Causes and Control

Trace how communist tactics developed in the United States.

TOT.C.9.5 "Examine the development of communism in the United States of America, including Soviet coordination of Western communist party tactics, communist "front" movements, and attempts to infiltrate and co-opt organized labor."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the CPUSA's changes in position in 1935, 1939, and 1941, and circle the name of a group described as a communist front. In the labor paragraph, write 1 beside an action that helped workers and 2 beside an action meant to advance party goals.

Party Goals, Public Causes

1. Two communist parties formed in the United States in 1919, amid strikes and fear of revolution. After reorganizations, the Communist Party USA, or CPUSA, emerged. It belonged to the Communist International, or Comintern, an organization based in Moscow that coordinated communist parties across countries. In 1935, the Comintern urged a Popular Front: cooperation with noncommunists against fascism. After the Soviet Union signed a pact with Nazi Germany in 1939, CPUSA leaders opposed United States involvement in the European war. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, they strongly backed the Allied war effort.

2. Public campaigns gave the party another way to build influence. The International Labor Defense, closely tied to the CPUSA, raised funds and organized legal support for the Scottsboro Boys, nine Black teenagers falsely accused of rape in Alabama in 1931. Its work also helped draw national attention to racist injustice. This group was often called a communist "front" because it brought people together around a cause while party members helped guide its work. Supporting the teenagers did not make every donor or volunteer a communist. Such coalitions could advance both a real public cause and the party's political aims.

3. Organized labor was another arena. During the 1930s, communist organizers worked inside unions, especially some in the new Congress of Industrial Organizations, or CIO. They helped recruit workers and lead strikes for better pay and safer workplaces. Party leaders also sought positions in unions so they could shape union decisions and connect labor campaigns to CPUSA goals. That effort to redirect an existing organization toward party priorities is called co-optation. Union members had varied beliefs, and many demanded better conditions without supporting communism. Amid Cold War tensions, the CIO expelled several unions it judged communist-led in 1949 and 1950.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the CPUSA's positions in 1935, 1939, and 1941 show a connection to Soviet-led tactics?

2. How could the International Labor Defense advance both a public cause and CPUSA goals?

3. How did communist organizers try to gain influence inside unions, beyond helping workers win better conditions?

4. What does the CIO's action in 1949 and 1950 suggest about how some union leaders viewed communist influence?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence museum label evaluating this claim: “Every worker in a Communist-backed campaign took orders from Moscow.” Use evidence from each paragraph, and explain what that evidence cannot prove about individual participants.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the CPUSA's changes in position in 1935, 1939, and 1941, and circle the name of a group described as a communist front. In the labor paragraph, write 1 beside an action that helped workers and 2 beside an action meant to advance party goals. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the CPUSA's positions in 1935, 1939, and 1941 show a connection to Soviet-led tactics?	**The party followed the Comintern's 1935 call for cooperation against fascism. Its position on the European war then changed after the Soviet Union's 1939 pact with Germany and again after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941.**
2	How could the International Labor Defense advance both a public cause and CPUSA goals?	**It raised money and organized legal support for the Scottsboro Boys while party members helped guide its work and build influence.**
3	How did communist organizers try to gain influence inside unions, beyond helping workers win better conditions?	**Party leaders sought union positions so they could shape decisions and connect labor campaigns to CPUSA goals.**
4	What does the CIO's action in 1949 and 1950 suggest about how some union leaders viewed communist influence?	**By expelling unions it judged communist-led, the CIO showed that it viewed such influence as a concern, even though union members held varied beliefs.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The claim that every worker in a Communist-backed campaign took orders from Moscow goes beyond the evidence. Comintern calls for a Popular Front and the CPUSA's wartime shifts show coordination at the party level. The International Labor Defense combined support for the Scottsboro Boys with party influence, yet its donors did not all belong to the party. Communist organizers also fought for better conditions while seeking influence inside CIO unions. Workers could share a goal with party organizers without sharing their politics or following Soviet instructions.

Accept labels that identify evidence of party-level coordination while rejecting the unsupported claim that every participant followed Soviet orders. Students should distinguish a group's leadership or goals from the beliefs of its members, donors, or allies.