

CHAPTER 4

What's the Matter with Me?

AS SOON AS NEWS OF THE CHRISTIAN FRONT ARRESTS IN NEW YORK broke, Francis Moran presented himself at the FBI field office in Boston's Post Office Square. Introducing himself as the "head of the Christian Front in Boston," Moran "wanted to know whether the Bureau was investigating him." He was particularly concerned that the FBI might have infiltrated his speaking engagement the previous day at the Kiwanis Club in Sanford, Maine, where he "struck out at Communist activity in government, and charged that 1500 Communists held key positions in federal service." In the course of the speech, Moran attacked the president and Supreme Court justices and suggested that Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins was a Russian spy.¹

FBI Special Agent in Charge Virgil Peterson "declined to make any comment" to Moran. Sitting face-to-face, "Peterson treated Moran cordially and courteously but at the same time told him nothing." Moran announced that he planned to speak that night in Somerville, Massachusetts, to a group called the United Minutemen. He asked Peterson if FBI agents were going to cover the meeting. The fact was that Peterson heard of neither Moran nor the Christian Front, and no agents were scheduled to attend.²

News reporters seemed more aware of the Christian Front than was the Boston branch of the FBI. After the barrage of headlines out of New York, one Boston reporter simply walked to "the Copley Square Hotel, where the Christian Front headquarters [were] located," inquired at reception, and found

that “Mr. Moran was out of town for several days.” But even if Special Agent Peterson had known where to look, he would not have found much of interest. Shortly after the New York arrests, investigators from the Boston Police Department’s Radical Squad illegally entered Moran’s office, swept it, and stole various pieces of “literature.” They did not find any guns or bombs, though, nor evidence of violent intent or illegal activity of any kind.³ The fearsome ordnance of the New York Christian Front occupied front pages everywhere, alongside the latest pithy quote from John Cassidy. There was not a peep from his Boston counterpart, however. Francis Moran was an enigma.

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The first time Moran attracted public notice, he was being tossed out of a raucous political meeting. On July 20, 1936, the new Coughlin-controlled Union Party held its regional meeting in Worcester, Massachusetts. Father Coughlin himself was routinely visiting the state, to stump for the party he hoped would displace Roosevelt from the White House. Moran, who was the assistant to the Union Party’s state supervisor, Myles Hayes, became combative when attendees at the meeting decided to cut ties with Hayes. The *Boston Herald* reported that “Francis P. Moran was escorted from the hall while members shouted, ‘throw him out!’”⁴

As a religio-political voice, the radio priest articulated the aspirations and the metaphysic that Moran had been grasping for since his youth. Moran was born on March 10, 1909, on East 3rd Street in South Boston to Patrick and Bridget Moran, immigrants from County Mayo, Ireland. Although they met in Ireland, Patrick and Bridget moved to the United States separately during the later stages of the Irish diaspora, around 1906, and were reacquainted in New Jersey before moving to Boston. Patrick was industrious, taking a sales job for a wholesale grocer and later training and working as a butcher. The family moved three times, on each occasion relocating to more desirable areas. They finally settled in the Dorchester section of Boston in 1920. Francis was the first of his parents’ eleven children.⁵

The Boston that Francis Moran was born into was not the helter-skelter world of nineteenth-century Irish immigration. By the time Moran was a teenager, the Boston Irish had a foothold in politics and finance and could wield patronage at will. But the Irish of Boston continued to face discrimination,

especially from the city's old-money families, who were largely Protestant. As the Boston Brahmin Arthur Crew Inman put it in 1933, "The worst misfortune which ever happened to the United States was the Irish. They have debased our political life. . . . They have taken all and given nothing in return to our national life save a rotten core. They are parasitical drones."⁶ These were common sentiments among the Yankee elite.

