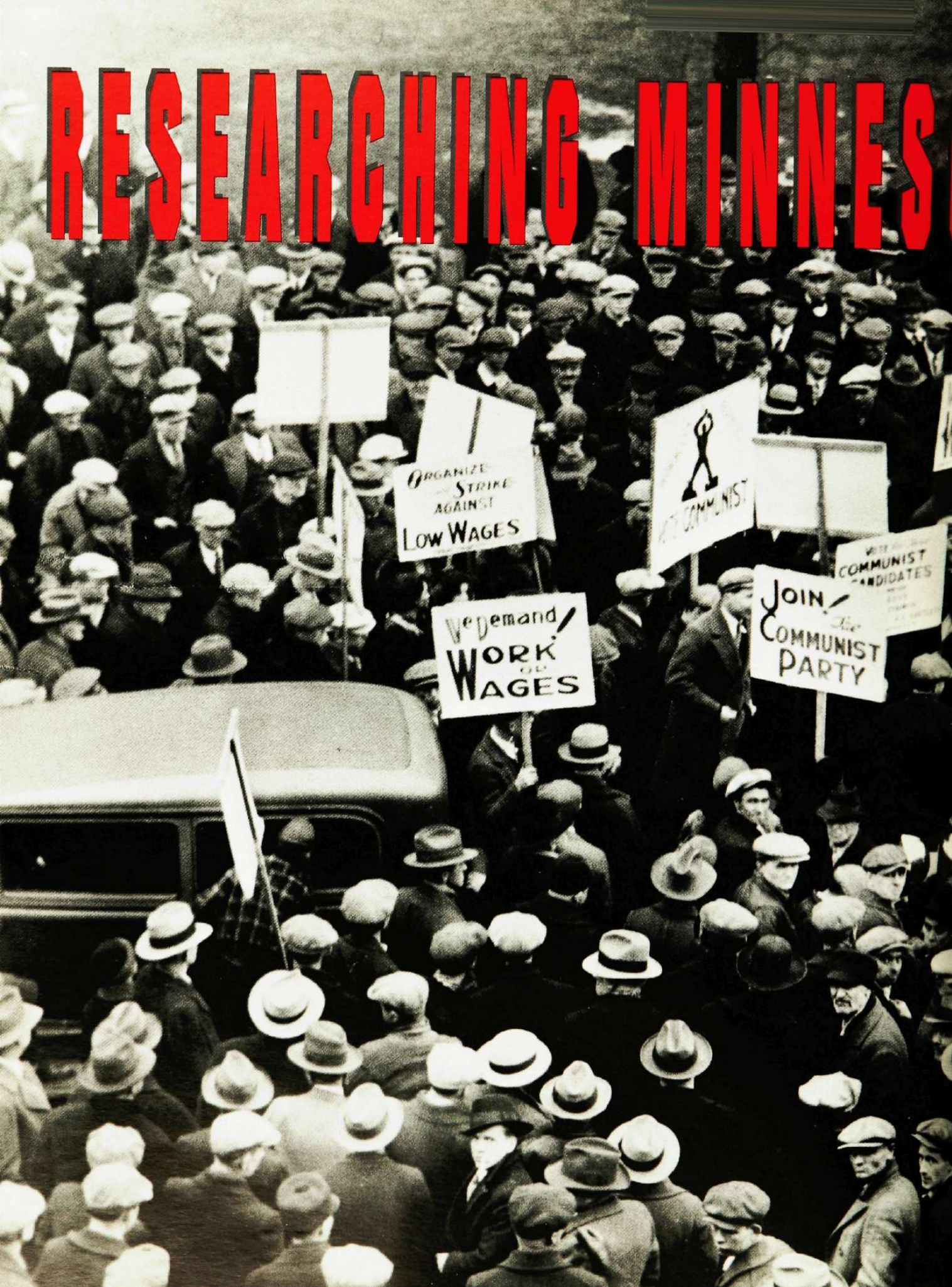
RESEARCHING MINNES



TA HISTORY IN MOSCOW

Students of twentieth-century Minnesota history are blessed with access to archival sources that are both abundant and readily available. The Minnesota Historical Society maintains extensive, well-catalogued collections of personal papers and organizational and official records in a magnificent facility. In addition, there are hundreds of other holdings at Minnesota colleges, county historical societies, and specialized libraries. Close by is material in the rich trade-union and political-history collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison and the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, Iowa. Other repositories with Minnesota-related material, such as the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas, or the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York, are not as conveniently reached but are, nonetheless, accessible. Many federal-government records dealing with the state can be studied at the National Archives in Washington, D. C. Also in Washington is the Library of Congress, which holds the personal papers of thousands of governmental, literary, scientific, and cultural figures.

JOHN EARL HAYNES AND HARVEY KLEHR

John Earl Haynes, manuscript historian at the Library of Congress, is the author of Dubious Alliance: The Making of Minnesota's DFL Party *and editor of the* Newsletter of the Historians of American Communism. *Harvey Klehr, Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Politics at Emory University, Atlanta, is author of* The Heyday of American Communism. *The two are coauthors of* The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself *(1992).*

LEFT: *Communist parade in St. Paul, March 1930*

A new source of primary documentation on Minnesota history, however, presents formidable travel problems. The collapse of the Soviet Union has opened some archives to research, although a number of others—notably those of intelligence agencies—remain closed. Most accessible are the records of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) at the "Rossiskii Tsentr Khraneniia i Izucheniia Dokumentov Noveishei Istorii" (RTsKhIDNI—Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Documents of Recent History). This archive, formerly known as the Central Party Archive of the Institute of the Theory and History of Socialism of the CPSU Central Committee (and before that as the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee of the Communist Party), holds the records of the Soviet Communist party from the early 1920s to Stalin's death in 1953.

