



# Communism in Washington State

History and Memory



Washington State's radical reputation was already well established by 1919.

The Socialist Party of Washington had been a powerful force in local electoral politics; the IWW flourished in the timber camps and in cities such as Seattle and Spokane. And in February of 1919, Seattle's AFL unions had led the first self-described General Strike in American history.





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Inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 and energized by the Seattle General Strike, in 1919 the left-wing of the state Socialist Party broke away to form a branch of the Communist Party of America (CPA). A rival party, the Communist Labor Party, was founded at the same time by former members of foreign-language sections of the Socialist Party. In Washington, as elsewhere throughout the country, the two factions merged in 1921 to become the Communist Party USA.

Seattle became the headquarters of CPUSA District 12, encompassing Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

**RUSSIA DID IT**

SHIPYARD WORKERS—You left the shipyards to enforce your demands for higher wages. Without you your employers are helpless. Without you they cannot make one cent of profit—their whole system of robbery has collapsed.

The shipyards are idle; the toilers have withdrawn even tho the owners of the yards are still there. Are your masters building ships? No. Without your labor power it would take all the shipyard employers of Seattle and Tacoma working eight hours a day the next thousand years to turn out one ship. Of what use are they in the shipyards?

It is you and you alone who build the ships; you create all the wealth of society today; you make possible the \$75,000 sable coats for millionaires' wives. It is you alone who can build the ships.

They can't build the ships. You can. Why don't you?

There are the shipyards; more ships are urgently needed; you alone can build them. If the masters continue their dog-in-the-manger attitude, not able to build the ships themselves and not allowing the workers to, there is only one thing left for you to do.

Take over the management of the shipyards yourselves; make the shipyards your own; make the jobs your own; decide the working conditions yourselves; decide your wages yourselves.

In Russia the masters refused to give their slaves a living wage too. The Russian workers put aside the bosses and their tool, the Russian government, and took over industry in their own interests.

There is only one way out; a nation-wide general strike with its object the overthrow of the present rotten system which produces thousands of millionaires and millions of paupers each year.

The Russians have shown you the way out. What are you going to do about it? You are doomed to wage slavery till you die unless you wake up, realize that you and the boss have not one thing in common, that the employing class must be overthrown, and that you, the workers, must take over the control of your jobs, and thru them, the control over your lives instead of offering yourselves up to the masters as a sacrifice six days a week, so that they may coin profits out of your sweat and toil.

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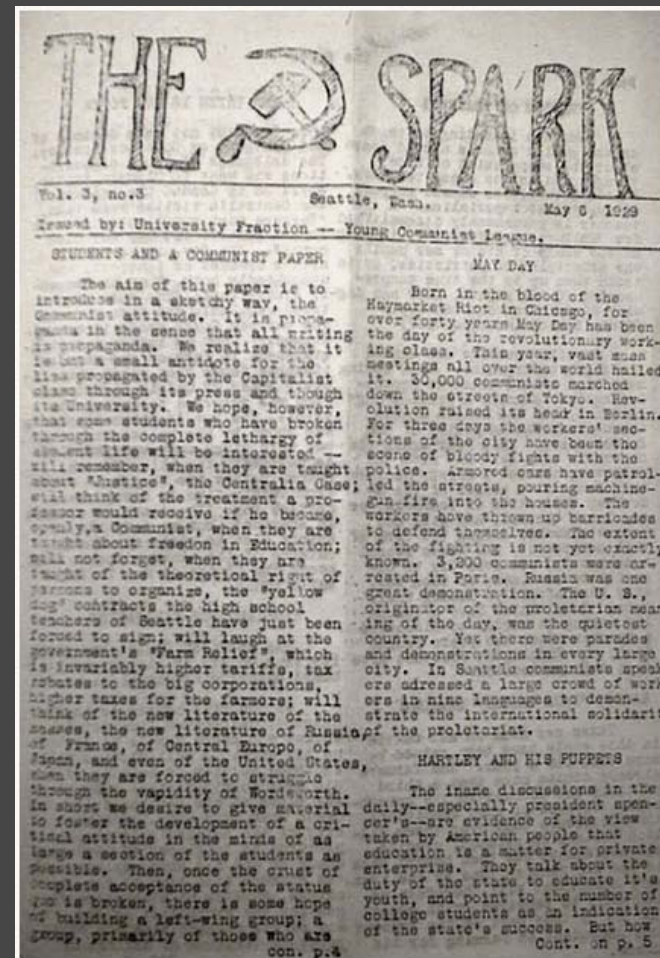


