



The History of the North Carolina Communist Party

Gregory S. Taylor

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This book presents a reevaluation of the objectives and actions of Tar Heel 'Reds' from the 1920s to the 1960s. Based on oral histories, archival sources, and previously unpublished documents of the Communist International, "The History of the North Carolina Communist Party" is the first comprehensive narrative account of the Tar Heel State's Communist Party during its half century of existence. Gregory S. Taylor's chronicle of the Party's sustained efforts in North Carolina draws extensively from Comintern files that, after decades of secrecy, have only recently been made available for historical examination. Although others have studied isolated moments of Communist activity within the state, Taylor ties those moments together, linking them with previously unexamined Communist efforts and demonstrating remarkable continuity of activity in North Carolina. As Taylor notes, the North Carolina Communist Party was a vibrant, socially conscious activist group as well as a political party, and the first organization of its kind in a Southern state. In the 1920s North Carolina saw prolonged and violent struggles between the owners and hired protectors of industrial enterprises and the laborers who worked the mills and factories. From 1929 to 1956 the Party took a leading role to implement change: it unionized tobacco and textile industries, pushed for legislation to benefit the unemployed, demanded civil rights for the disenfranchised, called for peaceful foreign policy, sought judicial and prison reforms, and opposed segregation and what the Party considered 'creeping fascism'. In recounting Party activities from this era, Taylor shows that the main objective was to organize and aid the economically, politically, and culturally downtrodden through social reform rather than through Communist revolution. He reveals Party members to be conscientious North Carolinians, and by extension he challenges long-held assumptions about the Communist presence throughout the United States. Although decimated in the 1960s by internal dissension, FBI infiltration, and cold-war politics, the North Carolina Communist Party left a reform-minded legacy that continues to influence the state. Taylor's study shows that North Carolina Communists were not dangerous threats to national security as they were often depicted. They were not beholden to the Soviet Union, nor did they try to overthrow the democratic process. In hindsight it becomes clear that their goals were not inherently anti-American, considering that much of what they advocated - such as civil rights, unionization, and unemployment insurance - has since become part of the national consensus.

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