The RTsKhIDNI is located nine time zones away from Minnesota in a large building in central Moscow. The edifice is modern by Soviet standards, as befitted what was once an elite CPSU institution, but like almost every Soviet-era structure, it is worn and has a shabby air about it. One enters the RTsKhIDNI through a dim, cavernous foyer dominated by a statue of Lenin, at the base of which some loyalist of the old regime still leaves flowers every day. An elevator takes researchers to the RTsKhIDNI's comfortable and spacious reading room decorated with Soviet-era paintings of Lenin addressing crowds of workers and peasants. The archive is located next to a major Moscow judicial building, and occasionally visitors may observe some of the political turmoil of today's Russia. On one day, for example, the authors saw a demonstration, peaceful but noisy. Protesting together were militants of the Komsomol (Young Communist League of the Russian Communist party) and the youth wing of the Romanov monarchist movement. The only item these two disparate groups (the former seeking to restore communism and the latter to restore the Romanov tsardom) had in common was dislike for Boris Yeltsin's government.

The staff of the archive reflects the confusion attending the collapse of communism: Some archivists are helpful and eager to make available their mammoth collections, while others are visibly reluctant. (Until 1990, only researchers having the approval of the Soviet Communist party were allowed to use the RTsKhIDNI.) Although copies of documents can be obtained, delivery may take weeks or even many months. Each of the authors has made two visits to the RTsKhIDNI over a year's time and on each visit found that the institution's use policies had changed significantly, probably a reflection of both the unsettled state of the Russian government and financial stress.

When the RTsKhIDNI was a CPSU institution, it was well funded, but the Communist party of the Soviet Union is dead. The archive has no relationship with the Russian Communist party or any of the other political movements that succeeded the CPSU. After that party's collapse, Yeltsin's government took over the archive and gave it its present name. Due to Russia's severe inflation, the RTsKhIDNI's budget is under great pressure at the same time that the institution is beset with a flood of researchers eager to look at files that have rarely seen the light of day. The staff is hard pressed to deal with foreign researchers, particularly Americans who are accustomed to easy and swift access to material. Only a few members of the archival staff speak English, and, not surprisingly, the RTsKhIDNI's finding aids are in Russian. These aids, however, are excellent, describing material down to the level of folder titles.

The largest part of the RTsKhIDNI's collection consists of CPSU records detailing internal Soviet matters. However, the repository also holds the massive archive of the Communist International. The Comintern, as it was known, supervised the activities of non-Soviet Communist parties and promoted Soviet communism abroad through both public and concealed means. It was formed by Lenin in 1919 and dissolved in 1943, its functions split among various CPSU offices and Soviet government agencies.

One of the foreign parties that the Comintern supervised was the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA). At its height in 1939, the CPUSA claimed only 100,000 members; for much of its history, membership has been a mere fraction of that number.[1] Yet this relatively small group has had an

Pass granting author John Haynes entry to the reading hall of the Soviet archive

[1] In 1994 its membership, largely elderly, was less than 2,000, possibly less than 1,000.

impact on American life far out of proportion to its size. From the late 1940s through the 1950s, the activities, real and imagined, of American Communists were one of the chief issues galvanizing the nation's politics. Nevertheless, the history of this movement has been ill documented because American Communists destroyed their records or shipped them to Moscow to keep them out of the hands of U.S. government prosecutors. Those records are now open for research at the RTsKhIDNI.

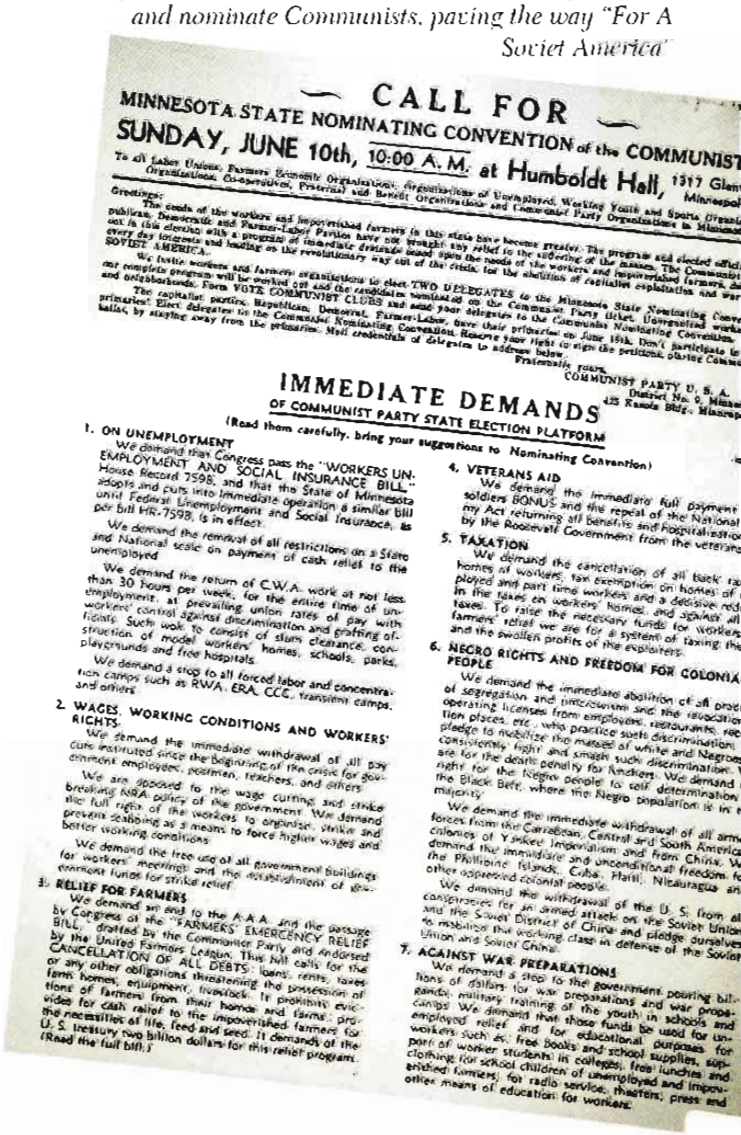
The CPUSA collection, while large (more than 4,300 files), is not complete. Documentation is spotty for 1919–22, when American communism was being organized, largely intact for the later 1920s up to 1936, and sparse thereafter, particularly after 1938. The CPUSA retained and used its records for several years before sending them to Moscow; the reduced volume after 1936 reflects the start of World War II in 1939 and the difficulty of secure shipment overseas. The CPUSA collection in the RTsKhIDNI ceases in 1944, one year after the end of the Comintern.[2]