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The 1920s were an inauspicious time to build a new radical movement. The local Party joined efforts to build a national Farm-Labor Party and worked within the Seattle Central Labor Council to push the labor movement leftward. But mostly it concentrated on its own survival. Bitter factional and cultural divides within the Party combined with harassment and repression to inhibit Party growth. Communists were expelled from the SCLC in 1925. Immigrant Communists, still the bulk of the Party in the 1920s, were deported by the dozens. By the end of the decade, the Washington State Communist Party boasted no more than around 500 members.





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With the onset of the Great Depression, the CPUSA appeared vindicated in its longstanding critique of the capitalist system. The Party began attracting more converts and sympathizers and became increasingly visible and influential.

The Washington State Party turned its attention toward poverty and unemployment. By the spring of 1932, at least 25 percent of the workforce, some 40 to 50 thousand workers, were unemployed in the city of Seattle.





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The CP established Unemployed Councils to organize and politicize the mass of jobless men and women. The Councils focused on educating workers about the failure of capitalism and the socialist future and on mass political action to block tenant evictions and pressure lawmakers into allocating more funding for public works and relief to the poor and unemployed.



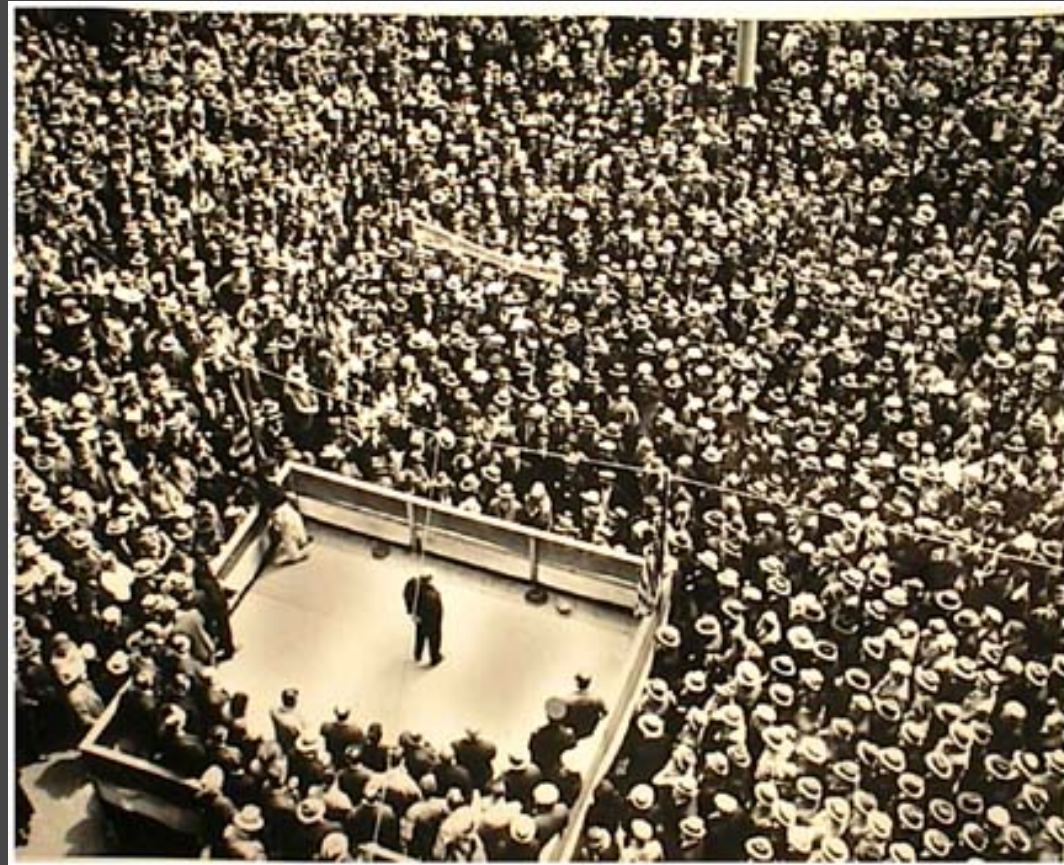


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The CP Unemployed Councils were quite successful in a few cities across the country. Locally, however, the Councils were quickly out-organized by a rival group led by former Socialist Party leaders: the Unemployed Citizens League (UCL). Focusing on self-help and practical aid rather than revolutionary politics, the Washington State UCL attracted a widespread following and spawned a nationwide movement to organize the unemployed.





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By the summer of 1932 the CP had given up organizing its own Unemployed Councils in favor of a strategy of “boring from within” the UCLs, which meant that Party members would join UCL locals and attempt to turn them away from self-help toward a more radical agenda using more confrontational tactics. Largely successful in this effort, by 1934 the UCL was a communist-dominated movement.





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Communists also played a critical role in the revitalization of organized labor in the Pacific Northwest in the 1930s and 1940s. Party members could be found in nearly every union, but were especially prominent in the maritime, timber, and canning industries. Party unionists helped lead some of the major strikes of the period, including the 1934 waterfront workers strike, the 1935 timber workers strike, and the 1936 Seattle Newspaper Guild strike. They were also among the most outspoken champions of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, working to push many AFL locals into the new CIO in the late 1930s.





