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History of the Philippine Communist Movement - “Comrade Carlos Bulosan”: U.S. State Surveillance And the Cold War Suppression of Filipino Radicals

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Carlos Bulosan, in a 1949 letter to Philippine labor leader Amado Hernandez, warned his friend and political ally that they must be guarded in their future correspondence. Referencing FBI surveillance of left-wing labor activists in the United States, Bulosan tells Hernandez, “I’m being watched too.” [1] To cover their tracks they employed aliases in their communiqués, Carlos adopted the nom de guerre, “Julie” and addressed his letters to Hernandez using his middle name “Victor.” “Julie” was but one of manyonyms that Bulosan used in his political communications during the Cold War to circumvent the watchful eye of the FBI. [2] The letters to Hernandez along with similar dispatches to Luis Taruc, leader of the Hukbalahap (Huk) peasant movement were eventually discovered by Philippine police after the arrest of Jesus Lava, a key figure in the Philippine Communist Party (PKP). This information alarmed American intelligence operatives who worked closely with the Philippine government to suppress left-wing political opposition in the newly independent nation. Consequently, federal authorities redoubled efforts to disrupt transnational ties linking Filipino partisans in the United States and the Philippines.

American authorities believed that a worldwide communist conspiracy was at the root of political unrest in the former U.S. colony and that Filipino labor activists in the United States communicated with insurgents in the Philippines through an elaborate spy ring that linked left-wing cadres across the globe. According to the FBI, secret dispatches from radicals like Bulosan were first transmitted from San Francisco to Honolulu. From there the missives were relayed to Ho Chi Minh in Saigon, who then passed them on to Madame Curie in Paris who inserted the stealthily coded messages inside used books that were eventually sent to professors at the University of Philippines who served as the intellectual ringleaders of the local communist movement. [3] While it is hard to know if this sophisticated communication network was really existed, or whether it was a paranoid Cold War fantasy, it is clear that American officials were deeply concerned about the threat of popular insurgency in the Philippines and the role played by U.S. based Filipinos in fomenting revolutionary struggle across the globe. The postwar momentum of communist parties in Asia gave the Philippine issue added urgency and the former U.S. colony became a crucial testing ground for the State Department’s newly implemented containment doctrine.

The far-reaching campaign to root out Filipino radicals during the Cold War bears many of the hallmarks of the present-day U.S. political regime, allowing us to historicize contemporary debates about state surveillance and social control. One recurring feature is the evocation of the term “national security” as a pretext for the casting of indiscriminate dragnets that amass personal information about citizens and legal residents with almost no independent oversight. Consequently, government officials have been granted wide latitude to assail critics whose political beliefs are capriciously labeled as a threat to U.S. institutions. Authorities charged with managing the nation’s

surveillance apparatus, then as today, are animated by the same manichean calculus; embracing the notion that it is often necessary to abrogate civil liberties to protect American society from an array of enemies both foreign and domestic. Parallels between the Cold War tactics used to pursue Filipino radicals and the methods sanctioned more recently under the auspices of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) highlight habitual patterns of abuse by federal agents who routinely target political dissenters who pose no significant threat to the nation, thus fostering an omnipresent climate of fear and suspicion that has profound consequences in a democratic society.

The campaign against Filipino American political activists during this period sheds light on two interrelated issues: The first is the trajectory of Filipino American political consciousness during the era of anti-colonial mobilizations sweeping across the globe. Secondly, it provides insights into the burgeoning surveillance apparatus U.S. authorities deployed to contain the spread of domestic and international radicalism during the early decades of the Cold War. While Carlos Bulosan attracted significant attention from the FBI, other figures from the Filipino left, some well known and some relatively obscure, were also targeted. Federal agents conducted surveillance on renowned labor activists Chris Mensalvas and Ernesto Mangaoang, leaders of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), a progressive organization with a large Filipino membership. We also learn of lesser-known individuals like, Raymundo Cabanilla, a former labor organizer with the Food, Tobacco, and Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (FTA) another left-wing union that had made strong inroads with minority agricultural workers in California during the 1940s. [4]

Carlos Bulosan made no secret of his admiration for both the Huks and for militant trade unions in the Philippines. He had long been active in left-wing circles in the United States and saw his career as a cultural worker as inextricably intertwined with his commitment to radical politics. Whether penning articles for left-wing newspapers or writing a semi-autobiographical novel about the socio-economic hardships faced by Filipino immigrants in the United States, Bulosan gave voice to the disenfranchised. He believed that his cultural labor could contribute directly to the struggle for a more just world, declaring to a colleague that, "every word is a weapon for freedom." [5] It is not clear exactly when Bulosan came onto the federal government's radar, but he appears to have first attracted the attention of authorities in the mid-1930s and remained a target of the FBI until his death in 1956. That he remained a steadfast partisan over three decades despite the climate of fear and suspicion that pervaded the American left during this era is quite remarkable. Additionally, the political work carried out by Bulosan and other Filipino radicals during this period is important as it set the stage for a later phase of labor activism that eventually gave birth to the United Farm Workers (UFWA) movement in the 1960s and 1970s. [6]

Raymundo Cabanilla's case fits into the classic template of a McCarthy-era probe. He was working as a low-level file clerk at the U.S. Department of Treasury and the Federal Security Agency when he came to the attention of authorities in the 1950s. The FBI launched an investigation into his background when an informant identified him as a communist based on his previous work as labor organizer with the FTA. The union had earned a reputation for being a "communist friendly" organization and had been expelled from the CIO in 1949 for failing to rid its ranks of radical leaders. By the late 1940s federal agencies were barred from hiring members of "subversive" organizations, including former communists who had not registered their previous party affiliation with the U.S. Attorney General. Like many other individuals caught up in the anti-communist witch hunts of this period he faced severe public sanctions for his alleged transgressions. When interviewed by the FBI, Cabanilla denied that he had ever been a member of the Communist Party and suggested that during his time as a field organizer he had often been at odds with the more radical elements of the union.

