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### CHAPTER 3



## Pragmatism and “Transcendent Vision”

In every movement or institution that I have ever belonged to, except the trade union movement, I have felt like a free lance, an individual who could stand over against it, so to speak, and whose main concern was to get his ideas uttered at every cost. In the trade union movement I just feel different. Of course, I do not agree with many of those who are in it . . . however . . . I cannot divorce myself from it any more than I can jump out of my own skin. No matter how much I differ from many of those prominent in the trade union movement, I want to differ with them as one who is just as much a part of that movement as they are.

—A. J. Muste, 1925

“IT WAS QUITE AN EXPERIENCE,” Muste recalled in his memoirs, to be driven from his pulpit for holding pacifist views, but it was “nothing” compared to the transition from preaching at a Quaker meeting to the leadership “of a turbulent strike of 30,000 textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts.” In the context of the postwar Red Scare, there was “no middle course”; by supporting the strike, he had placed himself on the side of anarchy and violence not only in the eyes of the authorities, but also among many of the liberals and pacifists whom he had counted as allies and friends.<sup>1</sup> For Muste, however, the strike was an intoxicating experience. Like so many of his generation and the next, the labor movement became his “messiah,” destined by history to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth. Indeed, one can make too much of the religious differences between Muste and the workers he organized and led. Though his idealism may

have sprung from a different source, all imbibed the ferment of 1919 with a millennial urgency that spoke of the cultural contexts in which they were reared. Anthony Capraro, an anarcho-syndicalist who was one of Muste's closest comrades during this period, wrote in the midst of the strike that the death and destruction of World War I also signaled "the birth-throes" of "a period of creation," of "renaissance and regeneration." "As the gospel of Jesus, so is the revolution," he proclaimed. "It comes from the East."<sup>2</sup> Sidney Hillman, Capraro's superior in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers union (ACW), offered a similar analysis at a mass meeting in 1918: the "Messiah is arriving. He may be with us any minute—one can hear the footsteps of the Deliverer—if only he listens intently. Labor will rule and the World will be free."<sup>3</sup>

Still, the Lawrence struggle and the subsequent challenge of organizing the Amalgamated Textile Workers of America (ATWA) forced Muste, the religious idealist, to deal with practical questions. "What does one do in a strike? How do you organize relief? What about pickets? How do you start negotiations? How do you get national publicity? Where do you get milk for the hungry kids? How do you spot a labor spy? How do you start a union?" To answer these questions, Muste turned to the pragmatic philosophy of William James and John Dewey.<sup>4</sup> Though often misunderstood to mean moderate or sensible, pragmatism seeks to reconcile idealism and realism by holding that "truth" emerges out of the dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment, theory and practice, and thus is always subject to change and revision. A distinctly modern philosophy, pragmatism did not view the decline of the self-sufficient individual of the nineteenth century as a tragedy, instead viewing "the increased interdependence and association determined by a corporate world of large-scale, even global, production" as having cosmopolitan and collectivist possibilities.<sup>5</sup> In these ways, pragmatism dovetailed with the views of Muste's comrades in Hillman's ACW, who sought to combine revolutionary commitment with the creation of stable, efficient unions, a project that entailed rationalizing and modernizing industry. The ACW deeply influenced Muste's ideas about trade unionism and provided the model for the ATWA, which he headed from 1919 through 1921.<sup>6</sup>

The forces of postwar reaction would ultimately destroy Muste's textile union, but his philosophy—which might best be described as "labor pragmatism" or "working-class pragmatism"—continued to shape his thought and served as the theoretical basis for the workers' education movement

that he led in the 1920s and, later, the "Musteite" movement of the 1930s. As the chairman of the faculty at Brookwood Labor College, the country's only residential school for workers, Muste and his fellow "labor movement intellectuals" found the pragmatic engagement of modernity, criticism of individualism, and optimism about social progress as valuable resources in their laborite project. At the same time, they rejected its emphasis on the internal development of the child to the exclusion of collective action and ideals. As Muste put it, teachers must take "their social responsibilities seriously" and articulate ideals of "genuine democracy and an economic collectivism suitable for the machine age."<sup>7</sup> In that spirit, labor educators made their commitment to socialism explicit and viewed their role as fostering the working-class solidarity and militancy needed to make it a reality. With the support of sympathetic academics, liberals, and leftists from across the ideological spectrum, the workers' education movement made up a key constituency of the left-liberal coalition that survived World War I and the Red Scare and that continued to evolve in creative ways through the 1920s.<sup>8</sup>

In many respects, their theory and practice of workers' education "anticipated" Antonio Gramsci's ideas about hegemony and culture. In his prison notebooks, Gramsci would argue that the bourgeoisie maintained its dominance largely through culture and ideology and that cultural institutions such as schools play a role in the hegemonic process by denying the reality of class conflict, producing intellectuals who rationalized the existing order, and giving the impression of facilitating social mobility. Conversely, workers should make education a vital part of a revolutionary "war of position" in which they would "free themselves from their dependence on bourgeois intellectuals [and] develop and disseminate their own conception of the world and of life."<sup>9</sup> Muste and his comrades in the workers' education movement developed a similar analysis of education and culture under capitalism and viewed their schools and colleges as counter-hegemonic institutions that would produce working-class meaning and knowledge. As they put it, effective working-class organization was only possible "when it [was] based upon a labor culture; that is, a mode of feeling, thinking and acting in terms of the problems and aspirations of labor."<sup>10</sup> Their efforts to create a counter-hegemonic labor culture in the 1920s challenge historical narratives of the decade as a period of quiescence and suggest that the seeds of the CIO and the "cultural front" of the 1930s were laid a decade earlier.<sup>11</sup> Not coincidentally, it was a debate over the meaning of working-class education in 1928 that served as a lightning rod around which the movement

for industrial unionism began its open revolt against the conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL).

LAWRENCE was the nation's largest textile city, located north of Boston on the banks of the Merrimack River. Its massive textile mills lined the city's skyline and employed over thirty thousand workers, most of them immigrants, who worked and lived under abysmal conditions. Like other mass production industries, textiles were notoriously difficult to organize. The workforce was divided by skill and ethnicity; "older" immigrants dominated lower-level management and skilled positions and "newer immigrants"—predominantly Italians, Russians, Syrians, Walloons, and French Canadians—were largely unskilled and thus easily replaceable. The unwillingness of the AFL's United Textile Workers (UTW) union to organize unskilled workers further undermined and divided Lawrence's working class.<sup>12</sup>

With the UTW indifferent and even hostile, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) had managed to gain a foothold in Lawrence in 1912, when they successfully led the "bread and roses" strike, a dramatic and often violent confrontation that made the city "the era's supreme symbol of militant struggle against industrial oppression."<sup>13</sup> The local disintegrated soon afterward, largely because of repression, but also because the IWW proved itself more capable of leading strikes than forming stable unions. "Most of us were wonderful agitators but poor union organizers," Elizabeth Gurley Flynn recalled of their efforts in Lawrence.<sup>14</sup> Still, the legacy of the 1912 strike was important in indoctrinating the revolutionary philosophy of syndicalism among Lawrence's workers. At the same time, its failure bequeathed a sense that organization, when it came, would need to have a more practical orientation by signing contracts and paying close attention to bread-and-butter issues.<sup>15</sup>

The 1912 strike has obtained almost mythic status in the annals of radical history, no doubt in part because of the involvement of IWW luminaries Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Carlo Tresca, Arturo Giovannitti, and "Big" Bill Haywood. But the 1919 strike was equally dramatic. Like other industries, textiles had experienced wartime prosperity, enjoying record-breaking profits from 1916 to 1918. The greatest beneficiary of all was William Wood's American Woolen Company, the largest company in the entire textile industry, which had extensive operations in Lawrence. For the first time, mill workers enjoyed year-round employment. Recognizing their

advantage, they broke traditional patterns of deference on the shop floor and staged a number of small strikes to gain wage increases. Textile workers were eager to hold on to their gains as the war ended. Mill owners, on the other hand, sought to maintain their high level of profitability, and they began to lay off workers and to reduce their hours as soon as wartime orders dropped off.<sup>16</sup>

