers' holiday."[134] His recollection of these annual school boycotts underscored his early recognition of the political

differences between himself and the other children in his school. But unlike Dennis, Schrank did not exalt in a sense of superiority or pride in this separation. Instead, he remembers how he tried to organize a "little gang of boys to join him in the fooling around" that landed him in still more trouble with school authorities.[135] As a young child, Schrank's radical political affiliation set him apart in ways that made him feel uncomfortable and isolated.

For other children, May Day was a fond memory of a spirited, fun occasion. Ruth Pinkson, also raised in a Jewish socialist home, attended a Yiddish-language shule in Harlem. There she learned about and came to cherish both her ethnic heritage and the radical political ideas of her parents.[136] She recalls how "marching in New York City's annual May Day parade with [her] friends and teachers was the highlight of [her] shule experience." Perhaps because she had the support of her extended community and shule classmates, Pinkson remembered May 1 as a "great event." She noted how she and her parents "arose early in the morning, dressed in special attire, and got into a spirit that none of the other holidays evoked."[137] The camaraderie of her family and friends marked the center of her experience as a radical child, which she celebrated on May Day as a young girl.

Although Robert Schrank may not have enjoyed the May Day school boycotts of his early childhood, he, too, came to embrace the carnival quality of the holiday as he grew into a young teen. Spurred by a concern for the unemployment that both he and his father faced in the early years of the Great Depression, already familiar with much of the radical ideology espoused by the CP, and attracted by the friendships promised by the communist youth organization, Schrank was drawn into the YCL. It was then that he began to support actively the party's annual May Day demonstrations.[138]

As a teen, the holiday took on a different meaning from what he experienced as a small child. As young adults, Schrank and his YCL comrades appreciated more fully the political demands they voiced as they marched. They also contributed more actively to the formation of those demands when they met and discussed them in the local cafeteria and designed the placards they would carry in the parade. The experience of gathering and planning for the demonstration became their schooling in political activism. That experience also simultaneously fulfilled a vital social function. Schrank had fun meeting up with his fellow YCL members, and made many new friends through the organization, including a few girlfriends

over the years. He noted in his autobiography, for example, how his attraction to a young woman named Miriam occupied much of his attention the night before the 1936 May Day parade in New York. Although they had only met once before, he claimed that he and Miriam "felt the immediate intimacy of being members of the same crusading army," and observed that "the excitement of a cause can be quite an aphrodisiac."[139]

Schrank's experiences in the YCL were similar to many other young radicals, who, as the native-born sons and daughters of radical immigrants, came of political age in the late 1920s and became the backbone of the CP's membership during the 1930s.[140] The combination of discussing radical political ideology and participating in public demonstrations while forming friendships and attending parties characterized the experience of many of these second-generation American ethnic radicals in the YCL. In the words of one former member, the league became for him "Leninist-Marxist theory all mixed up with baseball, screwing, dancing, selling the *Daily Worker*, bullshitting, and living the American-Jewish street life."[141] This milieu was common for many young radicals in these years, and the childhood stories of those like Dennis, Pinkson, and Schrank are familiar to those acquainted with the literature on such "red diaper babies."[142] Their recollections of May Day are significant, however, because they show how this holiday became a ritual focal point for the public definition and display of their complex social and political affiliations. Particularly for secular Jews, who cast off religious rituals, May 1 became the center of this display. As one radical later recalled of May Day: "*that* was our election day, our Fourth of July, our Hanukkah, and our Christmas."[143]

As small children in the early to mid-1920s, these sons and daughters of radical immigrants experienced the May Day school boycotts as one of the more important initial declarations of their political difference from their fellow native-born classmates. It was a moment of political awakening for Dennis, a youthful embarrassment for Schrank, and a cherished time of celebration for Pinkson. By the time these youngsters matured into teens and young adults in the early 1930s, they embraced May Day's radical potential, taking on a more self-conscious political identity as they actively planned and participated in the CP's demonstrations. By then, May Day had also become a familiar part of the local cultural landscape, especially for those who lived in radical ethnic enclaves within New York and Chicago. Each year, the youthful members of the YCL publicly defined their difference from those who did not share their political beliefs, as they also reaffirmed their ties to their local neighborhoods and communities of

fellow league and party members. Through their participation in the May Day demonstrations, they became both radicals and Americans, a complex identity they would articulate more clearly during the Popular Front May Day parades and mass meetings of the mid- to late 1930s.

As the experiences of these young radicals demonstrate, radical political youth groups like the YP and the YCL rarely drew their members from among boys in nonradical communities. Instead, children of party members and sympathizers filled the ranks of these organizations. Even among the working class, the Pioneers and YCL tended to draw their support from the sons and daughters of those who already espoused radical ideology, or who at least did not have an alternative belief system with which to inculcate their children in opposition to radicalism.[144] In the same way, the Boy Scouts did not draw much, if any, support from among the second-generation ethnic radical Americans. Loyalty Day and Child Health Day offered opportunities not for conversion, but for "reconsecration." For those who opposed the presence of socialists and communists in their city streets each May 1, these new holidays provided an effective way to reclaim the public space. Neither socialist nor communist May Day parades took place in the early 1920s.

The presence of thousands of working-class children from nonradical communities in Loyalty Day and Child Health Day events raises some interesting questions. These reform-oriented celebrations were linked to the public schools and, with their more benign assertions of patriotism, could have provided a vehicle for these children and their parents to assert their own version of working-class Americanism. In the early 1920s, that Americanism clearly included the rejection of political radicalism. Yet, it is also evident, from the rather quick disappearance of these anti–May Days, that there were limits to this opposition. There were more than just assertions of loyalty to the nation and rejections of socialism in the working-class Americanism that found expression in these events. There were also claims to healthy citizenship and participation in campaigns against urban vice and the ills that plagued workers' neighborhoods. By looking beyond the well-known legal and political history of the Red Scare to that of public celebrations like Loyalty Day and National Child Health Day, these parallel priorities within 1920s working-class culture are illuminated, and the contours of that decade's antiradicalism better understood.

Despite the effectiveness of those antiradical campaigns in displacing May Day parades from the streets during the 1920s, the SP and the CP

sustained a range of youth groups for the politicization of their members' children and teens. The two parties drew young people into more active roles during their annual indoor May Day celebrations, which they continued to observe defiantly, despite the many attempts that had been launched since the Red Scare to quash the holiday. In those demonstrations, some of the youngsters found their political voices for the first time, speaking to the party faithful at indoor gatherings. Others would also publicly assert their radical identities through participation in school strikes and the revived parades on May Day during the early 1930s. If not all of the nation's children were drawn into the politics of the left, as conservative and mainstream political adherents feared, neither were they all attracted to the alternative offerings of National Child Health Day and Loyalty Day. Instead, a minority of children within existing urban radical communities asserted their affiliation with the left as second-generation ethnic Americans. They would bring their youthful experiences to bear as leaders and members of the CP and the SP in the mid- to late 1930s, integrating their complex social and political affiliations into the radical American May Day demonstrations of the Popular Front years.