The evidence against Cabanilla was not particularly strong, but the mere accusation of communist sympathies tainted one with a dark political stain that was difficult to remove. Agents confronted

Cabanilla with evidence that he had hired Carlos Bulosan to do publicity work for the FTA during one of its strike campaigns and investigators noted that a search of his possessions turned up an autographed copy of *America is in The Heart*. These “facts” suggested that the two shared more than a casual friendship and were taken as evidence of his association with well-known radicals. Cabanilla, like many other individuals facing a blacklist and potential loss of employment, offered the FBI the names of other people who he claimed were tried and true subversives. Cabanilla identified fellow labor activists Mamerto Ventura, Nick Manzano, Ernesto Mangaong, Ireneo Cabadit, and Pablo Valdez as communists. These men had all been active in left-wing trade unions on the West Coast during the 1930s and 1940s and regularly collaborated with communist field organizers on a variety of hard fought strike campaigns involving Filipino workers. The FBI decided not to pursue charges against Cabanilla, likely due to his cooperation and to leave open the possibility that they might call on him to provide more information to authorities regarding other cases at a later date. [7]

The fact that these partisans attracted the attention of federal authorities during the Cold War is hardly surprising. Filipino workers had developed a well-earned reputation for labor militancy in the United States dating back to the early 1930s. That a considerable number of Filipinos (both from the U.S. and the Philippines) had volunteered for the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War during the late 1930s only added to the perception that they were immersed in international left-wing politics. [8] While this political quality won them admiration from American progressives, it provoked forceful condemnation from public officials and agribusiness interests who viewed minority labor activism as a serious threat to the social order. Consequently, Filipino workers were frequent targets of police surveillance and legal harassment in the 1920s and 1930s in communities where their organizing efforts gathered momentum. The federal investigations of Carlos Bulosan and other militants in the 1950s are best viewed as a continuation of a longer-term campaign to discipline and subordinate Filipino labor in the United States.

Tracing U.S. efforts to disrupt Filipino political militancy provides an opportunity to examine how efforts to intimidate and harass suspected subversives evolved between the first and second “Red Scares.” Agribusiness leaders initially hailed the arrival of Filipino immigrants citing their putative pliability and deference to authority. This self-serving narrative portraying the new migrants as a contented, docile workforce, however, quickly gave way to a new public discourse highlighting their defiant attitude toward traditional authority and their shrewdness in executing strike actions. As a result the relationship between Filipino workers and employers grew increasingly strained. Early examples of this contentious dynamic were seen in the Hawaiian Islands during the interwar period. Filipino plantation workers in Hawaii had steadily developed a reputation for militancy in the 1920s waging a series of formidable strikes that alarmed the territory’s powerful sugar oligarchy. The Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association (HSPA) responded by coordinating an elaborate network of spies to infiltrate unions and provide information about labor organizers. The HSPA and their local law enforcement allies employed many of the same red baiting tactics that would later be taken to extremes by the FBI and the anti-communist coalition.

A dramatic uptick in Filipino labor organizing in the 1920s rattled the sugar industry, prompting a hard line response from the HSPA. Plantation bosses repeatedly rejected demands for better wages and working conditions insisting that Filipinos were merely the cat’s paws of “red” agitators who sought to radically shift the balance of power in Hawaii into the hands of radicalized immigrant workers. The HSPA orchestrated a high-profile smear campaign against charismatic Filipino union leader, Pablo Manlapit, painting him as a fervent communist. Planters used information collected by spies to “blacklist” union supporters, often barring them from working or living on plantation property. Labor organizers faced relentless persecution from territorial authorities who enacted a series of anti-union measures, such as criminal syndicalism statutes and anti-picketing ordinances

making it difficult to carry out organizing campaigns. In addition, the HSPA hired private mercenaries to assail strikers when the legal system proved inadequate. A prolonged multi-island strike in 1924 prompted a violent response from authorities culminating in the infamous Hanapepe massacre on the island of Kauai, where police sharpshooters killed 16 Filipino strikers when they refused orders to disperse. Law enforcement officials blamed the massacre on foreign radicals who had brought the violence upon themselves by using “Bolshevik” methods to stir up dissension among the previously contented Filipino workforce. HSPA officials and their law enforcement allies in the islands grew increasingly worried about the popularity of Pablo Manlapit among rank and file workers, especially after their efforts to co-opt him failed. One classified intelligence report described him as “probably the most able...most intelligent and most dangerous radical Filipino in the world.” The author of the report added, “in my opinion he and his activities will constitute a menace both in the Hawaiian Islands and in the Philippines, and he will probably...become one of the foremost oriental leaders of the communist international.” [9]

The red-baiting tactics wielded against Filipino labor organizers in Hawaii prefigured a rhetorical ploy that would be repeated on the West Coast and Alaska in the ensuing years. The strategy was simple: discredit the legitimacy of labor leaders and/or civil rights activists by accusing them of being communists or alien subversives. Agribusiness spokesmen in California initially welcomed the arrival of Filipino immigrants declaring that the newcomers were well suited for low paying “stoop labor” in the fields because of their small physical stature and centuries of colonial conditioning under Spain and the U.S. Exploitative working conditions and miserly wages, however, spurred a new round of oppositional politics.

Mainstream unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor showed little interest in organizing field workers, especially Filipino and Mexican immigrants.

Communist-affiliated unions on the West Coast, however, readily embraced agricultural workers viewing them as an untapped sector of the U.S. working class. The Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAIWU), and the Agricultural Workers Industrial League (AWIL) all aggressively recruited Filipino laborers viewing them as unusually receptive to left-wing politics. These radical organizations helped to carry out some important strikes in the early 1930s that provided important organizing experience for immigrant farmworkers. In addition to these early alliances with communist affiliates, Filipinos also founded some important independent ethnic unions like the Filipino Labor Union (FLU) and the Filipino Agricultural Laborers Association (FALA) during this period that quickly garnered a reputation for their tactical effectiveness. The burgeoning strike activity involving thousands of Filipino in the mid-1930s occasioned a furious backlash from growers who worked closely with local law enforcement to conduct surveillance of union meetings and intimidate members. Accusations of communist leadership among farmworkers on the West Coast were used to justify a heavy-handed crackdown on labor activism. Extra-legal violence against Filipino workers was commonplace as local police and well-organized gangs of vigilantes worked in tandem to crush strikers and discredit popular labor leaders. [10]