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## Local 19 Mourns Labor Veteran Frank Jenkins

SEATTLE—ILWU Local 19 is mourning the death of Frank Jenkins, one of labor's veterans on the Seattle waterfront.

Funeral services were held April 17 at Bonnie Watson Mortuary.



JENKINS

Jenkins had served his local for over two decades as delegate to International ILWU conventions and long-shore caucuses. He also served for many years on the local's executive board and on the port labor relations committee.

Arriving in Seattle as a child in 1909, Jenkins went to work on the waterfront in 1920 after attending Lawton Grammar School and Queen Anne High School.

He became involved in one highly dramatic incident in connection with the fifth trial of ILWU President Bridges in 1953. (This was a civil suit to revoke Bridges' citizenship, instituted after the US Supreme Court earlier voided a criminal conviction on the same charge of prejudice in denying Communist Party membership when he secured his citizenship.)

Right after Jenkins finished testifying as a defense witness for Bridges the Coast Guard picked up his pass. The Coast Guard claimed it had been looking for him since 1953—although all those years he worked on the Seattle docks, served on the port labor relations committee, and resided at the same address.

It took four months of effort to get his Coast Guard pass restored.

He was elected a delegate to seven ILWU international conventions. At the 19th convention in 1971, having retired, he was present as a fraternal delegate.

The Jenkins family has asked *The Dispatcher* to "express their sincere thanks to Frank's many friends and members in the ILWU for their remembrances and condolences, and for their many expressions of love and kindness shown during his illness."

The Northwest Communist Party's appeal among African American and immigrant workers helped push forward the CIO's broader vision of interracial industrial unionism.



Filipino salmon processing workers in Alaska, known as the "Alaskeros."



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Interracial unionism was but one part of a broader offensive against racism initiated by the CP beginning in the early 1930s. Nationally, this effort was highlighted by the Party's defense of the Scottsboro Nine. Locally, the CP carried out its own celebrated legal defense in the case of Ted Jordan, an Oregon man falsely condemned for murder.

## Scottsboro Boy Sentenced to Die



TYPICAL NEGRO FAMILY'S HOME LIFE; SCOTTSBORO BOYS  
CAME FROM PLACES LIKE THIS

### Patterson Convicted in Decatur Trial

Seattle, April 15—News from Decatur, Alabama, where the world famous Scottsboro case is being retried, that Hawood Patterson has been again sentenced to death by a lily-white jury which laughed and joked as it brought in the verdict did not come as a surprise to Seattle groups organizing here to give support to the case.

"Most assuredly we will appeal this case," Samuel Leihowitz, famous defense attorney retained chief counsel by the International Labor Defense, is reported to have said.