The opening of the Comintern's archives offers American historians the opportunity to document assertions for which the evidence has been inadequate or ambiguous. For example, some scholars have long believed that American Communists were secretly subsidized by Moscow, but proof has been fragmentary. Consequently, many have dismissed this notion as "the myth of Moscow gold." The opening of the Soviet archives has proven that Moscow gold was no myth. The subsidies started with a 1920 delivery of jewels and gold valued at 1,008,000 rubles (about $1.5 million) to John Reed, one of the founders of American communism; continued throughout the party's existence, reaching $3 million in cash in 1988; and ended with a final payment in 1989 on the eve of the collapse of Soviet communism.[3]

The authors have examined hundreds of files in the Comintern's records on American communism as well as the CPUSA's own files. A portion of this material deals with Minnesota, much of it documenting routine organizational matters. Of greater historical interest are the thousands of pages of transcripts of speeches given in the 1930s to closed meetings of the American Communist party's ruling Central Committee, which periodically reviewed all party activity, and its Political Bureau, which consisted of the party's top leaders and directed day-to-day business. Only a few hundred pages of these transcripts are known to exist in the United States, scattered throughout the papers of various prominent party members.

In the mid-1930s the Communist party adopted its "Popular Front" stance. Goals remained unchanged, but the new strategy put aside revolutionary rhetoric to create an alliance with cooperative liberals and radicals working in and through mainstream political, labor, and

Poster, 1934, urging readers to boycott the Republican, Democratic, and Farmer-Labor primaries and nominate Communists, paving the way "For A Soviet America"



CALL FOR

MINNESOTA STATE NOMINATING CONVENTION of the COMMUNIST

SUNDAY, JUNE 10th, 10:00 A.M. at Humboldt Hall, 1317 Glen

IMMEDIATE DEMANDS

OF COMMUNIST PARTY STATE ELECTION PLATFORM

(Read them carefully, bring your suggestions to Nominating Convention)

1. ON UNEMPLOYMENT
2. WAGES, WORKING CONDITIONS AND WORKERS' RIGHTS
3. RELIEF FOR FARMERS
4. VETERANS AID
5. TAXATION
6. NEGRO RIGHTS AND FREEDOM FOR COLONIAL PEOPLE
7. AGAINST WAR PREPARATIONS

[2] It is not known if material was no longer routinely sent after 1944 or if it was placed elsewhere in a still-closed depository. Comintern records about American activities, as distinguished from the CPUSA's own records, do not show the same spottiness after 1936, although the volume declines after 1940 due to wartime difficulty of communications.

[3] For the history of Soviet subsidies and documentation of payments in the 1980s, see John E. Haynes and Harvey Klehr, "'Moscow Gold,' Confirmed at Last?" *Labor History* 33 (Spring 1992): 279–93 and 33 (Fall 1992): 576–78. Rudolf Pikhoya, chairman of the Committee on Archival Affairs of the Russian Federation and supervisor of the newly opened Soviet archives, estimated the value of the jewels and gold delivered to Reed; see Michael Dobbs, "Yeltsin Aides Seek to Link Gorbachev to Terrorism," *Washington Post*, June 6, 1992.

Clarence Hathaway, about 1940, probably in the office of the Daily Worker, *New York*

civic organizations. In several states and a few cities, Communists thus became a significant, albeit limited, force within the broad New Deal coalition.[4] Communists, however, usually acted through secret caucuses. Thus, historians have had difficulty evaluating their importance because of the incomplete, sometimes nonexistent, documentary record. Was the Communist presence of significant size? Who were the party members? What did they do? Did they make a difference? With the files in the Comintern archives, we are beginning to be able to answer some of these questions.

One of the Popular Front's targets was Minnesota's Farmer-Labor movement, which Communists had held in contempt until 1935. While the Farmer-Labor movement had a radical wing, it was chiefly a coalition of liberals, progressives, labor unions, and farm organizations that supported a center-left program of practical reform devoid of revolutionary intentions and, usually, radical rhetoric. In the 1920s and the early 1930s Minnesota Communists referred to Farmer-Laborites as "class collaborationist" or "social fascists" and denounced Farmer-Labor Governor Floyd B. Olson as a "crook, a fraud, and a liar." In 1924 some Farmer-Laborites thought they could work with the Communists, but the latter group's manipulation of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor movement's attempt to found a national organization ended the cooperation. In the sour aftermath of that affair, the Farmer-Labor Association (the membership organization that dominated the Farmer-Labor movement) amended its constitution to exclude Communists.[5]

The Popular Front's moderation, however, was compatible with a center-left stance, and the Farmer-Labor party's electoral success offered a quick route to the political mainstream. By the mid-1930s that party surpassed the entrenched Republicans and dominated state politics. After the 1936 election, Farmer-Laborites held the governorship, the majority of other statewide elected offices, both U.S. Senate seats, half of the U.S. House seats, and the state House of Representatives. Consequently, in 1936 and 1937 Minnesota Communists covertly entered the Farmer-Labor party and established a measure of influence therein. This entry began in the fall of 1935 when Earl Browder, general secretary of the CPUSA and its leading figure, met secretly with Governor Olson, negotiating an understanding that would guide Communist cooperation with the Farmer-Labor party. In the next year Communists began moving into the Farmer-Labor Association (FLA) by affiliating various Communist-led clubs and CPUSA auxiliaries with the FLA. Each group that affiliated gained the right to send delegates to local and state Farmer-Labor conventions.[6]

The national CPUSA official who kept in closest touch with developments in Minnesota was Clarence Hathaway. Born in Oakdale, Minnesota, in 1894, Hathaway joined the Communist party in 1919, the year of its founding. In the early 1920s he worked as a Communist organizer in the International Association of Machinists and in 1923 was elected a vice-president of the Minnesota State Federation of Labor, an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). He was also an early and active member of the Farmer-Labor movement. Hathaway was expelled from both the Minnesota labor movement and from the Farmer-Labor Association, however, for his role in assisting the Communist

[4] On the Popular Front in mainstream politics, see John Haynes, "The New History of the Communist Party in State Politics: The Implications for Mainstream Political History," *Labor History* 27 (Fall 1986): 549–63.