Filipino labor organizing continued apace through the 1930s, but slowed down during the early 1940s as unions deferred strike activity in concert with the domestic war mobilization. Anti-communist rhetoric in the public sphere was also tempered during the war, as the Soviet Union was an important ally in the global fight against fascism. This conciliatory tone, however, dissipated after the war as U.S. authorities commenced a new effort to isolate and suppress alleged radicals. American statesmen framed the postwar geo-political environment as a high-stakes battle between the democratic principles embraced by the “free world” and the “totalitarian” worldview espoused by the communist international. Filipino labor activists were among those singled out by the FBI for their labor militancy and intelligence officials were quick to link Filipino American radicals to Huk

rebels in the newly independent Philippines who were viewed as a threat to the U.S.-backed client regime. [11]

Filipino American labor activists confronted a changing political environment in the postwar period. In the 1920s and 1930s militant labor groups typically faced harassment from local law enforcement and business concerns that orchestrated direct action campaigns to run radicals out of their communities. The federal government took a more prominent role in the surveillance and pursuit of alleged subversives in the 1940s and 1950s. U.S. lawmakers enacted a series of directives during this period as part of a new governmental offensive against alleged communists, a campaign justified in the name of “national security.” The expansion in size and scope of anti-radical politics created new challenges for Filipino labor activists in the U.S. whose precarious political status as non-citizens left them vulnerable to legal persecution and deportation. The founding of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in the late 1930s provided a high profile platform for the anticommunist network to advance its agenda at the national level. HUAC members like Rep. Martin Dies helped to secure the passage of the Alien Registration Act (aka the Smith Act) in 1940, which contained important provisions designed to suppress left-wing labor activism. The law mandated the registration and fingerprinting of all aliens residing in the United States and criminalized membership in any organization that advocated the violent overthrow of the government. Any communist or socialist group operating in the United States automatically fell under the purview of the law, since it was assumed that domestic radicals conspired to conceal their violent program from authorities. Individuals convicted of violating the Smith Act were subject to deportation and/or loss of citizenship. [12]

Proponents of the law made it clear that it was intended to stifle radical labor activists like Harry Bridges, the charismatic leader of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU). Federal officials had tried and failed to deport Bridges, an immigrant from Australia, and sponsors of the Alien Registration Act hoped that the new law would provide prosecutors with the necessary tools to finally expel him from the United States. Wielding the threat of deportation proceedings against accused radicals was key to building public support for the federal anti-communist crusade, insofar as it effectively linked domestic radicalism with the immigration issue and thus reinforced the popular conceit that labor militancy in the U.S. was being fomented by “outside agitators” who enticed American workers with their foreign, un-American ideology.

Filipino farm and cannery workers came under new scrutiny from the government due to their involvement in the United Cannery, Agricultural Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), a militant trade union targeted by federal authorities for its loose association with the communist movement. Filipino activists claimed immunity from the law, arguing that their status as American nationals exempted them from the alien registration statute. The federal courts had long acknowledged that the status of Filipinos living in the U.S. differed from that of aliens, since the Philippines was under the administrative jurisdiction of the United States. Whether or not Filipinos’ unique legal classification as U.S. nationals exempted them from the Alien Registration Act, however, remained an unsettled question. A legal challenge to the law filed by journalist and activist Braulio Gancy was rejected by a federal judge who ruled that Filipinos were “aliens” with respect to the Smith Act. As a result Filipino members of UCAPAWA (and its successor union the FTA) faced potential deportation for their membership in unions that were accused of communist sympathies. The pursuit of Filipino radicals was temporarily halted once the United States and the Philippines were drawn into World War Two. The U.S. government’s aggressive recruitment of Filipino agricultural and cannery workers to participate in the domestic war mobilization and the Japanese military occupation of the Philippines during the war put the deportation issue on the back burner until the late 1940s.

The crackdown on domestic radicalism resumed with President Truman’s issue of Executive Order

9835 in 1947, which established a loyalty-security program barring Communist Party members and other individuals accused of “sympathetic association” with designated “subversive organizations” from federal employment. The aim of the directive was to ferret out “disloyal” individuals whose work for the government might pose a threat to the nation’s domestic security apparatus. What exactly constituted a subversive organization was left intentionally vague giving conservatives a free hand to interpret the law in broad ideological terms. As a result almost any left-leaning organization could be classified as a security threat and therefore subject to state interdiction.

Filipino activists had strong ties to a number of labor and civil rights groups that were labeled subversive by the Attorney General including the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, Committee for a Democratic Far East Policy, the Civil Rights Congress, the California Labor School, and a host of progressive trade unions. Filipinos and other immigrant cadres also faced extra scrutiny as the State Department and Immigration and Naturalization Service started using “reasonable suspicion” of membership in a designated subversive organization as grounds for deportation. [13] The FBI steadily expanded its influence over the domestic security apparatus in the 1940s under the stewardship of J. Edgar Hoover who developed strong ties to conservatives in Congress who shared his fixation about communist infiltration in the United States. The Bureau secured a leading role in the nation’s domestic security apparatus specializing in the gathering of political intelligence that was used to indict suspected communists. The FBI took a particular interest in Filipino labor activists like Carlos Bulosan, Chris Mensalves, and Ernesto Mangoang collecting information that could be used to deny employment with the government (in Bulosan’s and Cabanilla’s cases) or as the basis for deportation proceedings (in Mensalves and Mangaong’s cases).