"We'll take it up to the high court in our land that once before hurled this mess back into the la





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The CP's anti-racism activism is one of its most important legacies. In an era when very few white-led organizations paid any attention to civil rights, the CP made it a top priority. Here in Washington State, the Party picketed "Whites Only" businesses, fought anti-miscegenation legislation, and publicized instances of police brutality against African Americans.





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The CP also advanced its civil rights vision by actively recruiting African Americans and promoting them to leadership positions within the Party and in unions where Party members had influence. The Party nominated Revels Cayton for Seattle City Council in 1934. Cayton had been head of the Northwest district branch of the International Labor Defense and would go on to become an key leader in the Marine Cooks and Steward Union and, in the 1940s, head of the CIO on the West Coast.





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One of the distinguishing features of the Party in the Northwest was its press. From 1934 to 1948 the Party built and helped sustain a vibrant tradition of militant labor journalism under a series of mastheads: the *Voice of Action* (1934-1936), *The Sunday News* (1936-1938), *The Washington New Dealer* (1938-1943), and *The New World* (1943-1948). In 1948 the *New World* merged with the *Daily People's World*, a CP newspaper published out of San Francisco, California.

**18,000 WON'T SCAB!**

**A NEW WEEKLY PAPER**  
PUBLISHED BY THE STATE COMMITTEE OF ACTION

VOL. 1, NO. 1 SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, MARCH 26, 1935 2 CENTS IN SEATTLE

**King County Unemployed Strike Against Forced Labor**

**1900 BURIEN FAMILIES WIN BIG VICTORY**

BURIEN DISTRICT, King County, March 25.—Vouchers are being issued to the 1,900 families in this district without forced labor. The ranks of the strikers have been 100 per cent solid since the strike vote at the grand pit March 22. Committees of action, defense, relief and "striking" have been organized and are functioning well. Women and children are on the front supporting their husbands and fathers against the passage system.

The strike began when the committee of action from the Mount View hotel got thrown out of the hotel by the Frank Shannon group at Burien City for demanding vouchers. The early treatment of a woman on the committee by one of the cops who the strike that broke the owner's back. The committee went to the grand pit. A meeting was called. The vote was unanimous for strike.

Youchers were cut off. A committee of ten went in to see Shannon, county welfare head. He declared he would see no committee larger than a committee of one. The committee called the strikers, who sent twenty-five more. Shannon still refused. Finally seventy-five jammed the relief office. The same Shannon who would see only committees of ONE now saw a committee of seventy-five.

All 1,900 mothers but three are now receiving their vouchers.

**Baker Passes Buck**

YACOMA, March 24.—"I can't do anything for you. It's up to Shannon," declared Walter Baker, head of the State Relief Commission, to a committee of strikers from Burien, King County who paid him an un-

**Farmers KO Investigator**

WHATCOMB COUNTY.—Social-Welfare "Investigation" received a knockout blow as soon as it showed its head in Everett. The farmers of Whatcomb County had heard about the Welfare Methods which were being planned and determined to wage a fight against them. The farmers have explained their position as being that they refuse to be persecuted or subjected to personal indignities, or anything which brings on the right of human beings to be treated as human beings instead of dumb slaves.

At first the Welfare Commission started "investigation" with one member of the Committee of Action. This member convinced the Welfare Commission that investigation of farmers is impractical when the farmers determine to fight against it. Eighty questions were asked in all, but none of them were answered. The way the investigator wanted was expected, and it took so long that

**AF of L WORKERS OPPOSE FORCED LABOR**

SEATTLE, March 25.—The rank and file members of the Central Labor Council fought long and hard to win the right for the endorsement of the program of the Unemployed Citizens' League, which called for a minimum wage scale of 25 cents an hour for common labor and refused to work for a limited list of groceries.

Facing squarely the clear-cut issue of calling a halt to the Shannon-Black Social Welfare program of forced labor, the membership of the Central Labor Council battled against the old political machine.

Although the matter was laid over for one week, the aroused membership of the Central Labor Council will demand endorsement of the program at the next meeting Wednesday night, March 28.