[5] John Earl Haynes, *Dubious Alliance: The Making of Minnesota's DFL Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 12.

[6] On the Olson-Browder meeting, see Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 259–60; Haynes, *Dubious Alliance*, 18.

party in the 1924 Farmer-Labor fiasco. From 1926 to 1928 Hathaway attended the International Lenin School in Moscow, a Comintern institute for career party workers or cadre. He returned to the United States to take positions of steadily higher responsibility in the CPUSA. By 1937 Hathaway was editor of the *Daily Worker*, the party's flagship newspaper, and a member of the Communist inner circle. During all of this, he continued an interest in Minnesota, making periodic trips to his native state and acting as the national office supervisor of Communist activity there.[7]

In February 1936 Hathaway visited Minnesota and wrote Browder: "Now a few words on the Minnesota situation. There are many very favorable developments. Certainly our isolation of, let us say a year ago, is broken down. We have ready access to the leading circles of the Farmer-Labor Party and, to a considerable degree of the trade unions." Hathaway also reported, "Bound up with this is the character of our relationship itself with the Farmer-Labor leaders. *We have become the organizers of left support for Olson and [Elmer A.] Benson.* This is so true that even in the conversations with [Abe] Harris, [Roger] Rutchick, etc., they do not consider us as an independent force with which they must bargain, giving political concessions in return for support, but merely as a part of their machine for control of the Farmer-Labor party with the specific task of organizing the left-wing."[8]

Floyd B. Olson, about 1930, just before his first term as governor

Hathaway wanted this latter attitude to change and reported that he had instructed Minnesota Communists to assert themselves as an independent force as they grew stronger in the Farmer-Labor Association and insist on positive concessions in return for their support. A month after this letter, Hathaway himself met secretly with Governor Olson and Benson, who was then Minnesota's U.S. senator and gubernatorial candidate, to work out in greater detail Communist assistance to the Farmer-Labor party.[9]

Another document found in Moscow shows that the negotiations went well. In it Earl Browder pointed to the CPUSA's relationship with the Farmer-Labor party as evidence of the success of Popular Front policies. Addressing a closed meeting of the Comintern executive committee in 1937, Browder said, "This Farmer Labor Party is a broad united front, with a formal alliance with Roosevelt on the one hand and which works with us on the other. (The leadership works very close with us. An interesting little detail, when the Governor of this state [Elmer Benson] came to New York recently to meet with a Conference of Governors, he spent all of his time in the city, except the period of the Conference, conferring with Hathaway and myself.)"[10]

The Comintern's files also yielded the transcript of a speech on Minnesota given to a December 1936 closed meeting of the American Communist party's national Central Committee. The document names the speaker only as "Comrade Bill," who describes himself as a militant at a Minneapolis tractor plant expelled from his union because of his Communist activity. This identifies the speaker as William Mauseth from the Minneapolis-Moline plant, who had been suspended from the International Association of Machinists (IAM) as noted. Mauseth later led his union local out of the IAM into the United Electrical and Machine Workers Union of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). In 1945 he became the Minnesota director of the CIO's Political Action Committee, but by 1947 his ill-concealed Communist links led to his removal. From a secret list of the Communist party's national Central Committee also found in the Soviet archives, we learn for the first time that Mauseth was

[7] Bernard K. Johnpoll and Harvey Klehr, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 186–87.

[8] Clarence [Hathaway] to Browder, Feb. 27, 1936, RTsKhIDNI 515-1-4030; emphasis in the original. In the Moscow archive's citations, the first part is the number of the collection (or *fond*), the second part is the subseries or description (*opis*), and the third is the file or folder (*dela*). Harris, the editor of the FLA's *Minnesota Leader*, was a political adviser to Floyd Olson and Elmer Benson. Rutchick was an Olson-administration official who became Governor Benson's executive secretary.

[9] Haynes, *Dubious Alliance*, 18; Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, 259–60.

[10] Earl Browder testimony to the Executive Committee of the Communist International Secretariat, Apr. 4, 1937, transcript, RTsKhIDNI 495-20-521.

William Mauseth, pen in hand (front, fifth from left), and other members of an unspecified joint strike committee, about 1930

not just a CPUSA member but had been elected to that ruling body in 1936.[11]

Mauseth's speech was an exuberant celebration of the Minnesota Communist party's role in the sweeping Farmer-Labor victories in 1936. According to Mauseth, after the August 1936 death of the highly popular Olson, Farmer-Labor officials were nervous about the election and asked for Communist assistance: "They came to us after the death of Comrade Olson—they discussed among themselves and with us the question of leadership in the Farmer-Labor Party. They came to us and said—You've got to help us to win the election. In fact, it's up to you to help us save the Farmer-Labor Party."[12] He went on to describe how Communists provided campaign workers for Farmer-Labor candidates.

Mauseth clearly was indulging in considerable braggadocio. While Communists provided assistance during this campaign, describing their level of help as saving Farmer-Labor prospects is an exaggeration. Nat Ross, the chief CPUSA organizer for Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota (District 9), was equally pleased but more restrained in his description of the Communist role. In a speech to CPUSA leaders given shortly after the election, a transcript of which was found in Moscow, Ross said:

> The sweeping victory of the Farmer Labor party in Minnesota is impossible to understand without understanding the direct and positive and effective role of the Communist Party. . . As a result of our work in Minnesota during this whole election period, we have been able to increase the prestige and the influence of our party among the trade unions and farmer labor masses and sections of the progressive farmer labor and trade union leadership. . . .
>
> We find it necessary within the general Farmer-Labor movement . . to see to it that our Party people in a collective manner, in a coordinated manner,

[11] CPUSA Central Committee list with attached biographies, signed by Belov, Jan. 31, 1938, RTsKhIDNI 495-74-46.

[12] CPUSA Central Committee meeting, Dec. 4–6, 1936, transcript, RTsKhIDNI 495-14-44.