It was in the context of this tense and volatile situation that the UTW, under its conservative president John Golden, launched a nationwide campaign for the eight-hour day, passing a resolution calling on the textile mills to begin the new schedule on February 3, 1919. When it became clear that Golden was content to leave wage adjustments to the future, a movement emerged throughout New England textile centers to change the demand to 48/54—fifty-four hours' pay for forty-eight hours' work. As workers prepared to strike, the American Woolen Company announced it would honor the forty-eight-hour week but without the wage increase. The tactic succeeded in ending the UTW's involvement and in undercutting the strike movement everywhere except in Lawrence and, to a lesser extent, Passaic and Paterson, New Jersey, which were also major textile centers.<sup>17</sup>

With memories of the violent 1912 strike still fresh, the imminent standoff in Lawrence was front-page news in Boston. Eager to translate their ideals of nonviolence and brotherhood into reality, the Comradeship sent Muste, Harold Rotzel, and Cedric Long to Lawrence to investigate the situation. When the three ministers arrived on a bleak winter day in January, they found a city tense with excitement and fear. In true pacifist fashion, they immediately set about researching the situation from all points of view, interviewing workers, ministers, professionals, and industrialists, including William Wood Jr. They quickly concluded that the strike was justified; the pay was "miserable" even as the mills enjoyed windfall profits, yet the mill owners were utterly opposed to compromise and the native-born public was "paralyzed with fear," viewing the movement as part of a plot to Bolshevize the United States. To show their support, the ministers began passing out leaflets explaining the "facts" to the wider public and raising relief funds for the impending strike.<sup>18</sup>

The strike leaders welcomed the ministers' support. Many of them had been involved in the 1912 strike and knew the importance of outside support and publicity. As Muste recalled, "we were hailed as angels in these circumstances. They had virtually nobody who could talk English straight, nobody who could write English," and they recognized the value of "our

connections” in Boston.<sup>19</sup> Strike leaders had already set up a provisional strike committee composed of representatives from the various national and language groups. Under its auspices, for the first week of the strike, the ministers continued to focus their energies on obtaining relief funds and favorable publicity.<sup>20</sup>

Having earned the trust of the strike’s leaders, when a general strike committee was formed a week later, the ministers assumed key positions. For his part, Muste was elected executive secretary of the general strike committee, in effect making him the leader of the strike. Though he lacked experience, he had proven a charismatic and inspiring speaker whose ability to reconcile different points of view and construct a cohesive vision out of the strike’s “kaleidoscopic” ethnic and ideological diversity quickly endeared him to the workers. At his very first speaking appearance in Lawrence he told the assembled crowd: “You should learn all you can about the textile industry because very soon you are going to take it over for your own.”<sup>21</sup>

Muste also “demonstrated an ability to learn on the job” and to adapt his principles to fit the situation.<sup>22</sup> Without a background in labor unions or industrial conflicts, he drew upon the pragmatic method and looked to experience and practice as guides to truth. As he explained of his approach to labor organizing, “there are no absolute roles, formulas. . . . You have, on the one hand, a ‘social situation’; [and] on the other hand, an individual. But neither of these terms is set and static; they are fluid and dynamic.” Ultimately the “rebel must submit himself to the test of results” and “the test of group discussion . . . in spite of all the risks of compromise involved.” Ideals ultimately must not be “petrified dogmas mechanically applied to living situations, but hypotheses fearlessly lived by so long as [no] better are in sight, but constantly made to meet (not evade) situations and thus enriched and corrected.” “The moral life” was indeed “an adventure!”<sup>23</sup>

His response to the violence that characterized the strike illustrates his ability to be flexible and adaptable while maintaining his principles. The first day of the strike, on the first Monday in February, provided a harbinger of what was to come; as the strikers gathered at dawn outside the mills, the police attacked the picket lines, clubbing strikers, and even entered their homes, pulling women out of bed and beating them.<sup>24</sup> The repressive, brutal treatment of the striking workers continued throughout the strike and reflected the conviction, held by the city elite, that the strike represented “Bolshevism, the enemy of democracy, the destroyer of property

rights, the breeder of anarchy." They were determined that "Bolshevism" would "get no grip-hold in Lawrence" as it had in Seattle, Winnipeg, and other cities, and they granted the police free rein in handling the strikers.<sup>25</sup>

Police brutality placed the problem of violence squarely before Muste and his fellow pacifist clergy. Though the FOR favored socialism, many of its members opposed strikes, viewing their coercive character as a form of violence. The organization held that "true reconciliation" came from identifying with "both sides of the quarrel" and then drafting a solution "in which the true interest of every party can be satisfied." In the case that one party to a dispute was unwilling to "be converted," they suggested that it was better to let evil triumph than to violate their fundamental principles of nonviolence and love.<sup>26</sup> When Cedric Long defended the right of workers to strike at an FOR conference, he was publicly chastised by John Haynes Holmes who, with the hearty approval of the audience, pointed out that strikes violated the "moral law."<sup>27</sup>

In Lawrence, however, law enforcement was the "creator of violence," and the experience taught Muste, Long, Rotzel, and other left-wing pacifists that the language of peace could function to maintain the status quo. As Muste wrote in the *New Textile Worker*, the organization and agitation of workers may appear to disrupt the "social peace," but in fact brings attention to the class struggle that already exists. Quoting the English economist and historian G. D. H. Cole, he insisted that "the interests of Capital and Labour are diametrically opposed and although it may be necessary for Labour sometimes to acquiesce in 'social peace,' such peace is only the lull before the storm" that must come if a fundamental restructuring of power and privilege is ever to occur.<sup>28</sup> While Muste certainly hoped that the final victory in the class struggle would occur nonviolently, he refused to abandon the Lawrence strike on the grounds that striking workers were not pacifists.

Philosophical questions aside, as the leader of the strike, the problem of violence was also a practical one, for it seemed self-evident that the police were being deliberately provocative in the hopes of undermining the strikers and their cause. Police violence also undermined morale; several weeks into the strike, pessimism set in in the ranks "because of this business that every morning so many people got beat up." "Naturally," the impulse was for strikers "to go back to the mills" and attack strikebreakers. Muste, Rotzel, Long, and other strike leaders urged striking workers to avoid retaliatory violence, but as the conflict between strikers and scabs escalated, it



occurred to them that something more dramatic was called for. "Back in the jungle era of 1919," Muste recalled, it was the policy for strike leaders to avoid the picket line because they would be "picked off" by the police. But to boost morale, the strike committee decided that Muste, Long, and several other leaders would lead the picket line.<sup>29</sup>

On the afternoon of February 26, Muste and Long left strike headquarters, leading a throng of thousands on a picket line in front of one of the larger textile mills. No sooner had they begun the picket line when police on horseback swarmed into the crowd. In the confusion, Long and Muste ended up in a side street where police cut them off from the other picketers and began beating them. Long was immediately knocked unconscious, but they were more careful with Muste, systematically beating his legs and body and forcing him to continue walking to avoid being trampled by their horses. When he was finally unable to stand up, they placed him in the patrol wagon where Long was coming back into consciousness.<sup>30</sup>

At the police station, the two ministers were charged with disturbing the peace and loitering (Long received the additional charge of assaulting an "unknown girl"). Placed in separate cells, Muste and Long received another bout of abuse; the police hammered incessantly on the metal bars and even brought in Newton's chief of police, whose son had attended Muste's Sunday school class, to chastise Muste for getting "mixed up" with "all these wops" and "this row." The ministers grew increasingly anxious as night fell because at nine o'clock prisoners were transferred to a facility on the outskirts of town and it was "routine that *en route* prisoners 'tried to escape and had to be beaten into submission.'" Yet their comrades had worked feverishly to raise funds and managed to bail them out before the deadline. The next morning Muste and Long were out on the picket line again.<sup>31</sup>

The tactic proved a tremendous success. The persecution of the ministers turned liberal public opinion toward the strikers, lifted sagging spirits, and firmly established Muste's leadership role. Yet, as the strike wore on, the general strike committee continuously feared that they would lose control of the strike or that the workers would return to the mills. Provocative behavior by the police continued to be a problem. One of their most incendiary acts occurred during the sixth week of the strike when they mounted machine guns at several principle intersections. In response, a member of the strike committee made a speech calling on the workers to turn the machine guns on the police. Much to Muste's relief, the speaker was voted

down when others pointed out that "they can't weave wool with machine guns."<sup>32</sup> A week later Muste would find conclusive evidence that the speaker was in the employ of a detective agency and had made the speech at the behest of the police. A similar discovery was made a few weeks later when the strike's financial secretary revealed to Muste that he was a spy involved in a scheme with the mill employers to set him up for murder. Thus Muste learned firsthand about the role of labor spies and agents provocateurs in radical movements, a lesson he would not forget. They always posed "as the most intransigent Marxist and most militant labor fighter of them all," and insisted "upon the most meticulous observance of all the rules," Muste recalled of this perennial problem in labor and radical movements.<sup>33</sup>

