

Forgotten Radicals



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This detailed investigation of Communists and their Party in the hard coal fields of northeastern Pennsylvania, known as the Anthracite, draws on sources such as the central archives of the Communist Party of the United States to examine the origins, growth, and decline of the relatively small but active Marxist-Leninist organization that operated there during the first half of the 20th century. Anthracite. Just mentioning the name of the hard coal region of Pennsylvania conjures up classic images of labor violence and class conflict: Molly Maguires, Lattimer and the 1902 national coal strike. Yet this legendary tradition of labor and class discord has prompted no historian to chronicle the complete story of the region's largest and most active radical group in the 20th century: American Communists. They are forgotten radicals. Chronicling the story of these forgotten radicals allows us to examine American Communism in an important area of the highly industrialized state of Pennsylvania where a major capitalist enterprise, the hard coal industry, employed a large contingent of immigrant workers for about half of the 20th century. To be sure, studying these radicals permits us to explore the overall historical pattern of American Communism-the founding of the Party in 1919, the challenges of the 1920s, the heyday of the thirties, the turns of World War II, and the decline during the McCarthy period-in a regional context. Thus, Forgotten Radicals fills a niche in local studies of rank and file Communist activity.

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