The communist victory in China in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War spurred the passage of another important piece of anti-subversive legislation, the Internal Security Act of 1950 (also known as the McCarran Act). The bill was championed by Senator Pat McCarran of Nevada, a rabid anti-communist who chaired the Senate Judiciary Committee. The statute required all members of the Communist Party and its front groups to register with the government and submit to monitoring by the newly created Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB). The sweeping new domestic security measure expanded the prosecutory discretion available to federal authorities allowing them to go after individuals accused of having “sympathetic association” with the Communist Party or other designated subversive groups. This law effectively empowered authorities to punish individuals for holding unpopular political opinions, providing a major boost for anti-communist officials who had previously been required to provide evidence that accused radicals had committed or planned to commit a violent action against the government. Importantly, the McCarran Act allowed authorities to use past associations with the Communist Party or a communist front organization as grounds for indictment and investigators frequently dug up lapsed and often tenuous associations with left-wing groups to prosecute activists. The Act also contained a so-called “preventative detention” clause authorizing the Justice Department to round up suspected radicals en masse and place them in internment camps upon a presidential declaration of an “internal security emergency.” [14]

The McCarran Act contained a number of provisions specifically targeting immigrants whose political views fell outside the mainstream. The law barred from the United States the entry of aliens who subscribed to the doctrines of “world communism” and those who were likely to engage in political activity that might be construed as “subversive to national security.” Past or present affiliation with an alleged front organization could be used as grounds for deportation and immigrants accused of having communist sympathies could be held in custody indefinitely by the INS without bail. The notion that someone could face criminal sanction or deportation for holding unpopular political opinions alarmed many civil libertarians who worried about the unchecked power it granted to federal authorities to limit freedom of speech and association. Moreover, the open-ended statutory language of the McCarran measure raised the prospect that individuals could face

criminal sanction or deportation for advocating the same position on issues like civil rights or U.S. foreign policy as that favored by the communist party. [15]

The broad powers granted to federal authorities during this period would have significant consequences for the Filipino community. As discussed earlier Filipino workers had been active in communist-led unions on the West Coast in the 1930s and many more were affiliated with independent left-leaning organizations accused of having communist sympathies in the 1940s and 1950s. The FBI's pursuit of Filipino partisans during the Cold War offers insights into the mindset of federal authorities preoccupied with suppressing domestic radicalism and case files reveal an elaborate web of informants and infiltrators that provided testimony about the alleged subversive activities of investigatory targets. At the same time one cannot help but be somewhat incredulous about the quality of evidence gathered by the FBI and skeptical about the motivations of many of the informants. Government agents scoured a wide range of sources in their efforts to track down evidence of Filipino malfeasance: former Communist Party members, INS records, landlords, job applications, neighbors, past and present employers, grocers, creditors, local police, and barbers. The FBI files make it clear that the primary aim of authorities was to dredge up information that might be used to blacklist or deport left-leaning Filipino labor leaders. In addition, federal investigators prioritized the gathering of intelligence about the ties between Filipino partisans in the United States and left-wing activists in the Philippines.

Carlos Bulosan received significant attention from federal authorities, likely due to his reputation as a national literary figure and a stalwart in the militant Seattle branch of ILWU. His case sheds light on the ideological imperatives of the FBI whose primary interest in Bulosan revolved around his ties to the Communist Party in the United States and his support of the Huk peasant movement in the Philippines. [16] The investigation of Bulosan fits into the classic FBI template featuring a combination of general background information, personal gossip, and political innuendo. Much of the material compiled by investigators is suspect since it came from sources who provided information to curry favor with authorities, evade prosecution, or smear political rivals. At the same time, some of the material is revealing since it adds complementary details to what we already know about his political and personal life.

Bulosan arrived in Seattle in 1930 in search of economic opportunities. After a brief stint working in the apple orchards in Central Washington's Yakima Valley he quickly realized that he was not well suited for the rigors of farm labor. [17] Bulosan suffered from a number of serious health ailments, including having a metal plate inserted into his leg to replace a broken kneecap that made it difficult for him to engage in physically demanding jobs traditionally available to Filipinos on the West Coast. He relocated to California in the early 1930s in search of work, but spent much of his time broke and hungry, carving out a bare existence at the height of the Great Depression. Like many of his fellow countrymen he lived an itinerant life moving in and out of rundown flophouses that catered to Filipinos. Bulosan's nomadic existence is well documented in his FBI file, which lists dozens of addresses where he had resided since the 1930s suggesting that he rarely stayed in one place for more than a few months. Life on the margins took its toll as Bulosan was stricken with tuberculosis in 1936. His condition required having a lung removed at the Los Angeles County Hospital where he stayed in convalescence for around two years. He became a voracious reader during his recovery and during this period that he took up writing as a vocation, committing himself fully to a career as a cultural worker. [18]

Bulosan's political voice began to emerge in the mid-1930s as an active member of the Los Angeles popular front scene and the West Coast's proletarian literary movement. The development of his radical consciousness grew directly out of his lived experience and a growing awareness that the socio-economic marginality of Filipinos resulted from U.S. colonial domination of the Philippines and the logic of the capitalist world system. Bulosan, along with a small group of other Filipinos

including Chris Mensalves, co-founded *The New Tide* a proletarian magazine distributed to Filipino workers. The aim of *The New Tide* was to “interpret the struggles and aspirations of the workers,” and to advance “the fight of sincere intellectuals against fascism and racial oppression.” [19] He honed his writing skills as part of a collaborative network of writers and activists linked to the League of American Writers (LAW) and the Writer’s School in Hollywood. The U.S. Attorney General had designated both of these groups as communist front organizations under Executive Order 9835, which brought him to the attention of the authorities. His writing talents quickly earned him entrée into a circle of left-wing public intellectuals like Carey McWilliams, John Steinbeck, Louis Adamic, John Fante, and Sanora and Dorothy Babb. There is little doubt that the Communist Party and white progressives generally took a special interest in minority writers like Bulosan who were viewed as representing the authentic voice of racially subordinated labor in the United States. Bulosan was selected as a keynote speaker at LAW’s annual Writer’s Congress event held in Los Angeles in 1943. By the early 1940s time he was fully immersed in the region’s left wing political culture and published regularly in radical magazines and newspapers like the *Daily People’s World* and *New Masses*. He also became active in a variety of communist front organizations including the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, the California Labor School, Committee for a Democratic Far East Policy, The Civil Rights Congress, and the National Negro Labor Council. [20]