But the main problem was dwindling funds. Muste's connections in Boston had raised thousands of dollars and had helped to raise spirits by joining the workers on the picket line.<sup>34</sup> But the strike fund was quickly depleted by the costs of feeding and clothing thousands of striking workers, providing medical care for injured workers, and paying legal expenses for trials such as Long and Muste's (ultimately dismissed for lack of evidence). Early in March, connections were made between the striking workers and Sidney Hillman of the ACW. Hillman had long envisioned a union of all workers in the apparel industry and he was eager to provide assistance. Along with money, the ACW dispatched staff members August Bellanca, Nathan Kleinman, Leo Robbins, Gioacchino Artoni, H. J. Rubenstein, and Anthony Capraro to assist in the strike.<sup>35</sup>

The relationship with the ACW reflected not only a desire for funds, but also the growing conviction that the struggles in Lawrence and other textile centers represented an opportune moment for the unionization of all textile workers, regardless of skill. The ACW appealed to Lawrence's immigrant workforce because of its industrial character and because of its combination of revolutionary élan and practical achievements. Unlike the IWW, the ACW signed contracts through means of an impartial arbitrator and sought to maintain stable, efficient unions that provided tangible benefits to their workers.<sup>36</sup> There were also cultural similarities between clothing and textile workers; both groups were made up of immigrants with anarcho-syndicalist sympathies, giving their movements a spirit of militancy, localism, and democracy. Still, the ACW's impressive victories during the war were the result of Hillman's commitment to collaboration with the state and his willingness to discipline unruly members. As a result, the ACW secured a reliable foothold in the industry, and its membership increased

from 48,000 in 1916 to 138,000 in mid-1919. By 1920, the union would be the fourth-largest body of organized industrial workers in the United States, after the miners, machinists, and railroad workers. The question was where this practical orientation would lead: would “industrial democracy” mean workers’ control or something more limited like co-management between workers and their employers, which was how Hillman increasingly defined it?<sup>37</sup>

Thus, as the Lawrence strike dragged on into its eighth week, Muste and other strike leaders laid plans for a textile workers convention in New York City under the auspices of the ACW. On April 12–13, seventy-five workers from half a dozen textile centers gathered at Labor Temple at Fourteenth Street and Second Avenue where they voted to give birth to the Amalgamated Textile Workers of America (ATWA) and elected Muste general secretary. The constitution was modeled after the ACW and was explicitly revolutionary: it declared the reality of the class struggle and asserted that the union was the “natural weapon of offense and defense” in the struggle for a socialist society. It rejected the craft orientation of the AFL as outmoded and suggested that democratic, industrial organization would provide the training for workers to assume “control of the system of production.”<sup>38</sup> At the same time, reflecting the influence of the ACW, the union also made it clear that it aimed to be “practical.” As Muste explained, delegates felt that “former organizations had either been hopelessly conservative and thus played into the hands of the bosses, or, while radical in purpose, had been so extreme and impractical in method as likewise to fail in soundly organizing the industry.”<sup>39</sup>

Although the headquarters of the new union were to be in New York City, Muste returned immediately to Lawrence where the situation had grown more desperate. On April 11, the mill owners rejected an offer of mediation that even conservative Massachusetts governor (and later U.S. president) Calvin Coolidge said was “fair.” Two weeks later, the city Marshall announced the withdrawal of police protection for the strike leaders, and editorials appeared in local papers calling for vigilante action against “reds and mobs.”<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, strike funds were so depleted that workers went without shoes and milk for their children, leading the organizers to imitate a famous tactic of the 1912 strike of sending children outside of the beleaguered city to stay with families who could afford to clothe and feed them. On May 2, in order to raise morale, the strike leadership snuck Carlo Tresca into town to rally the workers. A lovable, inspiring speaker, Tresca

had been banned from Lawrence for slapping the face of the police chief during the 1912 strike. When the authorities learned of his visit, they became so enflamed that they organized a mob that went in search of Muste. Unable to find him, they kidnapped and brutally beat Anthony Capraro and Nathan Kleinman; the former only narrowly escaped a lynching.<sup>41</sup>

Though such acts tended to unify strikers and generate liberal support, the strike leadership began to prepare for defeat. On Monday, May 19, they dispatched Muste to New York City ostensibly to raise more funds; in fact, they wanted the head of the union out of town if and when the workers capitulated and went back to work. As Muste walked despondently to the train station, an incredible turn of events occurred that revealed the personal power wielded by the mill owners, especially William Wood, and also how the solidarity and organization of workers could challenge that power. A man approached Muste and told him that Walter Lamont, the head of Wood's American Woolen Company in Lawrence, wanted to see him. Together, they drove to Lamont's home where the magnate began cursing him as an outside agitator who had created the trouble in Lawrence. After a while, Muste asked, "Is this what you got me here for?" "No," he replied. "How can we settle this goddamn strike?" After Lamont assured him that he spoke for all of Lawrence's mills, Muste returned to the strike headquarters to announce that management was ready to settle with a 15 percent increase in wages and no discrimination against strikers.<sup>42</sup>

After the strikers joyfully ratified the settlement, Muste focused on channeling their enthusiasm into a solid industrial organization. This was a huge educational and cultural undertaking, for workers with traditions of shop-floor militancy and strikes did not necessarily translate into reliable union members.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, as Muste was fond of saying, the ATWA was like a "proletarian League of Nations" and while differences in language, nationality, and custom could be overcome, they presented a constant challenge.<sup>44</sup>

To overcome these ethnic and ideological differences, as well as a culture of resistance centered on the spontaneous strike, Muste and the ATWA leadership drew upon the example of the ACW and the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), both of which stressed the importance of building a union culture. Revolutionary idealism alone was not enough, Muste argued; strikes should be supplemented by "a great deal

of quiet educational work” to give workers practical skills in union organization and to foster a common workers’ culture. By offering members services that met “all their varied needs” as human beings, such as recreation, entertainment, and housing, Muste contended, unions would “hold the worker to his union and so build up labor morale.” It was “fundamentally bad to have these services handed to the workers from . . . above.” Workers must be prepared for the future, when they would run industry and society by themselves.<sup>45</sup> Thus, in that brief period from 1919 through 1920, the ATWA locals not only led strikes and organized shop committees, they also opened union halls, developed youth programs, sponsored lectures and classes for adult education, formed consumer cooperatives, and hosted festivities like picnics and dances, all in an effort to build up a union culture.<sup>46</sup>

In organizing schools, the ATWA also sought to counter the influence of the Americanization programs set up by employers and the public schools as part of the nativist sentiment that swept the country after the war. According to the ATWA, the language of Americanization “cloaked” a determination to exploit workers and preserve the status quo. In contrast to racist and deferential notions of citizenship, the ATWA and its supporters constructed a pragmatic definition of Americanism, viewing it as an inclusive, collaborative process that was constantly “in the making,” as Harold Rotzel put it. “I, for one, am for *a rapidly changing Americanism* which will represent the people of America and make democracy real where the people spend so much of their time—in industry,” he wrote.<sup>47</sup> ATWA educational programs thus sought to teach “in a spirit . . . of equals working out a problem together,” with the recognition that “what the alien knows” would help make American life “fuller and better.”<sup>48</sup> Significantly, its cosmopolitan understanding of Americanism was embedded within a working-class, revolutionary internationalism. Reflecting this spirit, it sought to organize rather than exclude immigrants and to build relationships with textile workers across national borders—such as its mutual union card exchange that it set up with textile workers’ unions in Italy and Poland.<sup>49</sup>

The ATWA’s concern with Americanization had to do with the very real ways in which hegemonic notions of national identity were used against them. Employers inculcated obsequious ideas about citizenship through their Americanization programs and through welfare capitalist schemes that sought to foster loyalty to the company rather than to expansive ideals of freedom. More coercively, employers used the bugaboo of “Bolshevism” to break their agreements with the ATWA; they discriminated against

former strikers, sped up production, spied on their workers, and sometimes moved production to nonunionized regions. Local and state authorities colluded in the hounding of the ATWA. Capitalizing on the hysteria generated by the Palmer raids, they obtained injunctions, arrested organizers, and shut down union halls. In November 1919, repression of striking textile workers in Utica, New York, culminated in an incident in which the police fired 250 rounds of ammunition into an unarmed crowd of men, women, and children, wounding six of them.<sup>50</sup> To put it bluntly, left-wing unionism simply did not enjoy liberties such as free speech and the right of assembly.