Growing up in an Irish enclave, Moran would not have had much exposure to the derision of his social betters, and the world of his youth appears to have been largely peaceful. "Frank was a contemplative sort," a family history noted, "always thinking. More at home with a book than a ball." As a young man, Moran's main choice would be between the sign of the dollar and the sign of the cross—large Irish Catholic families were always in need of the money that business could provide, but those same families often encouraged the "bookish" son to study for the priesthood. Moran's early years were steeped in religion: his mother was "a very pious woman," apt to get her children "down on their knees to say a Rosary." The relatively affluent St. Margaret's Parish in Dorchester was just a ten-minute walk from the Moran household, and "the Church was very much a part of their lives," according to Bridget and Patrick's granddaughter Nancy.⁷

Eventually Francis did in fact pursue the priestly life, but first he attended Boston's High School of Commerce. That choice was in keeping with what we know of Moran's personality. Throughout his life he was lured to money. Before his career as an activist, he worked in insurance, and, with the Christian Front, he labored constantly to turn a buck. All that fundraising ensured he would not have to live on piety alone. Instead of working from a community center or church basement like the rest of the nonprofit world, the nattily dressed Moran set up at the high-end Copley Square Hotel in the heart of downtown. A degree from the school of commerce would have put Moran on the path to wealth that he appears to have craved. In addition, graduates of the school had access to social position. Historically, such aspirations were unthinkable for most working-class Irish Bostonians, but during the era of the Great War, the popular mindset shifted. The Boston Irish rethought their accommodationist view of the Yankee upper-crust, seeking to step out unapologetically as the city's powerbrokers. The inspiration for this cultural shift was, in part, old-country nationalism. After the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland, resentments curdled in Boston, and the Irish became more antagonistic toward the Brahmin elite.⁸ A business education would

have put Moran on the road to leadership in a changing city, not to mention life beyond the clannish Dorchester–South Boston nexus.

But while money was a genuine vocation for Moran, so was the priesthood. He stayed at the commercial school for only a year. Given his family's association with St. Margaret's, the Archdiocese of Boston would have been the natural environment for Moran's Catholic schooling and the straightest path to ordination. But he took a different approach, instead entering the Franciscan order. In fall 1923, at age fourteen, Moran traveled to St. Joseph's Seraphic Seminary in Callicoon, New York, to commence his studies. St. Joseph's would provide Moran with formative personal, cultural, and religious experiences, alongside an educational program unlike any available to his neighborhood pals in Boston. Friars taught all of the classes at St. Joseph's, and they did not sacrifice rigor. Former students described "the Callicoon liberal arts program and the philosophical studies" as "genuinely challenging," the seminarians as "scholastically brilliant."⁹

The St. Joseph's campus sat on a promontory over the Delaware River Valley and commanded eighty-five acres. Mottled stone buildings lent a symmetric and subdued beauty to a complex that otherwise might have seemed out of place on the edge of a small Catskills town. The aesthetic of the seminary was Christocentric; a ten-foot tall sculpture of St. Joseph holding the Child Jesus greeted everyone who walked up the front steps. Elsewhere, the "walls were filled with mosaics, statues, candles, and the like." Life at the school was regimented, as one seminarian, apprehensive about rising every day at 5:20 A.M., noted. "The days were filled with Mass, prayer, Stations of the Cross, spiritual reading, recitation of the Rosary while walking around the lake, and visits to the chapel." This made for "a very uniform and scheduled way of life, with lots of surveillance."¹⁰

There is every reason to believe that Moran had his first encounter with anti-Bolshevism while studying on the hill in Callicoon. The friars, especially younger ones, often preached warnings about creeping Communism and "unions turning red." A former student explained in an interview that "an atmosphere of fairly strong anti-Communist animus" existed among the administration as well. A kind of nonintellectual anti-Communism prevailed: faculty and students did not critique Marxist treatises, but they did focus on Lenin's persecution of Christians and the fear generated by the Red Army's 1920 invasion of Catholic Poland. The cult of Mary, long associated with Catholic anti-Communist impulses, was also strong at the seminary. In addition

the school was the site of a certain amount of patriotic fervor, applying an American cast to a religious education that, at least formally, had nothing to do with earthly politics.¹¹