The FBI’s investigation of Bulosan focused on two interrelated questions: 1) Had he been a member of the Communist Party? 2) Was there evidence to support the government’s contention that his political beliefs, especially his criticism of U.S. foreign policy in Asia, made him a national security threat? Proving membership in the CP was no easy task, since the red scares of the 1920s had driven many radicals to be guarded about party membership. The proliferation of front groups during the 1930s complicated matters even more since they were designed to function as ancillary organizations that brought liberals into the communist orbit without any expectation of party membership. Moreover, in the political culture of the 1940s many popular front associations achieved a new level of mainstream legitimacy occasioned by the wartime alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union. The political climate, however, shifted dramatically after the war and the new federal crackdown on radicals in the 1950s made past political associations, even those born of wartime expediency, a centerpiece of their campaign. Communist insurgencies in China and Korea amplified anxieties about a potential domino effect that might spread to other parts of Asia. The prospect that the Philippines, a former American colony, might follow a similar path spurred U.S. policymakers to launch an aggressive counterinsurgency policy in the islands to keep it from “going red.” [21]

Following the usual FBI playbook, government agents eagerly compiled information about the personal lives of suspected radicals that might be used to tarnish their reputations. In the case of Carlos Bulosan, investigators speculated that he had initially been drawn to the popular front scene due to his sexual interest in white women who were affiliated with the communist party. Agents in Los Angeles investigated a rumor that Carlos had an amorous relationship with one of his early writing teachers, a mysterious woman known as “Miss Cunningham,” who may have served as a communist party recruiter. Government agents suggested that Bulosan had engaged in numerous sexual relationships with white women during the popular front era, which they thought might be used to undermine his credibility in the movement. Nativists and social conservatives had long exploited anxieties about interracial sex/marriage to discredit Filipino activists claiming that their demands for political equality were a smokescreen for their real agenda: unimpeded sexual access to white women.

The FBI took a keen interest in his romantic relationship with Marjorie Chubb, a working class white woman from Los Angeles with a lengthy history of interracial associations. By the time she met Bulosan she had already been married three times and two of her previous husbands were Filipino.

Chubb had even lived in the Philippines briefly with one of her previous partners but that relationship fell apart and she moved back to Southern California where she met Carlos in the early 1940s. The couple was married for an unknown number of years, but their relationship was strained by frequent bouts of financial destitution and political harassment. When interviewed by the FBI in the mid-1950s Bulosan was cagey about his relationship with Ms. Chubb and stated that they were no longer married. Federal agents conducted repeated interviews with Ms. Chubb's mother in Los Angeles who expressed sharp disapproval of her daughter's romantic entanglements and conveyed particular disdain for Bulosan who she described as an alcoholic. [22]

Bulosan's drinking was a key focus of the FBI's investigation insofar as his alleged alcoholism might be used by the government to impugn his character. According to numerous sources including his medical records Bulosan acknowledged that he consumed a pint-and-a-half of whiskey per day and had difficulty writing without the accompaniment of liquor. When Bulosan was admitted to the Firland Sanitarium in Seattle in 1950 to address lingering problems with tuberculosis his doctor declared that his condition had been aggravated by chronic alcoholism. His deteriorating physical state was evidenced by the fact that the 5'2 Bulosan's weight had dropped to 87 pounds when he was relocated to Seattle. Despite their best efforts the FBI was not able to dig up damaging information about Bulosan's personal life. Heavy drinking was hardly an unusual habit for a literary figure and investigation into his romantic life did not turn up anything particularly scandalous. His political views, however, did generate serious scrutiny from authorities.

Bulosan's popular front activities from the 1930s were a major focus of government agents. Discovering evidence that an investigative target was actually a member of the Communist Party was the ultimate goal of federal authorities, since party membership was grounds for deportation. Cases built on popular front activity alone, however, were harder to prosecute, since accused subversives could plausibly claim that they were independent leftists (so-called fellow travelers) whose views were protected by the U.S. Constitution. That prosecutors could cite past party membership was often important in cases against immigrant activists, since prosecutors could charge them with lying about their subversive activities, by not revealing their affiliations on government documents like their Alien Registration Act paperwork or their applications for naturalization.

Partisans like Bulosan were keenly aware that they were under constant government surveillance and recognized that their ideological commitments carried significant potential consequences. The FBI implemented a series of "mail holds" with the U.S. postal service to monitor his correspondence. They also probed his telephone communications, interviewing former boardinghouse landlords to find out who he received calls from. Consequently, he used a variety of aliases in his political communications to evade the watchful eye of authorities. He employed a variety of alternate spellings of his own name, such as "Carl Boulson" or used his brother Aurelio's name when writing to political confidants. [23] He was particularly careful about surveillance regarding his international correspondence, especially with colleagues in the Philippines who were waging a campaign to topple the U.S.-backed client regime that took power after World War Two.

Like many McCarthy-era operations, the FBI's investigation into Bulosan's political activities was largely circumstantial and much of the "evidence" they compiled was superficial. The Bureau's case relied heavily on guilt by association, highlighting his ties to radical figures in the U.S. and the Philippines. Agents took a keen interest in Bulosan's relationship with Hugh Bryson, president of the National Union of Marine Cooks and Stewards (NUMCS), a left-wing labor organization with a large minority (African American and Filipino) membership as well as his work with ILWU leaders like Harry Bridges, Chris Mensalves, and Ernesto Mangoang. [24]

Finding unequivocal proof that Bulosan had been a "card-carrying" member of the Communist Party

proved difficult. While he had certainly been active in various popular front groups, it difficult to ascertain what role he played in these organizations. The most damning evidence that government agents were able to dig up was information that Bulosan had been appointed as Commission Secretary of the Committee for Protection of Filipino Rights. The Committee was founded by Communist Party officials in the early 1940s after they took note of the conspicuous militancy of Filipino workers in the United States and sought to recruit them into their political orbit. Details about the organization, though, were hard to come by and the only trace of its existence was a Los Angeles post office box rented in Bulosan's name in 1941. Most of the other material compiled by law enforcement relied on gossip and innuendo. For example, agents singled out a speech given by Bulosan at an event commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Russian revolution in 1942. His address, which took place during the early period of World War Two, highlighted the importance of linking the fight against fascism abroad with the struggle for civil rights domestically. Bulosan implored progressives to establish a "second front" in the United States to combat the scourge of racial segregation that relegated minorities to second-class status in American society. [25]