The ATWA struggled mightily against the forces of reaction. When ATWA organizer (and ACLU member) Paul Blanshard was arrested in Utica for violating an injunction, he issued his own counter-injunction "against the Capitalist Class of Utica" in which he "restrained" them from "firing on unarmed women," intimidating workers from joining unions, suppressing free speech, and otherwise denying workers "industrial democracy."<sup>51</sup> In Passaic, New Jersey, when the police turned out the lights in their union hall, union members joined representatives of the ACLU in reading the New Jersey Constitution by candlelight.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, the ATWA expanded its efforts into the Midwest and Pennsylvania, where some mills had relocated to find cheaper, more docile labor. In an ideological offensive, Muste and other union organizers gave speeches and published articles warning workers not "to be deceived" by welfare capitalism. "Real men have never desired charity, but freedom and justice," Muste wrote in the pages of the *New Textile Worker*.<sup>53</sup>

In the summer and fall of 1919, this hard work generally paid off, and the ATWA could boast of having fifty thousand dues-paying members by the end of the year. The union's most impressive victory, at least in terms of their desire to obtain the sort of foothold in the textile industry that the ACW had achieved in clothing, was in New York City's silk ribbon industry where they hammered out a collective bargaining agreement using an impartial arbitrator.<sup>54</sup> But a postwar economic depression in the spring of 1920 shifted power decisively to the mill owners and forced the union on the defensive. At the first annual convention of the ATWA in April 1920, Muste warned that favorable conditions in industry would not last and urged affiliation with the ACW to provide the union with the institutional strength and stability to withstand the imminent onslaught. He also pursued an alliance with independent textile unions throughout the Northeast and Midwest.<sup>55</sup>

Yet he could not stem the tide; with their arbitrary power legitimated by the retreating wartime state, the mills spied on their workers, fired members of the ATWA, dramatically cut hours, slashed pay, and refused to negotiate with shop committees or the union.<sup>56</sup> When ATWA locals responded with strikes, the mills locked them out. Most dramatically, the American Woolen Company simply shut down production for the summer of 1920, and when it reopened in September, it discriminated against union members. Mills in other textile centers followed suit.<sup>57</sup> Recognizing the ATWA's fragile state and confronting the same forces of postwar reaction, the ACW retreated from its earlier assurances of affiliation. Unlike the former, the latter would manage to survive the Red Scare; a more established institution, it had managed to impress certain sectors of the clothing industry of its usefulness. Hillman had also established some powerful connections in high political places through his cooperation with the wartime state—in sharp contrast to the pacifist Muste.<sup>58</sup>

Anarcho-syndicalist sentiment, as well as ethnic and ideological divisions, compounded the union's woes. It should be noted in this context that syndicalism also shaped Muste's politics: he had a strong commitment to democracy within the union and believed that the path to workers' control lay in the organization and action of labor unions—which is why he did not join the more politically oriented Socialist Party.<sup>59</sup> Yet within the rank and file, syndicalism was often infused with anarchism—a sentiment to which Muste could not abide. Like his mentors Hillman and Joseph Schlossberg of the ACW, he was engaged in a modernist project to bring rationality, efficiency, and stabilization to a highly chaotic and differentiated industry. Anarcho-syndicalism could also intersect with ethnic parochialism and localism. In Lawrence, for example, the local had persistent trouble collecting dues and had to answer to charges that organizers were living high off of the earnings of workers.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, Muste was forced to respond to rumors that he, Long, and Rotzel were secretly in collusion with William Wood to achieve “industrial peace.”<sup>61</sup> Ethnic tensions, particularly Polish anti-Semitism, further hindered the union's efforts to unite workers.<sup>62</sup>

One historian has suggested that the “naïve” leadership of the union's “middle-class intellectuals” further contributed to the union's demise. For evidence, he cites the union's reluctance to stage strikes in the spring and summer of 1920, and argues that this reflected a politics of moderation out of step with the militancy of the rank and file.<sup>63</sup> Underlying his argument

is the problematic assumption that religious faith leads to moderation. As we have seen, pacifists like Rotzel, Long, Evan Thomas, and Muste risked their careers for their antiwar stance, and showed courage and militancy in organizing and leading the ATWA, which is why they earned the respect and trust of the workers. Muste's ambivalence about striking in the spring of 1920 did not reflect a failure of nerve so much as his pragmatism—with the union facing unilateral reductions in hours and even lockouts, an offensive strike to double the wages of textile workers and obtain union recognition seemed almost certain to end in defeat.<sup>64</sup>

Still, there were cultural differences between Protestant pacifists and the largely immigrant workforce; some of Lawrence's Italian workers, with their strong tradition of anticlericalism, never overcame their suspicion of the ministers.<sup>65</sup> For their part, pacifists often experienced union politics as an "assault" on their affinity for moral consistency.<sup>66</sup> Long would ultimately decide that his ideals found better expression in the cooperative movement, where he remained for the rest of his life. Evan Thomas, who served as the ATWA's organizer in Paterson, observed that his loyalty to individuals rather than to ideas or groups could rouse "real suspicion from some of the workers" in Paterson. "Many of us intellectual radicals are too introspective and ego-centered" to serve the labor movement, he surmised in a letter to his mother. Soon thereafter he turned away from organized politics to focus on his career and family. Likewise, following the demise of the ATWA, pacifists tended to stay on the sidelines of the labor movement, feeling morally compromised in the trenches.<sup>67</sup>

It would, however, be a mistake to exaggerate the divide between pacifism and labor. Left-wing members of the FOR continued to give the labor movement valuable support, and some of them remained actively involved.<sup>68</sup> And John Haynes Holmes may not have liked strikes very much, but he defended the rights of labor to free speech and free assembly as a member of the ACLU. Holmes's approach to the "labor question" was typical of pacifists and mainline Protestants throughout the 1920s: they served as crucial allies of the labor movement, while staking their hopes for industrial and international peace on moral suasion and legalistic formulas like the "outlawry of war" movement and a world court.<sup>69</sup>

Even so, Muste's continued and active engagement in the labor movement was unusual. In contrast to many of his fellow pacifists, he rejected the notion that individual conscientious objection alone would lead to peace. He was also deeply skeptical of legalistic and moralistic methods for



achieving social change, instead placing his hopes in labor organization, militancy, and solidarity.<sup>70</sup> The difference probably reflected his immigrant and working-class background. Union organizer James Dick's memories of the ATWA are suggestive: "We had seven or eight ministers in the Amalgamated Textile Workers, and that was six or seven too many. But there was one who did understand the workers and did understand labor organization: that was A. J. Muste. There is no man in the United States that I would rather go on the picket line with where there is real danger of getting heads cracked."<sup>71</sup>

For Muste's part, he felt a "very strong" sense of identification with men like Sidney Hillman, Carlo Tresca, Arturo Giovannitti, Abraham Cahan, and other ethnic leaders and workers with whom he had become closely connected, and his impression was that they felt the same toward him. His early experiences of poverty and factory work gave him empathy for "the conditions under which they had to live, the suffering which they had to undergo, the deprivation," and conditioned him to live simply. Like them, he also enjoyed the camaraderie of East Side coffeehouses and union meetings, often one and the same, though his Protestant heritage made him "congenitally" unable to sit around drinking and playing cards. "I had to get my relaxation going to plays or listening to music, and so when the boys went out to drink I didn't go along." Yet he refused to moralize, reflecting a deeply held conviction that idealists, whether religious or secular, should keep their ideals to themselves in a diverse and multifaceted movement.<sup>72</sup>

Ultimately, Muste found the experience of being part of something larger than the self deeply satisfying, a sentiment that contrasts with the strongly libertarian bent of other pacifists. Like other pragmatists, he believed that the individual could only find himself or herself through and in community rather than over and against it. "There is no such thing as an individual," Muste explained years later in his oral history. "He's a part of a community, a society" and has responsibilities to it.<sup>73</sup>