At the same time, a subdued German nationalism and more overt German cultural orientation mixed with American and Roman Catholic ideals. Callicoon had been home to German speakers since the 1840s, and the friars who built St. Joseph's were German refugees, driven about by Otto von Bismarck's Kulturkampf against the Catholic church in the 1870s. Many of the friars at St. Joseph's retained their German accents. The thickest belonged to the non-ordained Franciscan brothers. The brothers worked the farm, took care of chores, and had only nonacademic contact with the seminarians. Consequently, the seminarians found the brothers an approachable lot—simple, dedicated men, highly devout. Surrounded by Germans, the students celebrated all the German religious feasts, and German hymns were often sung at Mass. Historian Joseph M. White has called St. Joseph's a place where “mostly Irish ethnics, and mostly German natives” were forced to live together, bypassing the national separation that was becoming common in Catholic parish life as communities divided into Irish, Italian, German, Polish, and other churches.¹²

Moreover, “the seminary,” as one student explained, was “ruled by Germanic discipline further stiffened by persecution and exile.” The more oppressive aspects of this history were hard to overcome. “Within the political culture of German Catholicism,” historian Richard S. Levy has argued, “the Kulturkampf represented an early high-water mark of Catholic Anti-Semitism, since many Catholics accused liberal Jews of supporting Kulturkampf legislation.”¹³ But Callicoon does not seem to have been the seedbed of Moran's anti-Semitism. There is no evidence of anti-Semitism making its way into the classrooms at St. Joseph's, nor did the school become pro-Nazi when it had the chance. Franciscans exiled by Nazi persecutions supplied the school a second wave of German refugees in the 1920s and 1930s.

But if St. Joseph's did not educate Moran in anti-Semitism, he did receive there a theological understanding of what American Catholics believed about Jews in the 1920s: that they were responsible for deicide. As Monsignor Fulton Sheen later put it, “The Crucifixion was not [just] murder; it was deicide—the worst that sin can do.” This view colored the American Catholic psychology of anti-Semitism; until 1965, when the deicide accusation was discredited theologically, most American Catholics believed that Jewish agency lay behind the Crucifixion. It is not hard to see how this anti-Judaism bordering

on anti-Semitism fused in some students' minds with the "friendly affection" for German culture and customs inculcated at the school.¹⁴

Moran flourished in his first years at the seminary. Notably he received a perfect score in arithmetic during the 1924 school year—a singular achievement, since the friars were averse to granting any student a record of perfection. The grade was perhaps a tribute to Moran's training at Commercial High School, although clearly he was not just a math whiz. He also earned A-grades in Latin, English, and German, a language he would retain with fluency all his adult life. He even received an A for "conduct," a testament to his strengths in an area at which few teenage boys excel: ascetism.¹⁵

During his time as a public figure, Moran never made any comments about his seminary education other than to say he had "once studied for the priesthood." But while he downplayed his experience at St. Joseph's, those years were important in his development, setting him apart from other Christian Front leaders like Cassidy and Floyd Carridi. Moran learned to think theologically, which would make him more influential as a lay leader because he understood the theological lexicon and even Biblical exegesis. He also was trained to inhabit a public persona. From a young age, Moran was witness to powerful religious oration, delivered by men who impressed on him the importance of sharing theological concepts with the laity. This, after all, was the central objective of St. Joseph's: to train students who would, as priests, shepherd the faithful. Moran thus straddled the lay-clerical divide, and that made him especially dangerous once he developed a violent ideology. Recall Paul Tillich, who feared the influence of priests because "the sharp distinction between Catholic anti-Judaism and modern anti-Semitism seems to be contradicted by the fact of clerical anti-Semitism."¹⁶ Men like Moran were perhaps the most threatening of all. Though Moran lacked the doctrinal authority of a priest, he possessed similar charisma and skills and enough theological knowledge to persuade many unordained Catholics. Meanwhile, he never had to negotiate the distance that can accrue between an educated, cloistered priest and a flock beset by the concerns of daily life. Moran was an ecclesiastic without a collar, "one of the boys" while being as well a man of God. The Christian Front would become his movable parish.