The FBI interviewed a number of individuals from the Filipino community seeking confirmation of his ties to the Communist Party. These informants appeared to corroborate suspicions about Bulosan telling agents that he "had a general reputation for being a communist" due to his work with labor organizations like the FTA, ILWU, and the Legionarios del Trabajo. Witnesses also claimed that Bulosan regularly bragged about his associations with left-wing leaders in the U.S. and in the Philippines and had referred to himself as the "number 1 man" among Filipino radicals on the West Coast. Investigators took special note of the claim made by one informer that during a meeting with a colleague about labor issues, Bulosan had drawn a "Big C" on a restaurant tablecloth with a pencil. FBI agents interpreted this alleged tabletop scrawl as evidence of his furtive allegiance to the international communist conspiracy. Testimony that he frequently expressed "bitterness" about the economic and racial disenfranchisement of Filipino immigrants in the United States was cited as further proof that Bulosan held communist sympathies, though most of these informants acknowledged that they had no proof of party membership. Interviews with former CPUSA members questioned by the FBI also failed to corroborate Bulosan's connection to the party. None of the former party operatives recalled having ever met him and he did not show up in any membership rolls. The lack of concrete evidence did not deter investigators. They pieced together anecdotal information to buttress their case against him. For example, agents highlighted witness statements that *America is in the Heart* had been discussed at Communist Party reading groups on the West Coast and noted that the attendees referred to the author as, "Comrade Carlos Bulosan." Agents also noted that translated editions of his writings were published in the Soviet Union and other foreign countries suggesting that his work appealed to partisans in the international community.

The FBI also launched a sustained direct surveillance operation targeting Bulosan beginning in the early 1950s. Agents were assigned to watch the Firland Sanitarium in Seattle for months during Bulosan's treatment for tuberculosis in 1952, eavesdropping on his visitors and monitoring his mail. Chris and Mensalves and Ernesto Mangaoang of the ILWU were among his regular guests along with a handful of individuals associated with Seattle's progressive community. Agents also kept tabs on him after he was released from Firland noting that he frequently attended social gatherings sponsored by left-wing groups in the Pacific Northwest. Informants supplied the FBI with detailed lists of attendees at these events ranging from monthly "chop suey parties" held in the International District to fundraisers for Filipino labor activists facing deportation during the mid-1950s. [26]

Bulosan's ties with radicals in the Philippines were another area of investigative focus. By the late 1940s he was in regular communication with Huk leader, Luis Taruc and with Amado V. Hernandez, president of the left-wing Congress of Labor Organizations. The Quirino government viewed both men as threats to national security and worked closely with American officials to suppress the

opposition. Bulosan met Hernandez in the 1940s when he visited the United States as part of a visiting labor delegation and the two formed a bond based on their shared political affinities as well as their passion for literature. When Hernandez and other CLO leaders were arrested on trumped up treason charges in the Philippines, Bulosan launched a publicity campaign in the United States to draw attention to the crackdown on labor organizing in the islands. According to U.S. officials “Hernandez and Bulosan collaborated in the preparation of communist propaganda” that was widely disseminated in the Philippines. [27] The FBI, in concert with the CIA, Naval Intelligence, and the Philippine Government worked tirelessly to determine the degree of his involvement with radicals in the Philippines. U.S. authorities investigated a tip that Bulosan had worked as a Soviet agent in the 1940s traveling to the islands to strategize with the Communist Party of the Philippines (PKP), though ultimately determined that he did not fit the physical description of the man identified as the Filipino emissary. [28]

Bulosan’s relationship with Luis Taruc was of particular interest to U.S. officials. The FBI intercepted letters between the two men in which Bulosan praised the Huk political program and told Taruc that he planned to write a book about the peasant movement to popularize their struggle among progressive American audiences. He pledged to use his connections in Hollywood to sell a screenplay adaptation about the Huks that would be made into a movie. Despite the HUAC crackdown on progressive writers during the 1950s Bulosan told Taruc that he was “not afraid of the fascist bastards at home” and promised to start a Huk support committee in the U.S. once the McCarthyist “witch-hunting” died down. [29] American officials viewed transnational ties between Filipino activists with apprehension and worked closely with the Philippine government to shore up the former colony as a bulwark against the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. The Philippine government supplied intelligence to American spy agencies and worked closely with the CIA and the U.S. State Department to orchestrate counterinsurgency operations aimed at crushing the guerilla movement. Philippine government officials stationed in the United States also kept files on Filipino American activists and the San Francisco branch of the Philippine Consulate fired two employees; Jose Delos Reyes and Juan Dionisi, who were accused of having communist sympathies due to their associations with Bulosan. [30]

The leadership role played by Filipinos in the ILWU was a major focus of the FBI’s investigation. The union had long been in the crosshairs of the federal government due to its militant reputation and for its uncompromising critique of U.S. foreign policy. Bulosan and his colleagues publicly condemned U.S. intervention in the Korean War arguing that America’s imperialist foreign policy benefitted business and military elites at the expense of working people. The ILWU was one of 11 unions expelled from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1949 and 1950 as part of a campaign to rid the federation of allegedly communist dominated unions. [31] The Seattle branch of the ILWU, known as Local 37, was dominated by Filipinos, most of whom worked in Alaskan salmon canneries. Informants familiar with the organization told FBI investigators the union was “completely saturated by communists.” Three of its most visible leaders, Chris Mensalves, Ernesto Mangaoang, and Ponce Torres were all accused of having ties to the Communist Party. Mensalves hired his old friend Bulosan to do publicity work for the union having long admired his writing abilities. Bulosan edited the ILWU’s 1952 *Yearbook*, offering an emblematic rendering of Filipino transnational politics during the Cold War. Despite constant threat of arrest and deportation Filipino labor leaders used the publication to challenge the “malignant designs” of their adversaries in the business community who viewed their progressive political program as a threat to the status quo.

