

# BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF THE AMERICAN LEFT

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The commencement of the Moscow purge trials in 1936 added to Rahv's disillusionment with the Communist Party, and the *Partisan Review* stopped publishing for a year.

When the journal reappeared in late 1937, its revamped editorial board consisted of anti-Stalinist-Marxists who had either been expelled from or broken with the Party and who also championed literary modernism: Rahv, William Phillips (q.v.), F. W. Dupee, Dwight Macdonald (q.v.), Mary McCarthy, and George L. K. Morris. Until the advent of World War II, the *Partisan Review* considered itself a Leninist publication with considerable sympathy for Trotskyism. Although Rahv and his closest associate, William Phillips, were suspicious of any organizational association, Trotskyists and Trotsky himself were among the *Partisan Review's* contributors, and all the editors collaborated with the Trotskyists in setting up the short-lived League for Cultural Freedom and Socialism.

But wartime pressure caused a major rift in the editorial board. Two of the editors, Dwight Macdonald and the recently added Clement Greenberg, argued that opposition to fascism should not mean abandoning the struggle for socialism and endorsing the imperialist war aims of the Allies. Rahv and Sidney Hook (q.v.) wrote in favor of giving "critical support" to the U.S. government. In 1943 Macdonald felt forced to resign, and after this rupture the *Partisan Review's* connections with the Left became even more tenuous.

Although Rahv was sharply critical of McCarthyism, he was cautious about expressing his views and was by and large politically silent during the 1950s. During the 1960s he moved sharply left again, criticizing many of his fellow intellectuals for having sold out to American prosperity. In 1969 he broke with Phillips because he believed that the *Partisan* had capitulated to the counterculture. In 1971 he published *Modern Occasions*, which lasted for only six issues. He died in 1973.

SOURCES: Arthur Edelstein (ed.), *Images and Ideas in American Culture: Essays in Memory of Philip Rahv* (1979); James B. Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans* (1968); Philip Rahv, *Essays on Literature and Politics: 1932-1972* (1978).

ALAN WALD

**RANDOLPH, A. PHILIP (1889-1979).** Asa Philip Randolph achieved a lengthy and varied record of accomplishments in almost fifty years of political activism on the American Left. Co-founder and co-editor of *Messenger* magazine, first president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, first president of the National Negro Congress, progenitor of the 1941 March on Washington movement, founder of the Negro American Labor Council, and originator of the 1963 March on Washington, A. Philip Randolph was a longtime member of the Socialist Party and one of black America's preeminent leaders for over a quarter of a century.

Born in Crescent City, Florida, on April 15, 1889, Randolph was the son of Elizabeth Robinson Randolph and the Reverend James William Randolph, an African Methodist Episcopal minister of modest circumstances who moved his

family into nearby Jacksonville when Asa was 2 and his brother James was 4. Randolph completed his high school education at Jacksonville's Cookman Institute, a Methodist mission school, and after several years of working odd jobs in Jacksonville he adventurously booked passage to New York City in the spring of 1911 in search of a livelier existence and possible stage career.

Arriving in Harlem at the age of 22, Randolph worked a succession of menial jobs while taking courses at the City College of New York. He discovered the contemporary political scene both in those classes and in the streetcorner soapbox oratory that characterized Harlem's major avenues. He was strongly attracted to Socialist principles, quickly developed into an ardent admirer of Eugene V. Debs (q.v.), and late in 1916 formally joined the Socialist Party. Having wed a well-to-do widow with a prospering hairstyling business, Lucille E. Green, in late 1914, Randolph was free to devote all his time to political discussions and several short-lived attempts to launch organizations that would represent both poorly paid black workers and progressive political tenets. Along with a fellow young ideologue, Chandler Owen, Randolph attempted to build a Harlem employment agency and worker-organizing enterprise called the Brotherhood of Labor, but that too failed to prosper. Though Randolph had acquired a strong reputation as a superb streetcorner orator and had built up a discussion society, the Independent Political Council, around his forceful articulation of radical politics, it was not until early 1917, when the president of the Headwaiters and Sidewaiters Society of Greater New York asked Randolph and Owen to begin putting out a monthly magazine for the organization's membership, that Randolph finally found a firm niche in Harlem political life.

Starting out as *The Hotel Messenger*—and soon becoming simply *The Messenger* when the waiters society president withdrew his sponsorship—Randolph and Owen's journal quickly emerged as a lively and forcefully outspoken magazine of political commentary and cultural criticism. Fervently supportive of the Industrial Workers of the World, radical for that time in its demands for full black rights, and stridently critical of American involvement in World War I, the *Messenger* quickly established Randolph as one of New York's most notable black radicals. Arrested in Cleveland in the summer of 1918 for uttering Debsian-style condemnations of America's war effort, Randolph intensified his involvement with the Socialist Party when he garnered over 200,000 votes as its 1920 candidate for New York State comptroller. His firm commitment to biracial working-class radicalism led Randolph to turn the *Messenger's* rhetorical guns on Black Nationalist messiah Marcus Garvey with stringent harshness, but by the middle of the decade Randolph's own race-consciousness had led him to an increasingly negative view of the Socialist Party, which had "no effective policy toward Negroes, and didn't spend enough time organizing them," he later declared. Displeased with the political scene and with the financially strapped *Messenger* turning more to literary and cultural concerns, by 1925 Randolph faced dimmer prospects than at any time since 1917.