As to why Moran wound up a learned layperson rather than a priest, it is impossible to say with certainty. What we know is that after his third year of seminary, in 1925, his pursuit of ordination came to crashing halt. All of Moran's grades for that year were barely passing, and he dropped from the top of

his class to the very bottom. Perhaps he fell ill, experienced depression, or rebelled against the severity of seminary life. According to Michael Daly's biography of Father Mychal Judge, the St. Joseph's graduate and New York City Fire Department chaplain who died during the response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, it was not unusual for a friar to tell a student, "You're not doing enough for God." The "notion was to be hard, be tough." In addition, the close of the third year was a major turning point in seminary education, followed by vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. This prospect, too, may have disillusioned Moran. He swallowed the stigma of failure and left for home.¹⁷

The years from 1925 to 1930 are largely blank ones in Moran's biography. There are indications that he enrolled at a four-year high school in Boston, but no records prove it. The next time Moran showed up in records of any kind was 1929, when he took a job as a furniture delivery driver for Boston's Jordan Marsh Department Store. An auto accident bounced him from that job in May, but he was soon hired at Sears Roebuck Company only to be let go when the Depression set in during the fall. Yet Moran was able and determined, and he weathered the Depression far better than most. While 20 to 30 percent of Boston's labor force was idle, he was moving up in the world: in March 1930 he secured a job selling insurance for the John Hancock Life Insurance Company, one of the largest and most venerable Boston firms. A slender six-footer with brown hair and blue eyes, Moran cut a fine corporate cloth. He must have been good at the work, too, because in July 1932, at age twenty-three, he was poached by rival company Prudential. He turned them down.¹⁸

But within a few years, Moran would again be deflected from a promising trajectory. In March 1935 John Hancock fired him "because of poor business," but there was almost certainly more to the dismissal. Specifically, a management shakeup at Hancock put Moran under new leadership in 1935, that of one Albert Meltzer. This was probably the same Albert Meltzer who was active on the executive committee of Boston's Jewish War Veterans organization. According to a private detective who in 1939 investigated Moran on behalf of the New England office of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, Moran's relationship with Meltzer quickly deteriorated. Meltzer apparently considered Moran a "crack pot." The investigator reported that "eventually things got so bad that Moran and Meltzer became involved in a fist fight." Moran was fired soon after the altercation. He had lost the best job he ever had—a

job on which he apparently relied to support his father, mother, and ten brothers and sisters.¹⁹

The investigative report does not clarify the source of the friction between Moran and Meltzer. Meltzer of course would have been pressing Moran to increase his sales, an almost impossible task during the Depression. But the widespread Catholic suspicion of Jews was probably not far from the heart of the matter. Meltzer would have provoked particular misgivings. In the wake of World War I, many US Catholics developed a strong antipathy toward Jewish veterans like Meltzer, whom they deemed cowardly. American Catholics believed their community had proved its patriotism, as indicated by the number of their sons dead on the battlefield. By contrast, Jews who served were more likely to come home. This result is easily explained as an artifact of a small sample size: there were relatively few Jews in the United States and therefore few in the armed forces, so the effects of chance would be more pronounced within that group. But instead of luck, Catholics saw weakness and even treachery. The idea took hold across Catholic life, including in seminaries.²⁰ The figure of Meltzer would have both challenged and reinforced many of Moran's cognitive constructions about Jews. Jewish war veterans were supposed to be cowards, but more than likely it was Meltzer who bested Moran in their office slugfest. The Jews were responsible for deicide, yet here was Moran, a Christian, subservient to someone whose people had committed "the worst of all sins."

Moran tried to rebound with a job at Boston Mutual Life Insurance, but he was let go within two months. "The reason for the severance of his employment was not stated," an FBI agent later recorded. In spring 1936 Moran was twenty-seven years old and unemployed. It is hard to escape the conclusion that he blamed Jews for his state of crisis, and that his interpretation of his own life story informed his anti-Semitism in years to come. "The Jew is a demoralizer," Moran shouted to a "spellbound" Roxbury audience in December 1940, "a saphthirsty creature who drains our resources."²¹ While other Christian Front leaders focused on Jewish banks, Jewish media, and Judeo-Bolshevism, Moran paired these slanderous abstractions with more concrete grievances. He knew—or thought he knew—from personal experience that the trouble with Jews was not just the banks they owned but also the bank accounts they emptied. His bank account, and those of his fellow Christians. That line of attack resonated with working-class Bostonians who feared for their livelihoods and families.