Union leaders condemned the federal government’s campaign to destroy the organization through relentless legal harassment and trumped up accusations that the ILWU members were conspiring to overthrow the U.S. government. Bulosan argued that the crusade against the union was fueled by the “vicious lies of the capitalist press...the war-mongering of big business, [and] the race-hating

hysteria of reactionary organizations and groups.” The real aim of the U.S. government and business concerns was to “destroy the progressive union movement” by arresting organizers on bogus subversion charges. [32] The internationalist character of the union worried authorities and more than 30 members of Local 37 including Mensalves, Mangoang, Ponce Torres, George Dumlao, and Joe Prudencio were arrested and threatened with deportation for violating federal law by failing to register with the Attorney General as members of the Communist Party as required by the Internal Security Act of 1950 and the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952. [33]

The arrestees were given excessively high bails of between \$4,000-\$8,000 as government prosecutors sought to bankrupt the union through relentless legal harassment. While informants provided testimony that Torres, Mensalves, and Mangoang had attended Communist Party meetings in Seattle and Portland these rumors could not be documented. Local 37 leaders ultimately beat the deportation charges on technical grounds connected to their unique immigration status as U.S. nationals in 1953, but their problems were far from over. The government’s relentless legal harassment had provided an opening for a conservative faction of the union to seize leadership as rank and file members grew wary of the endless controversy surrounding the Mensalves-led leadership group. The union also faced financial hardships due to their exorbitant legal bills further eroding support for the union’s militant posture. [34]

Curiously Carlos Bulosan was not one of the few ILWU leaders facing deportation despite his role as publicity director for the union and his past affiliations with popular front organizations. Despite years of surveillance and harassment the case against him remained circumstantial. In 1954 the FBI decided to approach Bulosan directly about doing an interview on the pretext of wanting to learn more about his literary works. Seattle-based FBI officials expressed confidence that he would voluntarily meet with them, noting that Bulosan, like other Filipinos “were susceptible to praise” and could not resist the temptation to talk about themselves. Agents hoped that they could trip up their target during interrogation and get him to unwittingly provide statements that might bolster the Agency’s case against him.

The interview took place in August of 1954 in a car outside Bulosan’s residence at the Morrison Hotel on 3rd Ave. and Yesler Way. During the interrogation he repeatedly denied that he was a communist and frustrated agents with elusive answers about his political beliefs. Bulosan explained that his Catholic faith deterred him from joining the communist party, though there was little evidence that he was a particularly religious person. He also feigned ignorance of political affairs claiming that he had tried to read Marx’s Capital twice but failed to understand its theoretical contribution. When pressed about his relationship with Huk leader Luis Taruc, Bulosan explained that he had supported the group during their original incarnation as an anti-Japanese guerilla group during World War Two, but knew little of their political agenda after the war. Though these statements were clearly false, he did not reveal any new information that would bolster the case against him. FBI interrogators tried to pin Bulosan down by asking him, “how he could claim innocence” regarding allegations of communist sympathies when his own writings seldom deviated from the “CP line?” He responded by shrugging his shoulders and claimed that he had little interest in contemporary politics. Though agents believed that Bulosan was lying about his ideological commitments, they did not aggressively pursue the matter and suggested following up with him under more formal circumstances at an FBI office in the future [35] That follow-up interview never occurred. His failing health and the end of his involvement with the ILWU likely made him a lower priority for the agency. When Bulosan suddenly died after collapsing on the steps of the King County Courthouse on September 11th, 1956, the FBI closed its file on him noting that while he had engaged in occasional “front activity” they had never turned up evidence of formal membership in the communist party.

Much of the recent scholarly attention on Asian American activism has focused on the 1960s and

1970s. This essay seeks to expand the time frame of Asian American radicalism by documenting the U.S. government's persecution of Filipino radicals during the Cold War. No effort is made here to answer the question of whether or not the individuals targeted by the FBI were actually communist party members. Their political allegiances defy easy categorization. To be sure figures like Carlos Bulosan, Chris Mensalves, Ernesto Mangoang and others were radicals who employed the vernacular of class struggle and anti-imperialism and had early organizing experiences with communist affiliated agricultural unions on the West Coast. They certainly mixed freely with communist party members and made common cause with them on issues like workers rights and civil rights. It seems clear, however, that Filipino radicals charted their own course developing an independent political program born of their unique encounters with U.S. colonial policy, domestic race relations, and class subordination. Their militancy grew directly out of their lived experience and they drew on decades of political organizing to build ILWU Local 37 into a formidable union. The costs of their activism, however, came at a significant price as they faced years of political persecution that eventually isolated and ousted the radical leadership of the union. The federal government's targeting of Filipino activists during the Cold War resonates with contemporary debates about the consequences of the state's surveillance apparatus that was repeatedly deployed to target critics and vulnerable populations whose constitutionally protected rights were trampled in the name of national security.

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Footnotes

[1] The author would like to thank Trevor Griffey, Shelley Lee, Madeline Hsu, and Mark Selden for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

[2] FBI FOIA File: 105-882-37. At the time of their correspondence Hernandez was the head of Philippine Congress of Labor Organizations.

[3] FBI FOIA File: 105-WF-2457; *ibid.* 100-HQ-370827.

[4] For more on the radical politics of FTA see, Karl Korstad, "Black and White Together: Organizing in the South with the Food, Tobacco, Agriculture and Allied Workers Union, 1946-1952," in Steve Rosswurm, ed., *The CIO's Left-Led Unions*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, (1992), 69-94.

[5] FBI FOIA File: 100-HQ-370827. See also, Marilyn Alquizola and Lane Hirabayashi's "Carlos Bulosan's Final Defiant Acts: Achievements During the McCarthy Era," *Amerasia Journal*, 38(3), 29-50.

[6] The UFW was formed in the mid-1960s with the merger of the Filipino-led Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and the Mexican-led National Farm Workers Association. C. Scharlin and L. Villanueva, *Philip Vera Cruz: A Personal History of Filipino Immigrants and the Farmworkers Movement*, University of Washington Press, (2000); M. Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement*, University of California Press, 2012.

[7] FOIA File: 105-SF-1530; 105-HQ-16743.

[8] N. Tsou and L. Tsou, "Asian Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: A Report" *Science and Society*, v.68 (3), 342-350; See also, *Fallen Sparrows: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War*, American Philosophical Society (1994).