Mayoral candidate Thomas E. Latimer addressing voters before his first election victory, May 1935

show themselves to be the actual militant and leading forces in building the Farmer Labor Party, in making it a real peoples front movement.

[W]e have a large section of our Party within the Farmer Labor movement, where our Party has established rather good relations with the dominant leadership of the Farmer Labor movement which now, of course, is in the position of governmental control of the state, with the exception of the Senate.[13]

Ross went on to offer as an example of effective political work the activities of "Comrade Bill" and his

machinists unit of about 30 Party members. I would say roughly that half of these members are also members of Farmer Labor ward clubs, and some of them are delegates from their ward clubs to the Farmer Labor County Committee. Some of them are also delegates from their union, which is affiliated to the Farmer Labor Party, to this County Committee. So we have the problem of trying to find forms of work to give our comrades, concrete guidance in order for them to be able to influence the whole course of the work.

Mauseth's December 1936 speech went on to lay out what Communists would do with their newly established role in the Farmer-Labor party, specifically targeting the mayor of Minneapolis, Thomas E. Latimer, a veteran Farmer-Laborite. Although far more liberal than his Republican predecessor, Latimer had disappointed some supporters by restricting welfare spending more than hoped and only partly curtailing city police actions against labor-union pickets. Communists hated Latimer because he had joined the Committee For the Defense of Leon Trotsky, a body that rejected Stalin's charges that the exiled Bolshevik leader was working with remnants of the Tsarist White Guard and the secret services of Japan, Britain, and Germany to overthrow the Soviet state. Mauseth promised, "In Minneapolis we are going

[13] Here and below, see transcript with handwritten title "Ross," undated, probably late 1936. RTsKhIDNI 495-14-45.

to dig up a good man for mayor, and see if we can't get rid of Latimer. I am quite sure we will be able to put the proper man over for mayor, and we are going to do further than that. In the coming elections we will be able to get I think, a couple of comrades elected as councilmen in Minneapolis."[14]

In the spring of 1937, the Hennepin County FLA convention refused to endorse Latimer for reelection, as Mauseth predicted, and chose Kenneth Haycraft, an official in Governor Benson's administration. Latimer refused to accept defeat and, with the support of the powerful AFL body, the Minneapolis Central Labor Union, sponsored a rival Farmer-Labor convention. Latimer's supporters cited the presence of concealed Communists at the first FLA convention as one reason to invalidate Haycraft's endorsement. The FLA state committee supported Haycraft, but Latimer took his fight to the primary. Haycraft won the primary by only 236 votes and went on to lose badly to a Republican, former mayor George E. Leach, in the general election. However, Mauseth's other prediction came true: Herbert Finseth, a secret Communist running as a Farmer-Labor candidate, won an aldermanic seat on the city council.[15]

[14] Transcript, Dec. 4–6, 1936, with name incorrectly spelled "Lattimer." On Latimer and the relief issue, see Raymond L. Koch, "Politics and Relief in Minneapolis During the 1930s," *Minnesota History* 41 (Winter 1968), 153–70.

[15] On the Latimer-Haycraft contest, see Millard L. Gieske, *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism: The Third-Party Alternative* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 216, 246–47; Haynes, *Dubious Alliance*, 24–25. Albert Kittock and Rasmus Borgen, two Minnesota Communists who later quit the party, identified Finseth as a Communist. Kittock stated that he presided at the Minneapolis eleventh-ward CPUSA caucus that selected Finseth for the aldermanic race; see testimonies of Albert Kittock and Rasmus Borgen, Oct. 17, 1938, in House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States*, 75th Cong., 3d. sess., 1938, p. 1388–90.

Strikers picketing Minneapolis City Hall in 1937, the year Latimer lost the Farmer-Labor endorsement

It is well known that Communists entered the Minnesota Farmer-Labor movement in the mid-1930s. Indeed, the hotly contested 1938 gubernatorial election revolved around the issue. Arthur Naftalin's 1948 dissertation, "A History of the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota," gave the Communist role major attention; Millard L. Gieske's *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism,* Steven J. Keillor's *Hjalmar Petersen of Minnesota,* and Harvey Klehr's *The Heyday of American Communism* noted its importance; and it was a central theme of John Earl Haynes's *Dubious Alliance.*[16]

Knowing that Communists were in the Farmer-Labor movement and that their presence caused an ongoing struggle is not, however, the same as knowing how many or who they were. For example, historians have been able to name or count only a few who were delegates to Farmer-Labor Association conventions. Not only were Communists habitually given to concealment, but the FLA constitution prohibited their membership, so any public avowal of party affiliation would have meant expulsion.

Any competent researcher could tell that the Communists identified were but a few of a larger number, but stating its magnitude was not possible. Consequently, historians were left with noting that some unknown number of Communists operating through a left-wing, progressive, or Popular Front caucus were a factor at this or that FLA convention. While factional test votes at a convention often indicated the size of the Popular Front caucus, vote counts did not reveal how many Communists were present. Besides Communists, the Popular Front included close allies who knew they were working with Communists and regarded their alliance as permanent. Surrounding this hard core were "soft" Popular Fronters, who were willing to work with Communists on particular issues, as well as a variety of liberals who believed the disavowals made by the concealed Communist Farmer-Laborites and had no idea that they were working with Minnesota enthusiasts of Joseph Stalin.

A 1937 report found in the Moscow archives sheds more light on the number of Communists at FLA conventions. The author of the report is identified as

Elmer A. Benson campaigning by train, probably 1936

"CAH"—Clarence A. Hathaway. Hathaway's report to the Political Bureau, the chief administrative body of the American Communist party, chiefly describes a state FLA convention held in late January. No elections were in immediate prospect, and the convention concerned itself with internal organizational questions and with giving newly elected Governor Benson a platform for his legislative program. Hathaway reported that, of the approximately 300 delegates to the convention, "There was a large Communist fraction. I don't know the exact number, but the total numbers [*sic*] was some 80-85." This is an unexpectedly high estimate, more than 25 percent of the delegates. It is far higher than the number of Communists at the 1936 convention, when Nat Ross claimed 6 percent (40 delegates out of 667).[17]

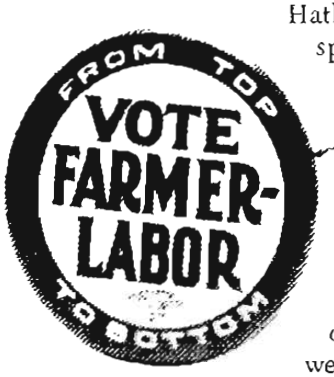
Hathaway went on to say, "Our comrades throughout participated in all activities of the convention. The

[16] Arthur Naftalin, "A History of the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1948); Steven J. Keillor, *Hjalmar Petersen of Minnesota: The Politics of Provincial Independence* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1987).