In 1920–21, as Muste watched the ATWA collapse all around him, he came to believe that the labor movement should combat not only the conservatism of the AFL, but also the increasingly out-of-touch insurrectionary politics of the left. Radicals had fallen "into the formulation of rules, orthodoxies," escaping into "dogmatic radicalism" rather than facing "life and reality."<sup>74</sup> Indeed, one reason the postwar Red Scare was so devastating to the labor movement was that the Palmer raids tended to exacerbate the

left's millenarianism; from 1919 to 1921, anarchists entered a conspiracy to avenge their repression, the Socialist Party split into rival right- and left-wing factions, and the subsequently formed Communist Party went underground. These insurrectionary politics deeply affected the ATWA. Union meetings often centered on "doctrinal disputations" rather than "straight-out trade union organization of the workers for the immediate improvement of their conditions." More dramatically, anarchists in textile centers bungled several bombings and the union's Communist Party members became scarce.<sup>75</sup>

Muste's decision to leave the ATWA and turn to workers' education emerged out of this context. It was clear to him that labor's expansive vision for the postwar order had been defeated and that the United States had entered a period of reaction. Yet he found reason to be hopeful. John Golden, the UTW's reactionary president, died in 1921 and was replaced by Thomas McMahon, a more progressive unionist who reached out to Muste and who would fight closely with progressives in the 1922 New England textile strike. Perhaps the ATWA had served its purpose in spurring the UTW into more aggressive action; "for the time being," a more practical approach was to push for a federation of textile unions under the auspices of the UTW. At any rate, the "extraordinary instability" of textiles, the specter of an economic downturn, and the extreme hostility of textile magnates made dual unionism now seem like a suicidal policy.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, workers' education became a means whereby he could build a culture of industrial unionism within the American working class, which his experience within the ATWA had taught him would be no easy task. As he reflected, building class consciousness and organizing workers required more than an "evangelistic" method of intensive organization campaigns, big strikes, and generating popular enthusiasm; it was a long-term educational and cultural project. It might also serve as a means whereby he could press his vision for a more realistic left, on the one hand, and a more idealistic labor movement, on the other.<sup>77</sup>

Progressive unionists and independent radicals throughout the United States shared Muste's deep interest in workers' education. The needle and clothing trades were especially supportive, having initiated cultural and educational programs for their members, but so too were the machinists, mine workers and railroad brotherhoods, and central labor councils. James H. Maurer, a machinist who had risen to the presidency of the Pennsylvania Federation of Labor, was one of its most passionate advocates. Mortified by

the pro-war, pro-corporate, nationalistic stance of the schools during World War I, Maurer became convinced that labor needed “schools of its own . . . for free and open discussion, from the workers’ point of view, of the social and economic questions that are of vital interest to workingmen.” Other prominent backers of the movement included John Brophy, the president of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) District 2, who served as a center of insurgency against the autocratic leadership of John L. Lewis, and the venerable John Fitzpatrick, head of the Chicago Federation of Labor and partisan of third-party organizing efforts.<sup>78</sup> Their organ was the left-labor monthly *Labor Age*; its statement of purpose encapsulates the ideology of these labor pragmatists: “Presenting all facts about American labor—Believing that the goal of the American labor movement lies in industry for service, with workers’ control.” Its aim was to serve the labor movement by dealing “with the acts and thoughts of labor, without regard to dogma.”<sup>79</sup>

Intellectuals, educators, and pacifists joined these progressive laborites in support of workers’ education. Boston’s Trade Union College could boast that its teachers included Felix Frankfurter and Harold Laski of Harvard University. The journalist Arthur Gleason was a particularly zealous backer, as were the historian Charles A. Beard and Bryn Mawr’s president M. Carey Thomas, both of whom had traveled to England where they had observed an active and flourishing movement. When they returned to the United States, Beard taught classes for the Rand School of Social Science and the ILGWU, while Thomas founded Bryn Mawr’s famous summer school for women workers. By the spring of 1921, there was enough sentiment to host a conference of two hundred supporters at the New York School for Social Research. Noting that at least twenty-six workers’ education “enterprises” serving some ten thousand students had been established in just two years, the conference voted to found the Workers’ Education Bureau (WEB) as a national clearinghouse for research, teaching, publication, and extension work in workers’ education.<sup>80</sup>

The movement’s nascent philosophy embraced the experimental, non-dogmatic approach of progressive education, while rejecting its individualism. As one proponent put it, academics and liberals implicitly viewed education from a “middle-class point of view” with their tendency to “substitute ‘higher spiritual or cultural objectives’” for the “‘materialistic’ outlook” of workers and trade unions. Workers’ education, by contrast, aimed to educate workers to serve their unions and their class, not to educate

them out of their class with bourgeois ideals of individualism and upward mobility.<sup>81</sup> Reflecting this perspective, the curriculum of early workers' education programs was largely limited to subjects considered directly useful to workers, such as the English language, trade union instrumentals, and the social sciences, which included sociology, economics, history, and some literature. At this early stage, literature and the arts were seen as something the workers already had access to as human beings, not as an additional "front" in the struggle for "a new social order."<sup>82</sup>

Still, enthusiasts of workers' education remained on the political left. Unlike the conservative trade unionists they had battled for supremacy during the war, their ultimate goal was a socialist society, and they believed that workers' education could help them achieve it. As Fannia Cohn of the ILGWU explained, workers' education must be "flexible, experimental, and reflective of the interests of the groups involved," while also having a "central ideology" of unifying the working class to achieve power.<sup>83</sup> Labor educators were also tired of the factional squabbles of left and right and sought to make workers' education independent of any political party or dogmatic creed, in contrast to the educational programs of the Socialist and Communist parties. As one early theorist explained, the movement was "positively partisan" in its commitment to strengthen the labor movement, but it would not "stereotype men's thoughts, ideals and beliefs . . . substitute one dogma for another." Clint Golden, a machinist who would serve as Brookwood Labor College's field secretary in the 1920s, reiterated this distinction in a 1925 survey of the movement. "Where classes have been organized or conducted primarily for propaganda purposes [such as those offered by the Communist and Socialist parties] they have had but a brief existence. . . . Those efforts seem most directly and permanently felt which are pragmatically conducted—dealing with the individual problems with which the workers are confronted," and allowing for "free investigation, examination and inquiry."<sup>84</sup>

As Golden's comments suggest, pedagogically, this independence was expressed through a commitment to the "factual approach," in which worker-students would be presented with a real, living problem and the data and tools necessary for solving it themselves. Historians have typically interpreted the social science language of "facts" and "neutrality" as a retreat from the values of advocacy and service that had animated the previous generation of intellectuals.<sup>85</sup> But for enthusiasts of workers' education, faith in the tools of the social sciences coexisted with a rejection of academic

notions of objectivity and detachment. “There is a great deal of bunk current which suggests that . . . both or more sides must be presented for the students’ judgment. Mental gymnastics, however, is not education. . . . Teach students to think by all means, *but thought must have a content and education a purpose*.”<sup>86</sup> Students were given leave to participate in strikes and other labor activities, which were viewed as “laboratories” for testing the hypotheses and methods that they had explored in their classes. As Louis Budenz explained in the pages of *Labor Age*, “It is in the pragmatic field of the workers’ trench warfare that workers’ education will be worked out.”<sup>87</sup>

The alliance between progressive unionists and intellectuals represented by the workers’ education movement shows that not all intellectuals retreated from their faith in the masses and social service after World War I, nor did all workers ascribe to the anti-intellectualism preached by Samuel Gompers.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, the movement served as a residual expression of a once robust bond between workers and intellectuals, though laborites made it clear that intellectuals were there to serve the movement and “not as prophets.”<sup>89</sup>

The origins of Brookwood Labor College reflect the developments outlined above. Its founders were Christian pacifists who had been converted to labor’s cause during World War I. The most important of these was William Fincke, a minister who had resigned his pulpit in opposition to the war. In the fall of 1919, he and his wife, Helen, decided to turn their country estate—complete with a mansion, “white and wooden-grand with high pillars and wide portico”—outside of Katonah, New York, into a secondary school to promote their ideals.<sup>90</sup> For a variety of reasons, the school never really got off the ground, and the Finckes, inspired by the example of Ruskin College in England, decided to reopen the school as a labor college.<sup>91</sup>