Lois Nash, a member of the County Welfare Board and delegate to the Central Labor Council, stated

**OFFICIAL CENTRAL STRIKE COMMITTEE BULLETIN**

All districts sending delegates to Shannon's office should have written credentials and demands properly endorsed by the district strike committees.

Districts sending reports on strike situation, to Central Strike Committee, should have endorsement of the district strike committee.

HOBERT DISTRICT RECEIVED THEIR VOUCHERS TODAY.

Lake Burien District requests that all security equipment be removed King County welfare board. Also a protest against Bruce Haysington, county foreman, who is trying to cause trouble among the unemployed by encouraging and instilling that they go to work under the present system. All districts are requested to take same action.

Yungsten Action Committee reports that they were ordered from park grounds, while doing picketing duty there this morning. Districts are requested to send their forces to Yungsten local to assist them.

**MARTIN BREAKS MORE PROMISES**

OLYMPIA, March 25.—During the past week Governor Martin killed House Bill No. 18 "requiring minimum wage provisions in contracts



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In the mid 1930s, Communist Parties around the world became increasingly worried about the rise of fascism in Europe. Consequently, they became much more open to forming coalitions with liberals and non-communist radicals in a variety of political, civil rights, and labor causes including support for the New Deal, the AFL, and the CIO. This “Popular Front” strategy was more successful in Washington State than in perhaps any other place in the country.

### Communists Will Work for Real Mass Labor Party

#### New Policies, Tactics Of C.P. Explained To Workers

By R. E. Whipple

The Northwest District Committee of the Communist Party has just met to discuss new tactics and policies decided upon by the Central Committee in its New York meeting of this year. They are designed to meet the changing conditions of the class struggle.

In the last year we have witnessed gains of monopoly capital at the expense of the worker, the poor farmer and the small business man, the strengthening of fascist tendencies, intensified imperialism and new threats of war.

At the same time labor has met this attack on its rights by renewed class warfare. Unionization, especially AFL unionization, is growing. A wave of strikes which tended to develop into general strikes has swept the nation. There is greater class consciousness than ever before and a new demand for unity of action. Millions of disillusioned work-

ers have deserted the two old parties and are looking for a real mass Labor Party.

Realizing this the Communist Party has instructed its members to fight side by side with all the workers in their struggles on the new battle front. The three chief tasks the Party sets itself are (1) to strengthen the trade union movement, (2) to increase the power of the United Front, and, (3) to build a real mass Labor Party.

The first job is to strengthen the ranks of union labor and to increase the militancy of the unions. The Communist Party has ordered every one of its members that is eligible to join an AFL union. The Communist Party is doing this because it recognizes that the AFL is becoming a more and more predominant mass organization. The members are more class conscious. They are militant in their demands. And they are educating workers on all fronts in their unions.

The growth of the trade union must continue until every worker, employed or unemployed, is a member and the company union is destroyed. This can be done by increasing trade union democracy and the industrial organization of the AFL. Then every work-

er will be active in union work. The union will always be truly their heroic resistance to anything.

The Communist members of the unions are to join in the daily struggles for specific and concrete demands such as fights against wage cuts, rising pay for rising prices, a reduction in hours without reduction in pay, elimination of the speed-up, real social insurance and unemployment relief—HOURS ARE ALL.

In the interests of trade union unity the Communist members of independent unions are asked to fight for united action. In the Marine unions they are already working for amalgamation. In the lumber unions they are demanding a wage conference of all the unions in the industry. In order to win against the bosses the workers must have unity and every Communist must make a day by day fight for concrete united action.

**No Loose Name-Calling**

These resolutions ask the Communist members to keep always in mind that the AFL unions are honest mass workers' organizations even though there may be some leaders, bureaucrats at the top. The duty of the Communist members is to expose those who

are traitors, secretly and consciously, but to recognize and assist those who are honest functionaries in particular local AFL unions.

The second task which the Communist Party sets its members is to struggle more actively for the united front. The nature of the union work in this field has already been pointed out. Any other elements who are willing to make a united fight for specific measures must be contacted and drawn into the struggle.

**Build Anti-War Coalitions**

Particularly about the Northwest Conference Against War and Fascism be extended. Already the Socialists of Tacoma have joined in this united front. Local units of the Socialist Party elsewhere must be drawn in, as well as Commonwealth units, farmers, teachers, and all others who can be made allies of the working class.