[17] "Farmer-Labor Party Convention," Feb. 4, 1937, attached to CPUSA, "Minutes of Polburo Meeting," Feb 4–5, 1937, RTsKhIDNI 495-14-68. On the 1936 convention, see Gieske, *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism,* 218; Haynes, *Dubious Alliance,* 18. This was one of the few FLA gatherings for which documentation on the numbers of Communist delegates was available before the opening of the Soviet archives.

chairman of the Resolutions Committee was a member of the party, and on all of the leading committees, legislative, resolutions, credentials, organization, etc., we had [*indecipherable*] leading Communists. Party members on them—members of the [Communist party] District Committee." Their presence, of course, was a secret. As Hathaway reported, Governor Benson in his address to the convention "came out very sharply against any red-baiting of the party, against raising the red issue in any form." With Benson fresh from electoral victory by the largest margin in the state's history, even those Farmer-Laborites who knew and disliked the Communists found it prudent to keep their complaints to themselves. No delegates mentioned the subject, and no newspaper reported it.[18]

Another Political Bureau report filed in the Comintern's archives describes a more difficult situation for Minnesota Communists. Delivered at a March 1938 meeting, this unsigned document appears from its language and contents also to be the work of Hathaway. By this time Governor Benson, an eloquent speaker but an inept politician, was in deep trouble. He was at war with the conservative-controlled state Senate, had lost the support of leading members of the liberal-controlled House of Representatives, and had alienated the heads of Minnesota's AFL unions. Hathaway told his fellow Communist leaders, "The Republican Party there is a real threat this year and in the first place in the person of [Harold] Stassen, should he win the nomination."



Hathaway also warned that the prospective Farmer-Labor primary, where former-governor Hjalmar Petersen would challenge Benson, was a sign of trouble.[19]

Hathaway, who had attended the 1938 FLA convention, gave the Political Bureau a detailed account. The meeting was much larger than the 1937 off-year gathering; in 1938 there were 1,200 delegates with 900 votes. (The FLA system allowed for delegates with fractional votes.) According to Hathaway, "There is first the progressive grouping, including ourselves, progressive FLites and CIO forces. . . . In terms of convention representation this group had approximately 250 to 275 votes. 125 [Communist] Party members were delegates to the convention." This is a smaller proportion than 1937, but even so, at more than 10 percent, it is impressive. Hathaway went on to put the strength of "Gov. Benson forces," with whom the Communist-led "progressives" were allied, at 250 to 300 votes, making a total Popular Front showing of 500 to 575. Hathaway reported the "right wing group" (those opposing Benson) as numbering 350 to 375.

Unlike 1937, Benson could not keep the Communist issue from surfacing. As Hathaway noted, the governor was assailed both from within the Farmer-Labor movement and from without by those hostile to his semi-secret alliance with the Communist party. The issue could have disrupted the convention except for a key piece of leverage that Benson held. Popular Front factions jointly held a majority of convention votes. This majority could block the endorsement for reelection to the state Railroad and Warehouse Commission of incumbent Harold Atwood. The commission regulated matters important to several AFL unions, to whom Atwood had proven a reliable friend. What Hathaway called "the right wing" consisted in large part of delegates from AFL unions who fervently wanted endorsement for Atwood.[20]

Hathaway told the Political Bureau that he personally negotiated with Atwood's supporters and worked out a deal: In return for supporting Atwood, the "right-wing would go out to liquidate redbaiting," that is, block a resolution to strengthen the anti-Communist rule in the FLA constitution. Hathaway reported that Benson and the progressives shifted enough votes to Atwood to assure his endorsement, and in return "right-wing leaders took the floor and proposed that all remaining business [including the anti-Communist resolution] be referred to the State Committee and to the next Convention. In this way we kept the whole ticket united, eliminated redbaiting and all agreements were fulfilled." In their histories of the Farmer-Labor movement, Gieske, Haynes, and Keillor indicated that Atwood's 1938 endorsement fight was connected to the Communist issue in some way, but the paucity of records made the connection unclear. The Hathaway report clarifies what was once obscure.

Governor Benson defeated Petersen by a slim margin in the hard-fought Farmer-Labor primary and was then trounced by Stassen in the general election by a landslide margin, even larger than Benson's record win in 1936. Hathaway's next report, written immediately after his return from the January 1939 state FLA convention, was much gloomier than his earlier ones: "At the moment it is in the most serious situation that they [Communists] have ever been confronted with in the life of the progressive movement in the state." A large bloc of Farmer-Laborites who had supported Benson when he was the incumbent shifted to the anti-Communist camp after his defeat. The convention amended the FLA constitution, stiffening the prohibi-

[18] "Minutes of Polburo Meeting," Feb. 4–5, 1937.

[19] Here and below see "Election Campaign, March 31, 1938," attached to Polburo meeting minutes, Mar. 31, 1938, RTsKhIDNI 495-14-96; Stassen is misspelled as "Stesson."

[20] Here and below, see "Election Campaign, March 31, 1938"; Gieske, *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism*, 259, 263; Haynes, *Dubious Alliance*, 32; Keillor, *Hjalmar Petersen*, 152–53.