In the spring of 1921, they invited a small group of intellectuals, academics, and trade unionists to discuss the founding of a residential school for adult workers.<sup>92</sup> As a pacifist, a socialist, and a trade unionist with working-class credentials, Muste provided the bridge between the various groups and quickly emerged as the most likely candidate to direct the school. At first, he only agreed to teach history, but the demise of the ATWA, his own growing interest in workers’ education, and the decision of the Finckes to leave Brookwood at the end of the summer of 1921 all pushed him to assume the chairmanship. It was like “screwing in the spark plug of an engine,” the Finckes’ son recalled of the recruitment of Muste.<sup>93</sup>

Personal factors also played a role in Muste's decision. The years since he left Newtonville's Central Congregational Church had been chaotic and insecure ones for his family. While he led the Lawrence strike, Anne remained in Boston, pregnant with their second child, Constance, who was born in August 1919. That same summer, Muste moved his family to New York City where the ATWA had set up its headquarters. In some ways, this was a more stable existence. As head of the union, he earned a regular salary, albeit much reduced from what he had received as an upstanding minister. Yet, despite these improvements, Muste was rarely at home and his involvement with the ATWA meant that he constantly faced arrest and even death. As Muste recalled of those years, "I do not recall a single week when there was not a strike on somewhere. . . . There was no strike without labor spies; no strike in which we did not encounter arbitrary, and usually violent, conduct on the part of the police; no strike, hardly a union meeting in those days, where raids by Attorney General Palmer's men were not carried out or at least threatened." Though he found these experiences decidedly stimulating, he began to feel as though he was "running out of ammunition," with never a moment to pause for reflection. Brookwood thus offered some respite from the constant ferment of leading a persecuted union in decline.<sup>94</sup>

Two miles outside of Katonah in Westchester County, "up a winding road through overhanging woods," Brookwood also offered an idyllic, though primitive, environment for raising children. Nancy, Constance, and John Martin (born in 1927) recalled these years as happy ones for the family. Though conditions were initially quite rustic, eventually the campus included a stone cottage for the Mustes, volleyball and tennis courts, and a swimming pool, "nestled in surrounding greenery" and overlooking "the wooded hills and valleys" of nearby estates. Other faculty and staff, along with their children, also lived on the campus, which had a communal atmosphere in which residents took their meals together and often worked cooperatively to improve the campus. The Muste children thrived in the idealistic, community-centered culture of the school. One of their fondest memories was of being asked to act in plays written by students and faculty. As Nancy recalled of one Saturday night, the Muste family "was up on the stage, huddled around some mechanical parts, while we sang a song about [how] 'the Anarchist family threw the bomb-bomb-bomb.'" <sup>95</sup>

Anne also apparently enjoyed "the settled life at the school."<sup>96</sup> She was, however, often sick; sometime in the late 1930s, a doctor would diagnose

her with a serious heart condition that resulted from having rheumatic fever when she was a child.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps the combination of having poor health and the sole responsibility for household chores and raising the children explains why contemporaries described her as shy and retiring. Yet her reserve may also have reflected disinterest in the political and ideological concerns that consumed her husband. While other movement wives occasionally make an appearance in the historical record from this period, Anne appears only once—in a letter from her resigning as head of Brookwood’s kitchen committee because of the constant squabbling between “the girls.”<sup>98</sup>

Under Muste’s leadership, Brookwood Labor College quickly outgrew its pacifist roots and became a central institution of the progressive wing of the labor movement. At this point, Muste remained a committed pacifist, viewing “modern” educational methods as reflective of the ideals of non-violence.<sup>99</sup> Yet he also recognized that workers came from a variety of ideological and political perspectives and would not abide preaching. Thus, he supported the decision to discard the Christian pacifist ethos of Brookwood School and to place it under the control of unionists, a move that pushed pacifists to the margins.<sup>100</sup>

Muste and the other unionists who founded Brookwood worked hard to make it “labor’s own school,” thus differentiating it from workers’ educational initiatives sponsored by private colleges and state universities.<sup>101</sup> The college’s board of directors was dominated by trade unionists, all with long, distinguished careers, including Maurer, Fitzpatrick, Brophy, Rose Schneiderman of the Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL), Abraham Lefkowitz of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Jay G. Brown of the Farmer-Labor Party, Phil E. Ziegler of the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks, and Fannia Cohn of the ILGWU.<sup>102</sup> It only hired faculty members who had a record of service to the labor movement and ran a closed shop in which faculty had to be members of the AFT; in fact, Muste served as one of the international’s vice presidents through much of the 1920s. The college only admitted students who had recommendations from their unions and reached out to unionists who could not stay for long-term study by establishing an extension program and by offering short courses where unionists could gather to explore problems in their union or in the labor movement as a whole. In 1925, Brookwood expanded its extension program by offering correspondence courses through the pages of *Labor Age*.

Brookwood also sought to be wholly financed by unions. These efforts paid off: within Brookwood's first year alone, Muste boasted of having thirty endorsements from unions. The college never became financially independent, however; although a number of unions established scholarships, he was forced to turn to old sources of support, like Elizabeth Glendower Evans and Anna N. Davis, as well as to the newly formed American Fund for Public Service (also known as the Garland Fund), from which he managed to obtain a long-term grant. Muste made it clear, however, that these donations came with "no strings attached."<sup>103</sup>

Muste's desire to obtain labor's support partly explains his more moderate tone and cultivation of the AFL leadership during Brookwood's early years, though he was also genuinely eager to find common ground between "lefts and rights" in the movement. In his correspondence and interactions with the AFL leadership, "Brother Muste" explicated Brookwood's pragmatic approach to education and its hostility to sectarianism, and reassured them that the college's goal was simply to make more "effective" trade unionists. He also made it the college's policy not to take official positions on questions facing the labor movement or to publicly align with any given party. In 1924, he even offered the AFL official representation on Brookwood's board of directors, though he was relieved when the federation declined the offer.<sup>104</sup> His efforts paid off. By 1924, the AFL had endorsed the movement and became formally affiliated with the WEB, and articles on workers' education, including some by Brookwood faculty and staff, began to appear regularly in its organ, the *American Federationist*.<sup>105</sup>

Muste's publications during this period espoused loyalty to the AFL, while drawing attention to trends that presaged a more progressive federation. Thus he responded with cautious optimism when, in 1924, the AFL departed from its tradition of nonpartisanship and supported third-party candidate Robert La Follette's bid for the presidency and replaced Gompers with William Green, who many hoped would be a progressive because of his background in an industrial union.<sup>106</sup> In essence, Muste tried to chart a middle course. He continued to call for a more militant and internationally minded American labor movement, while criticizing "lefts" for "crabbing about trade union leadership" and for pursuing a "destructive" policy of dual unionism.<sup>107</sup> To some, recalling his recent stint as head of a renegade union, his reformist posture appeared disingenuous, but Muste saw it as a realistic assessment of the state of American labor in the early 1920s. In this way, he reflected the spirit of reconciliation that animated the progressive



wing of the labor movement more broadly during the postwar years. *Labor Age*, for example, rarely explicitly criticized the AFL, instead posing questions for discussion and printing articles that represented a variety of perspectives.<sup>108</sup>

It took Muste two years before he found a stable faculty who shared his teaching philosophy. In early 1922, he hired Josephine “Polly” Colby, who had served as a vice president and full-time national organizer for the AFT, to teach English and public speaking.<sup>109</sup> The other two core members of the faculty were David Saposs and Arthur Calhoun. Saposs was from a working-class, immigrant background and had worked his way through graduate school under the tutelage of John Commons at the University of Wisconsin. By the time he was hired at Brookwood to teach courses on trade union organization and administration, he had extensive experience as a labor researcher and economist and had published widely. Arthur Calhoun, a sociologist by training, taught courses in economics, social problems, and social psychology. Clint Golden took Brookwood’s message into the field, finding students, obtaining scholarships, initiating extension classes, and helping Brookwood alumni secure funding for educational initiatives within their unions and their communities. A burly and charismatic man, Golden was tremendously important in expanding Brookwood’s connections far beyond the progressive wing of the labor movement.<sup>110</sup>