Evolution of a Radical

Theologically inspired right-wing thought was a balm for Moran, as it was for Cassidy. Driftless, angst-ridden, and indignant at a world that did not appreciate his intelligence and ability, in 1936 Moran found direction in the appeal of Father Coughlin. This was perhaps a homecoming of sorts, as the radio priest had been well received in the Moran household. Moran's mother, Bridget, "thought the world" of Father Coughlin. It is not far-fetched to believe that mother and son listened to Coughlin's Sunday broadcasts together.²²

Coughlin's speeches reflected on the main question asked by the Franciscans at Callicoon: Are you doing enough for God? For Moran, doing enough for God meant doing something for Coughlin. Moran became a Coughlin political operative as early as 1936. Moran's FBI file indicates that he "had been introduced to Father Coughlin by a Father Duffy, whose name appeared in the columns of *Social Justice* on many occasions." This was probably Bishop John Duffy of Syracuse, New York, whom Coughlin considered "an old, tried, and true friend." In the late 1930s, Duffy joined Coughlin in rejecting a possible partnership with the Soviet Union against the rising Nazi regime, arguing that Americans should refuse to sign up "rather than serve as an ally of a Communistic government and atheistic cabal." Moran, as leader of the Christian Front in Boston, would echo this plea.²³

According to the FBI, Moran met personally with Father Coughlin during the priest's 1936 visit to Massachusetts. Coughlin eyed the state as one in which his Union Party could have significant political impact and in July "barnstormed across Massachusetts," visiting the "strongly Irish neighborhoods such as Charlestown and South Boston." Indeed, Coughlin enjoyed much support as well as powerful connections in the state. Bostonian Joseph P. Kennedy, patriarch of the Kennedy political dynasty, was chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission in 1935 when he arranged a meeting between Father Coughlin and President Roosevelt. Massachusetts governor and ardent Democrat James Michael Curley, who was running for the Senate in 1936, did not hesitate to engage Coughlin in a photo opportunity, even as Roosevelt warned that Coughlin's third party could throw votes to the Republicans. For Curley, obtaining the favor of the Detroit priest was electioneering 101. Boston was "the most Coughlinite city in America," Curley thought. "Politicians tripped over one another to be seen with him."²⁴

Evidently Moran impressed Coughlin during their face-to-face encounter. This would have been Coughlin's first meeting with one of his eventual henchmen. In 1936 the idea of a Christian Front was a glimmer in Arnold Lunn's eye, and while Coughlin had his own dreams of Catholic militancy, he had no grassroots leaders on his side. It would be nearly three years before either Cassidy or Carridi decided to put in with Coughlin. Indeed, at this point, Coughlin was not entirely sure that men like Cassidy, Carridi, and Moran were the right people to direct his movement. He was focused on big names, reaching out to war heroes like Smedley Butler. An unnamed FBI informant who spoke with Moran reported that, during the Coughlin-Moran meeting, "Father Coughlin mentioned that someone should start an anti-Communist program in Boston" but then paused and ruminated. Presumably Coughlin hoped that a well-known Boston Catholic would carry through with his suggestion. Moran told the informant that he responded to Coughlin's suggestion by staring him in the eye and asking, "What's the matter with me?" Coughlin was delighted, and Moran was soon on board, working with the state supervisor of the Union Party.²⁵

By joining the party, Moran was signing up for anti-Communism explicitly and anti-Semitism implicitly. Coughlin's "union" brought together the populism of Francis Townsend—the architect of Social Security, and an official Union Party member as of summer 1936—and the hard-line anti-Communism of Gerald L. K. Smith, a protégé of the late Senator Huey Long. Before he turned to Coughlin, Smith was fanatically devoted to Long and eulogized the Louisiana senator in terms that drew on the Judeo-Bolshevist myth. This was a revealing mix, given that ideas associated with both Long and Townsend were incorporated into the New Deal, yet Coughlin's goal, as he put it, was "to take a Communist out of the chair once occupied by Washington." Evidently what made Roosevelt a Communist in Coughlin's and Smith's eyes was not his redistributive policies but his welcoming of Jews and his unwillingness to grant Christians official favor.²⁶