Railroad and warehouse commissioners before the stormy 1938 convention: (from left) Charles Munn, Oliver Ossanna, Hjalmar Petersen, and Harold Atwood

tion against Communist membership, and revised its rules, forbidding Communist-controlled auxiliary organizations from having delegate votes. (The Popular Front-led Hennepin County FLA had allocated delegates to such Communist-affiliated organizations as the Rosa Luxemburg Women's League, the Bulgarian-Macedonian Workers Education Club, and the Finnish Women's Auxiliary of the Finnish Workers' Club.)[21]

The convention majority also attempted to expel delegates who were Communists. As usual, the votes—approximately 550—were split among the delegates. Because of the confused credentials fight, it is not clear how many of the delegates shared these votes, perhaps about 600 or 650. Hathaway reported that of these, 63 were Communists—about 10 percent. The convention majority, however, faced a serious problem: How could delegates identify people who concealed their party membership and did not hesitate to swear falsely that they were not Communists? Of the 63 Communist delegates that Hathaway counted, none admitted to CPUSA membership. Farmer-Laborites had opinions about who they thought were Communists, but proof was another matter. In the end, the convention voted to expel 14 delegates who in 1936 had signed petitions to put Communist-party candidates on the Minnesota ballot. Hathaway noted that of them, eight were Communists; the remaining six were merely close allies. This bitter fight in 1939 was but a foretaste of the intense factionalism that would continue until the Farmer-Labor merger with the Democratic party in 1944.

In 1937, during the heyday of the Popular Front when Benson was the newly elected governor and Communists were welcome but secret partners in the Farmer-Labor party, Samuel Adams Darcy, a national CPUSA figure, visited Minnesota. Darcy issued a gloomy view of the situation he found: Communists in Minnesota pursued a "policy of recklessly furtive goings

[21] Here and below, see "II—Minnesota," report to CPUSA Political Bureau, Feb. 9, 1938, RTsKhIDNI 495-14-117.

and comings through side doors" and had converted the Communist party into "a semisecret society for conniving in other organizations." He said it would be much healthier for Communists to enter mainstream politics openly, under their own banner, rather than work clandestinely within other organizations. Browder regarded Darcy's criticism as an attack on his Popular Front policy and had him demoted within the ranks of the Central Committee.[22]

Darcy, however, was correct in noting the risks of operating secretly inside the Farmer-Labor movement. Secrecy poisoned normal political interchange. Farmer-Laborites who brushed up against the semiconcealed Communist apparatus often felt that they were being manipulated or were working with a menacing force. Those who denounced the Communist presence found themselves the target of abuse and denunciation by concealed Communists and their Popular Front allies, all of which added to the factional stresses within the FLA. Anti-Communist Farmer-Laborites were enraged and, over time, embittered by these experiences. Secrecy also had a corrosive effect on the Communists and their Popular Front allies, who became compromised and ultimately corrupted by the habit of destroying the reputations of honest opponents.

Hathaway's reports that Communists won from 10 percent to more than 25 percent of the delegates at the 1938 and 1937 FLA conventions, respectively, raises the question of why the party was so successful. Communist zeal, discipline, and talent no doubt contributed to this success. A transcript in the Soviet archives provides another reason as well. In 1932, when Hathaway was in Moscow to report on internal American party matters to the Anglo-American Secretariat of the Comintern, which had jurisdiction over the American Communist party, he discussed that party's extraordinarily high number of full-time employees, called functionaries. Hathaway noted that although the CPUSA had only 800 members in Minnesota, "We now have 26 full time . functionaries of the Party, the TUUL [Trade Union Unity League], the WIR [Workers' International Relief] and so forth."[23]

With 26 cadre, Minnesota Communists had more full-time employees than the state's Farmer-Labor Association or its Republican or Democratic parties. These numbers gave the Communist party an effectiveness far out of proportion to its size. The cadre worked for low salaries, but even so, given the even lower incomes of most party members, there was no way Minnesota Communists from their own resources could have supported one full-time functionary for each 31 party members. Here, the benefits of Moscow gold are amply demonstrated.

A 1936 report by Matti Wick, a Communist organizer assigned to work among Finnish immigrants, to Nat Ross, the chief CPUSA organizer in Minnesota, illustrates how the party could use its cadre to maximize its influence. Wick had been assigned to get the CPUSA's Finnish auxiliary, the Finnish Workers' Clubs, formally enrolled as Farmer-Labor Association affiliates, thus gaining them delegates at upcoming FLA conventions. Wick told Ross that of the 42 Finnish Workers' Clubs in Minnesota he had affiliated 28 with the FLA and would have the remainder enrolled shortly. Wick reported that the affiliations were already paying off, pointing to the recent Eighth Congressional District (northeastern Minnesota) Farmer-Labor convention: "There were 208 votes at this meeting, of which we were in control of quite a powerful minority, of a little over 40 votes. . . . Our candidate was John Bernard, and, due to our influence, he was nominated as the candidate from the eighth District."[24]

Bernard went on to win election to Congress. There, he quickly earned a radical reputation and won distinction as the only member of Congress to vote against imposing an arms embargo on Spain after the Spanish Civil War broke out. His concealed links to the Communist party, however, became a political problem and contributed to his defeat after one term in 1938. Bernard publicly joined the CPUSA many years later—in 1977—but veteran Communist John Abt said in his autobiography that Bernard had been a concealed Communist while in Congress. Abt's sister, Marion Bachrach, was Bernard's secretary while he was in Congress. She had secretly joined the CPUSA in the early 1930s.[25]

The Soviet archives also provide an interesting sidelight on the later life of Clarence Hathaway. Historians have long known that the American Communist party

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[22] Samuel Darcy, manuscript autobiography written 1945–48, Tamiment Institute, New York University; Samuel Darcy interview with John Haynes at Harvey Cedars, New Jersey, Sept. 16, 1981, notes in author's possession.

[23] "Anglo-American Secretariat Meeting 7.1.32," transcript, RTsKhIDNI 495-72-168.