The united front is the weapon by which the workers can beat back the attacks of the bosses. The OGI bill now in the representative of the masses. And the unemployed, unemployed with the employed, will continue State Socialists is not just a threat to the Communist Party. It is

a weapon forged to destroy all victories, but the efforts of the masses to better their conditions. The open militarization of the CCC camps, the spread of secret fascist organizations like the Vigilantes, is consciously intended to pave the way for terror against workers' unions. The success of the united front in France proves that it is a weapon in the hands of the masses which can defeat capitalist terror and violence.

**Organize Labor Party**

The third task of the Communists is to work for a real mass labor party. The time is now ripe for it as shown by the disillusionment of the masses with the two old parties. Millions of workers are looking around for a party which they can support. Successful demagogues like Henry Long and Oliver M. Peterson already see this and are trying to get the workers' votes. Neither these nor "progressives" like La Follette of Wisconsin can lead a militant labor party. Following them will only result in another Roosevelt betrayal.

In the State of Washington similar elements are already at work. John C. Norstrom is building a machine to elect him governor of the state. He is trying

#### Leaders Must Be Men Known and Tested In Struggle

to continue the workers that he will represent their interests. He has working for him a skilled ringleader, M. R. London.

**Tested Leaders**

It is the duty of the Communists to expose demagogues who will sell out the masses, and to work unceasingly for a real labor party. Such a party must be built on a mass basis. The masses must demand it. It must fight militantly for concrete mass issues, its representatives must be known and tested workers in the class struggle.

The policy expressed in these resolutions will be put into effect more concretely in further discussions of particular issues facing the workers of the Northwest. By them the Communist Party will continue the mass of the workers of the righteousness of the Party's line. They will do this in the concrete, daily struggle, fighting in the front line of the class battle.



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In large part this was due to the success of the Washington Commonwealth Federation and the Washington Pension Union. The WCF functioned as a left-wing caucus of the state Democratic Party, working to set legislative priorities and to get progressive candidates nominated and elected on the Democratic ticket. In some cases, notably the election of Hugh DeLacy to the U.S. Congress in 1944, these Democrats were secretly members of the Communist Party. The WPU was a mass organization that lobbied for higher old age insurance for the elderly. At their peak in the late 1930s and early 1940s, each organization boasted tens of thousands of members statewide and the WCF largely controlled the state Democratic Party apparatus.





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The Party vacillated between ardent, often effusively patriotic support for the Allied effort in World War II to equally militant isolationism, and back again. The CPUSA's policy shifts on the war effort, which the Washington State Party followed dutifully, were a reflection of the Soviet Union's own shifting set of foreign policy prerogatives and severely undermined the CP's credibility for many erstwhile supporters both within and outside of the Party.





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The success of the Popular Front and the influence that the Communist Party in Washington State wielded in the 1930s and early 1940s provoked a strong backlash when the political winds changed in the late 1940s. Suspected Communists were fired from jobs and blacklisted while several Party leaders were forced underground. Under pressure, the AFL and CIO purged Communists from their ranks.





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Washington state witnessed four high-profile episodes of government-sponsored anticommunism: the first occurred back in 1930 when the Fish Committee came to Seattle; the 1947 Canwell Committee hearings investigated “un-American” activities at the UW and in the Washington Pension Union, among other places; in 1953 seven Party leaders were tried for conspiracy to overthrow the federal government under the Smith Act; and in 1955 and 1956, the House Committee on Un-American Activities held hearings in Seattle.



A black and white photograph showing a large crowd of people gathered on the steps of the Washington state capitol building in Olympia. In the foreground, several men are in the water, pulling a large net. A sign on the building reads "Kentucky Fried Chicken". The scene is a demonstration or rally.

## Olympia rally highlights Indian fish-in actions



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The Washington State Communist Party continues to play a supporting role in labor, civil rights, and environmental struggles across the state. Its numbers and influence have dwindled significantly since its heyday in the 1930s, however. Unsuccessful in attracting younger members and damaged by the collapse of communism in the USSR and eastern Europe, the Party was forced to close its Seattle office in 2001.





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