Muste’s commitment to a pragmatic approach to labor education shaped the curriculum. Courses focused on the “actual living problems” that confronted workers and the labor movement; education should begin with the “experiences” of trade unionists and “the problems that arise in connection with them,” Muste explained.<sup>111</sup> Faculty preferred free and open discussions rather than lecture, which was seen as passive and authoritative, or debate, which was seen as narrowly confining discussion between two simplified poles. Faculty also presented their subject material as objectively as possible, and then allowed the students to come to their own conclusions, using the research and rhetorical skills they had learned.<sup>112</sup>

Muste’s personality encouraged this thoughtful engagement with different sides of an issue. Len De Caux, who attended the college in the mid-1920s (and who would later serve as the Communist editor of the *CIO News*), recalled that Muste “always looked for the center with his ‘On the one hand . . . But on the other hand . . .’” “To us young Brookwooders, A. J. was essentially moderate. We respected his counsels of caution, practicality, a relative labor conformism.” He continued, “I would have expected

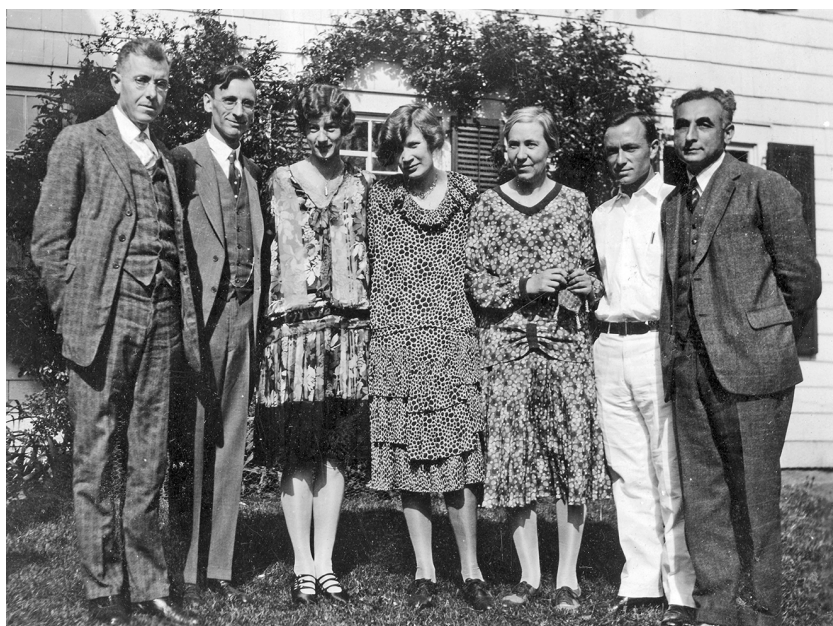


FIGURE 3. Brookwood Faculty and Staff, 1928. Left to right: Arthur Calhoun, A. J. Muste, Cara Cook, Helen Norton, Josephine Colby, Tom Tippet, and David Saposs. (*Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University*)

him to progress ever rightward, a typical social-democrat. Youthful impati-  
 ents, we didn't suspect that fires like our own might burn beneath the  
 diplomatic calm of this lean and eager man." De Caux's comments must  
 be understood as the impressions of a student; Cara Cook, who served as a  
 staff member of the college, suggested that Muste's tendency to present  
 many sides of an issue was "consciously cultivated . . . more as a teaching  
 method than as a front for tolerance." It may have reflected "his own  
 method of thinking through something . . . employed until the crunch  
 came, when he could be unequivocal—the time comes when, for the good  
 of all concerned, you have to make up your mind." <sup>113</sup>

Short courses and visiting lecturers from all elements of the labor move-  
 ment and the liberal left, as well as from abroad, further enriched Brook-  
 wood's curriculum and reinforced the inclusive spirit of inquiry that Muste  
 sought to inculcate in his students and in the labor movement. Trade union

officials representing both left and right perspectives spoke at Brookwood, academics like Rex Tugwell and Selig Perlman participated in summer institutes and workshops, and a wide range of intellectuals lectured on a variety of topics; William Z. Foster, Roger Baldwin, V. F. Calverton, Sinclair Lewis, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, A. Philip Randolph, Scott Nearing, Reinhold Niebuhr, Norman Thomas, Charney Vladeck, Harry Wood, Bertram Wolfe, and Kate Richards O'Hare were just some of the left-liberal luminaries who spoke at Brookwood in the 1920s.<sup>114</sup>

Brookwood's student body offers further evidence of Muste's ecumenical approach to labor education and his desire to bridge the gap between conservatives and radicals in the movement. The faculty deliberately selected students who would disagree with each other. "What we wish to do is to make our idealists practical, and our practical minded people, idealists," one early member of the faculty explained. They also sought to balance region, trade, and ethnicity, making a special effort to recruit women and African Americans. Foreign students also enrolled at Brookwood. Len De Caux, for example, was from New Zealand; others hailed from Japan, Mexico, Norway, Guatemala, and England. As a result of these policies, Brookwood's student body was quite diverse and became more so over time. As Muste once bragged, Brookwood students "are 'old line trade unionists' and 'wobblies': lefts, rights, ambidextrous ones; reds, yellows, pinks, greens!"<sup>115</sup>

In the first half of the decade, most of Brookwood's students were immigrants who had participated in the great strikes of the war years. Few of them had formal education, having left school as soon as they were legally permitted to work, and were eager to learn. As dedicated trade unionists, they sought practical skills that would help them to strengthen their unions and the labor movement. As one student explained, "the problems uppermost in my mind since I came to Brookwood relate to the failure of the Metal Trades campaign waged last summer [in Pittsburgh]. . . . Why did the campaign fail . . . [and] to find a method whereby it is possible to stir the spirit of the rank and file in the interest of the labor movement." Students further appreciated the opportunity to meet unionists from other cultures and trades, though these interactions could also be fraught with ethnic and cultural tensions.<sup>116</sup>

Len De Caux provides an account of Brookwood that is suggestive of its deeper meaning for the students who arrived there. "Brookwood was beautiful. . . . To the miner, Brookwood was green, clean, all above

ground—no coal dust, no cricks in the back. To the machinist, Brookwood was greaseless days far from the grinding roar of metal against metal. To makers of suits, dresses, hats, Brookwood was a fairytale country to which they were wand-wafted from the square, treeless hills, the trash-strewn cement valleys of Manhattan or Chicago. To those who had known poverty, Brookwood offered ease, security, the fresh-air pleasures of the well-to-do." The seasons were sharply defined, with "clear and crisp" air in the fall, sledding and frozen-over ponds for skating in the winter, and "fat, bursting buds, sun-dimpled rivulets, baby-green grass" in the spring that set the stage for romantic dalliances. Indeed, "Brookwood was coeducation at close quarters"; with the average Brookwood student unmarried and in his or her late twenties, romances flowered in the context of intellectual and political stimulation and debate. The overall effect was the spiritual expression of "a labor movement in microcosm—without bureaucrats or racketeers—with emphasis on youth, aspiration, ideals."<sup>117</sup>

By 1925–26, the college was flourishing. Under Muste's able leadership, Brookwood had secured stable financing, improved living and working conditions on campus, and initiated a Building and Endowment Fund to further improve and expand the campus. Its graduates had assumed key roles within their unions as organizers, labor journalists, and educators, while its new students emanated a confidence borne from their status as second-generation immigrants.<sup>118</sup> As we have seen, by 1924, the AFL had "warmly" embraced workers' education.