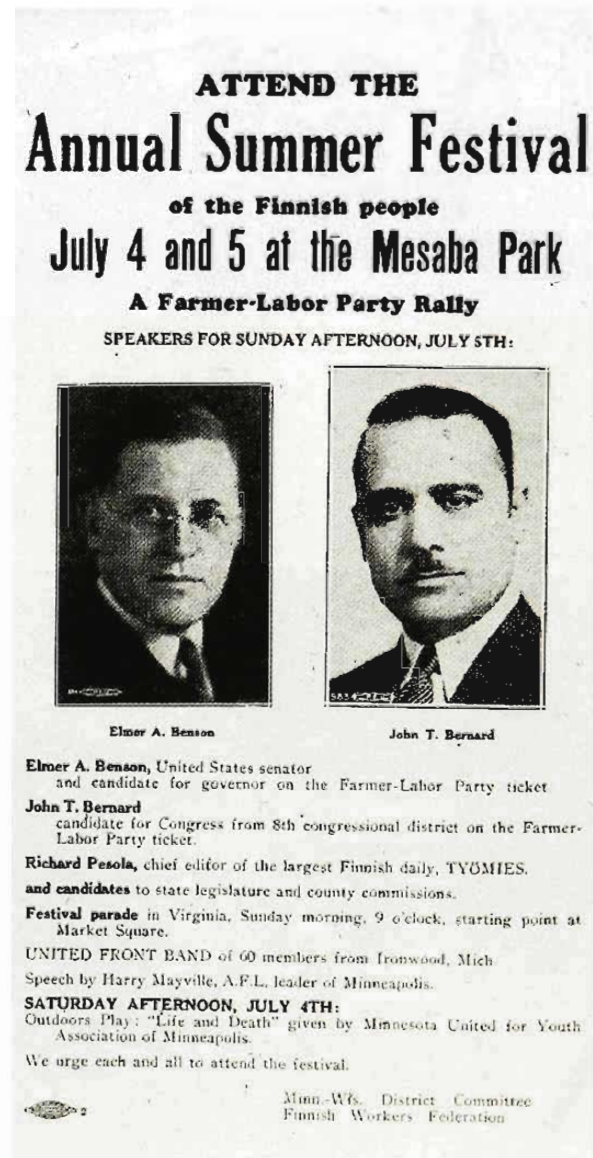
[24] Matti Wick to Nat Ross, Apr. 25, 1936, "Report of the Activity of the Finnish Workers' Clubs on the Farmer Labor Party Question in Minnesota," RTsKhIDNI 515-1-4030. The Communist strength at this FLA convention was based on more than the Finnish clubs. Communists were also strong in the nascent CIO movement on the Iron Range and in Duluth; see John Haynes, "Communists and Anti-Communists in the Northern Minnesota CIO, 1936–1949," *Upper Midwest History* 1 (1981): 55–73.

[25] Barbara Stuhler, "The One Man Who Voted 'Nay': The Story of John T. Bernard's Quarrel with American Foreign Policy, 1937–1939," *Minnesota History* 43 (Fall 1972): 83–92; John J. Abt and Michael Myerson, *Advocate and Activist: Memoirs of an American Communist Lawyer* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 40–41. On Bernard's publicly joining the CPUSA, see Haynes, *Dubious Alliance*, 224n.

expelled Hathaway in 1940 because of his alcohol problem. He returned to Minnesota, got his private life under control, and became a successful organizer for the United Electrical and Machine Workers Union. Hathaway reentered the Communist party in the late 1940s and rejoined its national leadership in 1959.[26]

What was not known is that Moscow initiated Hathaway's disciplinary expulsion. Newly discovered in the Comintern's archives is a November 1939 report on the American from Gulyaev and Stetsenko, respectively the director and secretary of the personnel department of the Communist International. The two told Georgi Dimitrov, head of the Comintern, about Hathaway's longstanding problem, including a drunken fight with a Moscow policeman when he was at the Lenin School in the late 1920s. They said reports from the United States indicated that Hathaway had failed to reform despite warnings and concluded, "We consider it necessary to raise a question about the necessity of the U.S. Communist Party Central Committee to consider the issue and to decide whether it is possible to keep Hathaway in a leading party position in the new circumstances."[27] A few months later, the CPUSA expelled Hathaway. This document, demonstrating that the Comintern interested itself even in the drinking habits of CPUSA leaders, well illustrates how closely Moscow supervised the American Communist movement and shows the CPUSA's rapid response to Comintern directives.

These are only some highlights of the Minnesota material uncovered to date in the Soviet archives. Other documents deal extensively with the CPUSA's Finnish-language bureau and its large following in northern Minnesota; the struggle that ensued when the largely Finnish Central Cooperative Exchange (headquartered in Superior, Wisconsin, with extensive Minnesota operations) cut its ties with the Communist party; and the party's roles in the Farm Holiday Association and in the Minnesota CIO in the 1930s. It may be disconcerting to realize that for some aspects of Minnesota history a thorough researcher will need to travel to Moscow. Still, the trip will be well worth the trouble because of the unique nature of the information found in the Soviet archives.



ATTEND THE

Annual Summer Festival

of the Finnish people

July 4 and 5 at the Mesaba Park

A Farmer-Labor Party Rally

SPEAKERS FOR SUNDAY AFTERNOON, JULY 5TH:

Elmer A. Benson

John T. Bernard

Elmer A. Benson, United States senator and candidate for governor on the Farmer-Labor Party ticket

John T. Bernard candidate for Congress from 8th congressional district on the Farmer-Labor Party ticket.

Richard Pesola, chief editor of the largest Finnish daily, TYÖMIES,

and candidates to state legislature and county commissions.

Festival parade in Virginia, Sunday morning, 9 o'clock, starting point at Market Square.

UNITED FRONT BAND of 60 members from Ironwood, Mich.

Speech by Harry Mayville, A.F.L. leader of Minneapolis.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON, JULY 4TH:

Outdoors Play: "Life and Death" given by Minnesota United for Youth Association of Minneapolis.

We urge each and all to attend the festival.

Minn.-Wis. District Committee
Finnish Workers Federation

Candidates Benson and Bernard sharing the bill, 1936

[26] Haynes, *Dubious Alliance*, 236n23.

[27] Gulyaev and Stetsenko to Georgi Dimitrov, Nov. 26, 1939, RTsKhIDNI 495-74-472.

The pass, p. 4, is courtesy John Haynes, the photo of Hathaway, p. 6, is a People's Weekly World *file photo; all other items are in MHS collections*