In June of that year an outspoken black Pullman porter, Ashley L. Totten, asked Randolph to turn his considerable energies and powerful speaking skills toward organizing the 10,000 black porters scattered nationwide into a union that could force the Pullman Company into raising the men's miniscule wages and improving their horrendous working conditions. Despite the porters' lack of success in previous organizing efforts, Randolph looked into their situation, recognized the direct relevance of their cause to his own racial and economic precepts, and, at the first formal meeting on August 25, 1925, was named president of the new Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

Randolph began what turned out to be a twelve-year effort to win recognition of the black workers' union by the Pullman Company. Touring the nation to help stiffen members' courage in the face of repeated legal setbacks, company harassment, and mass firings of suspected Brotherhood porters, he won the respect and allegiance of the core membership despite the long and draining struggle. Finally, in 1934, New Deal political support resulted in strengthening amendments to the Railway Labor Act that eventually, after Supreme Court approval, forced the Pullman Company to sit down face-to-face with the Brotherhood leadership and pursue meaningful negotiations. On August 25, 1937, the company signed an agreement with the Brotherhood giving porters a substantial salary increase and a reduction in monthly working hours from 400 to 240.

The Brotherhood's resounding triumph thrust Randolph forward into a nationally prominent black leadership position he had never before assumed. Already named the first president of the new Communist-influenced National Negro Congress a year earlier, Randolph softpeddled differences within that congress and had little to do with its actual operation until Communist efforts to set the organization's political line became self-obvious at its third convention in April 1940. Then, with Communist representatives urging American isolationism in light of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, Randolph criticized both the Soviet regime and the policies of the American Communist Party. Many delegates walked out during his remarks, and a resolution implicitly rejecting Randolph's stance was adopted. Firmly committed to his principles, Randolph resigned the presidency and publicly condemned the congress' adherence to Soviet preferences and increasing dependence on the Communist Party.

Randolph's resignation did nothing to harm his status as a preeminent black leader, and the onset of World War II, coupled with the continuing prevalence of racial discrimination in all major American industries, led him to mount a new attack on government-condoned segregation both in the military services themselves and in private firms churning out defense hardware. On January 15, 1941, Randolph announced that a mass march of at least 10,000 black citizens would take place that summer in Washington, D.C., to protest the Roosevelt administration's continued reluctance to implement nondiscriminatory practices and establish a fair employment practices committee to monitor private government

contractors. As grass-roots sentiment in support of the March on Washington movement grew steadily in black communities across the nation, to the point that Randolph increased his estimate to 100,000 marchers, President Roosevelt summoned him to a June 18 White House meeting, only two weeks in advance of the July 1 pilgrimage. Consenting to Randolph's demand that a presidential directive banning racial discrimination and establishing a fair employment practices committee be issued if the mass march was to be called off, Roosevelt on June 25 signed Executive Order 8802, commanding those two steps, and Randolph canceled the protest.

Randolph remained prominent for the following quarter-century. He rejected a request to run as the Socialist Party's 1944 vice-presidential nominee, and led repeated late 1940s efforts to convince President Truman to enforce and expand the federal anti-discrimination mandate set forth in Roosevelt's initial order. He continued his long-standing battle against racial discrimination within organized labor itself, and a heated confrontation with AFL-CIO President George Meany at the group's 1959 convention led Randolph to take the helm of a new black trade union organization, the Negro American Labor Council (NALC), established specifically to press for racial justice within the labor movement. AFL-CIO executives censured Randolph for his continued public criticisms of labor's racial shortcomings, but by 1962 relations were repaired, and two years later Randolph left the NALC presidency, decrying the same influences that had torpedoed the National Negro Congress twenty-five years earlier.

Over 70 years old by the time the civil rights movement of the 1960s emerged at the forefront of American politics, Randolph functioned as an elder statesman while symbolizing to a younger generation of activists how mass protest and grass-roots organizing, rather than the courtroom litigation preferred by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, ought to be the movement's predominant forms of action. Assisted by his lieutenant, Bayard Rustin (q.v.), Randolph took the lead in organizing the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, which drew 200,000 people and became the emotional peak of the civil rights era. With AFL-CIO financial support, Rustin and Randolph in 1964 established the A. Philip Randolph Institute and two years later called for a \$180 billion federal "Freedom Budget" to provide full employment plus guaranteed annual incomes for those unable to work.

Childless and left a widower by his wife's death in 1963, Randolph in 1969 formally rejoined the Socialist Party. He later affiliated with the Social Democrats USA. One of the major figures in twentieth-century black protest, he died on May 16, 1979, at the age of 90.

SOURCES: Jervis Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (1973); William H. Harris, *Keeping the Faith: A. Philip Randolph, Milton P. Webster, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, 1925-37* (1977); Theodore Kornweibel, *No Crystal Stair: Black Life and the Messenger, 1917-1928* (1975).

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