[9] Cited in B. Kerkvliet, *Unbending Cane: Pablo Manlapit, A Filipino Labor Leader in Hawaii*, University of Hawaii Press, 2002, 70-71. See also, R. Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America 1898-1946*, NYU Press (2011), 55-59; E. Beechert, *Working in Hawaii: A Labor History*, University of Hawaii Press, (1985), 203-224.

[10] H. Dewitt, *Violence in the Fields: California Farm Labor Unionization During the Great Depression*, Century Twenty-One Publishing, (1980); S. Jamieson, *Labor Unionism in American Agriculture*, Washington DC, Government Printing Office (1945).

[11] For more on the proliferation of anti-Filipino violence on the U.S. mainland see, R. Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion* 135-155; and H. Dewitt, *Violence in the Fields, California Filipino Farm Labor Unionization During the Great Depression*, R & E Publishers, (1980).

[12] The 1940 Nationality Act passed a few months later prohibited suspected communists from becoming American citizens. For more on the Nationality Act's implications for Filipinos see, R. Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion, Empire and Migration in Filipino America*, 199-204.

[13] Harry Truman, Executive Order 9835, *Federal Register* vol. 12, no. 1935 (1947); E. Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism*, 54-55.

[14] E. Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism*, 43-46, 61; L. Ceplair, *Anti-Communism in Twentieth-Century America*, Praeger, (2011), 96-115.

[15] D. Moloney *National Insecurities: Immigrants and US Deportation Policy Since 1882*, (UNC Press (2012), 176-190.

[16] E. San Juan, *On Becoming Filipino: Selected Writings of Carlos Bulosan*, Temple University Press, (1995) and *Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of Class Struggle*, University of Philippines Press, (1972) see also A. Espiritu, *Five Faces of Exile: The Nation and Filipino Intellectuals*, (Stanford University Press, (2005) and M. Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (1998).

[17] There was a sizeable Filipino farmworker community in Central Washington made up primarily of Illocano immigrants. FBI FOIA file 100-SE-20689; For more on Bulosan's brief stint

as a agricultural laborer in Yakima see Chris Mensalves's interview in, Carlos Bulosan Papers, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Accession number 0581-013.

[18] Bulosan also suffered from a serious kidney infection that resulted in periodic hemorrhaging. FBI FOIA File: 105-WF-2457.

[19] M. Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (1998), 222-223.

[20] FBI FOIA File: 105-WF-2457.

[21] B. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*, University of California Press, (1977); A. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire, The United States, The Philippines and the Rise of the Surveillance State*, University of Wisconsin Press, (2009); M. Hunt and S. Levine, *The Arc of Empire: America's Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam*, University of North Carolina Press, (2012).

[22] According to Marjorie's mother (Mary Irene Chubb), Bulosan was her daughter's third Filipino husband, the previous two were, Ben Español and David Patón. There is conflicting evidence about whether the two were formally married, but Marjorie was registered to vote in Los Angeles County under the name, Marjorie Paton Bulosan and listed Bulosan her surname on numerous documents including job applications. Moreover, numerous friends of the couple described them as husband and wife. FBI FOIA file: 105-WF-2457; *ibid.* 100-LA-32735.

[23] According the FBI he also used the pseudonyms, Juniper Bulosan and David Paton (the name of one his wife's ex-husbands).

[24] NUMCS was one of the unions purged from the CIO as part of its effort to eradicate radicals from its ranks during the McCarthy era. FOIA 100-LA-32725-33.

[25] The speech was given at an event sponsored by the American-Soviet Friendship Committee. Front groups such as these were tolerated during the war since U.S. and U.S.S.R. were key allies, so Bulosan's address to this particular audience was not remarkable given the political backdrop of the time. The Soviet Union was often viewed favorably in mainstream opinion organs during this period. Recall, for example, that Joseph Stalin was twice selected as Time Magazine's person of the year. FOIA File, 105-WF-2457.

[26] FOIA File: 105-WF-2457; 100-HQ-370827.

[27] FOIA File: 100-SE-20689. Bulosan solicited an essay from Hernandez that was published in the ILWU Yearbook in 1952 that highlighted the repressive policies employed by the Philippine government to stifle dissent and cripple labor rights in the islands.

[28] FOIA File: 100-SE-20689; *ibid.* 100-LA-32725. For more on the political persecution of Hernandez see, Laurel, Jose P. *People of the Philippines, Plaintiff, Versus Amado V. Hernandez, Accuse*, G.R. No. L-6025: Renewal of Petition for Bail. Manila: Social & Commercial Press, 1955 and Hernandez, Amado V, and Jose P. Laurel. *People of the Philippines, Plaintiff-Appellee, Versus Amado V. Hernandez, Defendant-Appellant*, G.R. No. L-6025: Brief for the Defendant-Appellant Amado V. Hernandez. Manila: Vera Print. Press, 1956.

[29] FOIA File: 105-WF-2457.

[30] FOIA File: 105-SF-1530; B. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*, University of California Press, (1977); O. Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, Cambridge University Press, (2007).

[31] N. Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*, Princeton University Press, 2003, 115-116, 156-159; H. Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets: The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront*, University of California Press, 1988, 12-13.

[32] International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union, *Local 37 Yearbook- 1952*, 1-2; See also C. Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: Philadelphia*: Temple University Press, (1994), 127-133.

[33] FBI FOIA file: 105-882-37; M Ellison, "The Local 7/Local 37 Story: Filipino American Cannery Unionism in Seattle 1940-1959," *Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project*, 5-8; A. De Vera "Without Parallel: The Local 7 Deportation Cases, 1949-1955" *Amerasia Journal*, 20-2 (1994), 10-13.

[34] A. De Vera "Without Parallel: The Local 7 Deportation Cases, 1949-1955" *Amerasia Journal*, 20-2 (1994), 12-20; M Ellison, "The Local 7/Local 37 Story: Filipino American Cannery Unionism in Seattle 1940-1959," 6-10.

[35] FBI FOIA File: 100-SE-20689; M Ellison, "The Local 7/Local 37 Story: Filipino American Cannery Unionism in Seattle 1940-1959."