Relations with the Communist Party were also relatively harmonious at mid-decade. At one point, in 1924, party leader Earl Browder accused the school of Fabian elitism, but generally it was believed that "good Communists can go to Brookwood and come out better Communists." Party members attended the college through their unions, Brookwood faculty were invited to teach at the Communist Party's Workers' School in New York, and leaders of the party occasionally lectured at the college. It almost seemed possible that the college might serve as a fulcrum for the reconciliation between left and right, intellectuals and workers, within the movement.<sup>119</sup>

As Brookwood matured, so did its theoretical understanding of the role of education and culture under capitalism. In the college's early years, it tended to view itself as a medium for communicating expert knowledge to workers. By mid-decade, however, it increasingly saw itself as a site where

working-class knowledge was produced. As Muste explained in 1927, knowledge about industry and labor was already “in the heads of the men and women who have been doing the practical work of the [labor] movement.” The problem was that it had not “been written down anywhere.” Brookwood thus offered workers the opportunity to “to think carefully, comprehensively, critically” about their experiences and problems through collaboration with other workers and “experts.” Meanwhile, Brookwood graduates and faculty disseminated that knowledge for the benefit of the labor movement through educational initiatives within their unions, articles in the labor press, pamphlets, and books. In these forums, labor educators presented their views and subject matter in a problem-centered format, as starting points for discussion, rather than as truths handed down from above.<sup>120</sup>

In part, Brookwood’s evolving teaching philosophy grew out of its half decade of experience teaching adult workers. But it was also a response to the growing sophistication of capital in the 1920s. The full-scale employer assault on organized labor in the early 1920s had given way “to the gentler methods of paternalistic welfare capitalism.” Although its emergence was uneven, welfare capitalism sought to develop a “harmony of interests” between the worker and the company through employee representation plans (“company unionism”), fringe benefits and higher wages, as well as through educational and cultural programs. This was part of a larger project to modernize business methods; just as Frederick Winslow Taylor brought efficiency and rationality to production, corporations sought to do the same with personnel.<sup>121</sup> Muste was deeply concerned about these developments, and his evolving views of workers’ education must be placed in this context. “The boss is not afraid of education,” Muste often pointed out. Newly formed schools of business management “used expert service of all kinds” to train managers in the skills of industrial efficiency, de-skilling, and company unionism. Unless the labor movement shed its residual anti-intellectualism, he warned, the social sciences would continue to be used in antilabor ways.<sup>122</sup>

The advent of mass culture and its reshaping of working-class culture and institutions further concerned Muste. He read Robert and Helen Lynd’s book *Middletown* with great interest, observing that the automobile meant that many workers no longer lived near their places of employment, which “makes it harder to bring them together for organization purposes.” This development, “together with the radio, movies and other modern ways

of recreation and spending leisure time, is cutting down attendance at union meetings."<sup>123</sup>

Rather than adopt a defensive posture, however, Muste called for engagement and appropriation of the new mass culture within the values of the labor movement. Modern methods of propaganda—such as “modern psychology, advertising, and religious revivalism”—and the new media of mass communication might be utilized to win “individuals and the masses” to the labor movement. Indeed, culture might be an important front in the struggle for a socialist society.<sup>124</sup> The union had to be the primary working-class institution because “the basic fact about a worker is that he is a worker” and all of his “human relations depend upon that fact.” But it was also important for labor to create its own history, literature, art, and drama. “When Labor undertakes to write and produce its own movies, to do its own radio broadcasting,” Muste opined, “then it gives notice that it expects to do its own dreaming henceforth. . . . And this is of great importance, for the dreams that men dream, the visions that they see, probably have far more to do than their abstract thinking in determining how they shall vote and act.”<sup>125</sup>

Other labor progressives shared Muste’s interest in culture, taking an approach that differentiated them from their modernist contemporaries and that anticipated the left’s engagement with the popular and vernacular arts in the 1930s. Throughout the 1920s, organized workers explored the possibilities of counter-institution building and culture as ways to inculcate the ethics of the labor movement in workers and their families. The AFL’s schemes like labor banking and life insurance have often been interpreted as evidence of its “class collaborationist” character during this decade, but it might be more fruitful to interpret them as a conservative manifestation of a much larger and diverse cultural project that included education, cooperative experiments, drama, radio programs, summer camps, and youth groups. One such program, Pioneer Youth, with which Muste was closely connected, was conceived as labor’s alternative to the militaristic and patriotic culture of the Boy Scouts. It aimed to instill social idealism, a cooperative spirit, and knowledge of the labor movement in working-class children, but in a nondogmatic and playful atmosphere so that workers children would “become critical, independent, [and] creative.”<sup>126</sup>

Brookwood’s pedagogy and curriculum changed to reflect this more expansive vision. Starting in 1925–26, the college began to organize “labor sports,” volleyball, baseball, hiking, tennis, and horseshoe pitching, to foster

physical health and working-class solidarity.<sup>127</sup> It also broadened its curriculum to include elective courses in subjects like social psychology, current events, labor journalism, literature, and dramatics. The *Brookwood Review* announced these changes in December 1925 with a modernized format and a lively lead article: “Can that most dramatic movement in the world, the Labor Movement, be dramatized? And dramatized . . . by the workers themselves? Can the workers, in dramatizing the movement for the world, bring home to their own consciousness the scope and possibilities of the movement? Can they, in effect, create a form of drama characteristic of the new proletarian spirit in production?”<sup>128</sup>

As this quote suggests, labor theater proved the most popular with students and faculty. The new drama teacher, Jasper Deeter of the Provincetown Playhouse, oversaw student writing and production. Like the proletarian cultural production of the 1930s, these plays mixed proletarian realism and modernism, while also drawing upon the formulas of mass culture. While often rather simplistic, they reflected students’ actual experiences; one of the authors of the play *Shades of Passaic* had been beaten by the police for participating in an ACW-led strike.<sup>129</sup>

Brookwood faculty also wrote and produced plays. Tom Tippet, a former miner who was hired to teach economics in 1927 and later became the school’s extension director, published *Mill Shadows*, a dramatization of how one company town was transformed into a union community.<sup>130</sup> Helen Norton, the school’s journalism instructor, wrote a number of plays, one of which was a satire of a faculty meeting that reveals much about the culture and politics of Brookwood during this dynamic period. In the play, Muste introduces the meeting agenda, stating that they need to plan Brookwood’s economy. Cara Cook, the school’s librarian and tutor, responds, “I thought what we wanted was a revolution, not a planned economy.” Yet, to meet costs, they must figure out how to reduce the number of students. One faculty member suggests eliminating students who “get second helpings in the dining room.” After realizing that this would eliminate nearly every student, another suggests cutting “out *one* student from *each* political wing represented at the school.” But that solution is also seen as impractical since it would mean that “practically everybody would leave, and the few left would have far too much harmony in the class room.” At one point, David Saposs offers to economize by not teaching his classes. Eventually, they decide to host a “bazaar,” but then immediately start debating how to raise money, the gradual approach or the big campaign, metaphorically

discussing the best means of organizing workers. Throughout, the meeting is interrupted by phone calls from various creditors and labor contacts, as well as by Connie Muste, who asks her father for a pencil for her history test the next morning.

The play speaks to "the spirit of fellowship" and "dear love of comrade" that Brookwood sought to inculcate, while its humor serves to release tensions over the perennial challenge of fund-raising, quality of the food, heating problems, and gender; in one scene, when Muste is told that the furnace in the women's dormitory might blow up and destroy the labor posters the students had made, he responds, "Well, it would get rid of the women students, and I'd give a poster a day to get that problem off my hands."<sup>131</sup>

Brookwood faculty and students performed these plays, along with labor songs, poems, and lectures on a variety of topics in traveling "labor chautauquas" that raised money for the school and for various strike funds, while also educating workers in the history and culture of unionism.<sup>132</sup> Yet this cultural turn brought criticism from some quarters that suggested that it would divert working-class militants from the urgent task of industrial organization.<sup>133</sup> As a result, culture remained secondary to the college's main purpose of training trade unionists to more effectively serve the labor movement. The college's refusal to hire V. F. Calverton, the editor of the modernist literary magazine *Modern Quarterly*, as a full-time instructor of literature reveals the dominant place practical courses on trade unionism and the social sciences held in Brookwood's curriculum. As Muste explained of the college's decision to only employ him on a part-time basis, "we are specializing in getting men and women whose interests are not primarily cultural or scholarly but who are practical people who . . . are going to do the practical work of the trade union movement." Perhaps when Brookwood became a full-scale "labor university," it would be able to hire Calverton on a full-time basis.<sup>134</sup>

Muste's dreams for Brookwood and the labor movement thus remained expansive, despite his moderate posture and practical orientation during this period. Between the poles of revolutionary socialist and loyal trade unionist was a pragmatist who recognized the importance of being flexible and adaptable to changing conditions. In the early 1920s, those conditions were corporate intransigence, a hostile state, a conservative labor movement, and a decimated left, all of which made education and conciliation with the AFL seem imperative. Pragmatism also gave Muste a language for reconciling his individualism with his allegiance to the working class; with



its emphasis on cooperation and action as the path to freedom, pragmatism helped to temper his sense of historical destiny as a prophet of nonviolence and human brotherhood. Yet those ideals remained deeply important to him. As economic and political conditions changed, and as the labor movement and the far left remained resistant to his efforts at reconciliation, even going so far as to publicly attack and vilify him, he would revise his ideas about how to strengthen the labor movement and build a socialist America.