The Union Party, for the first time ever in a presidential election, used anti-Communist rhetoric extensively. "The choice," Coughlin crowed, was between the Union Party with its freedom of worship, constitutional government, and "purified" capitalism, "or the black bread of Communism." Coughlin argued that "the Communistic tendencies of the New Deal" could only be overcome by voting for the Union Party. The party did not incorporate anti-Semitism in its platform, but by 1936 Coughlin had made clear his

views: some Jews—“religious Jews,” who maintained connection to the God of Israel and their covenant—were to be commended, but the rest had rejected God and taken up Bolshevism as a violent, expansionist substitute for religion. Moran was publicly cryptic about his own anti-Semitic views, first to protect the Union Party and later because he knew that outright anti-Semitism could soil the Christian Front’s reputation in some quarters. In 1943 Moran would express to an FBI informant his desire to “get rid of every Jew overnight,” as well as his opinion that “returning veterans of World War II will be a large and important factor in eliminating the Jews inasmuch as they will be organized and will not be afraid of handling firearms.” But in 1936 Moran stuck to the language of anti-Communism.²⁷

To say that the Union Party was crushed in the election would be an understatement. All Union Party candidates for the House and Senate were defeated. The party’s presidential candidate, William Lemke, a member of the US House from North Dakota, secured less than a million votes. Still, Lemke pulled 8 percent of the vote in Boston, his fourth-highest metropolitan total. Massachusetts was Lemke’s second-best state after Ohio, netting him 118,639 votes. For Moran, an unemployed insurance salesman and political novice, these results were passable, and he managed to retain Father Coughlin’s approval. Still, no one would have been surprised had Moran fallen off the political radar after the 1936.²⁸

But just as he was about to be eclipsed by history, Moran received a major opportunity. Sybil Holmes, a Republican Massachusetts senator, gave him a public forum in which to parade himself as an authority on the Communist menace. Holmes was the first woman ever to serve in the state senate. A *Boston Daily Globe* profile published two days after her election in 1936 described her “gracious smile and sparkling dark blue eyes,” and she magnified her apolitical image by telling the paper, “I didn’t plan to be a senator.” But Holmes would prove to be a firm ideologue in office. Though she was as junior a senator as could be, in her first term, she chaired the attention-grabbing Special Commission to Investigate Activities within this Commonwealth of Communist, Fascist, Nazi, and Other Subversive Organizations. That was an ungainly name for a kind of un-American affairs committee within the Massachusetts legislature, and Holmes was an uncompromising spokesperson for the mission. “Members of the Communist Party have been instructed to . . . infiltrate the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, religious and civic groups, and labor unions,” she warned in 1938. “We must be on our guard.”²⁹

In Massachusetts and the Boston area specifically—Holmes represented Brookline, a neighboring town in the heart of the metro area—anti-Communism was good political sense. Holmes's platform won her the support of Boston's Democratic mayor Maurice Tobin, who was as paranoid as she. In Old North Church on Patriots' Day in 1938, Tobin described anti-Communism as "Paul Revere's latest ride" and insisted, "Our peril today is not from sword and gunfire, but from the onward rush of Communism." Politicians in eastern Massachusetts had to win votes in the same communities that, only ten years earlier, had been at aghast at the likes of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, convicted in court for murder and in the public for their left-wing politics. Lurking in the background was the Boston Police Department's Red Squad, a cadre of elite officers trained in the surveillance of political activists—specifically, those of the "revolutionary" stripe. Herbert A. Philbrick, who would become one of the foremost FBI moles in the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), began his career as a youth minister at Grace Baptist Church in Somerville, a few miles from Boston. The 1950s television series *I Led 3 Lives*, which glorified anti-Communist espionage, was based on his life. Holmes added more fuel to this already-raging fire.³⁰

As a special commission, Holmes's panel was to operate for a fixed period, receive testimony, and publish a report on its findings. Its first day of official business was September 30, 1937. Opening remarks were delivered by a most unexpected speaker, the choice of whom reflected perhaps an inexplicable blunder or maybe an attempt to shock the public: Earl Browder, head of the CPUSA. Browder took the opportunity to disabuse the legislature of the belief that the CPUSA wished to forcefully overthrow the US government. To a "packed audience" in the State House, he outlined a plan "removed from guns or bloodshed" and "pooh-pooed the suggestion of Commission members that Communists would even think of gaining their ends by violence." Communists, Browder explained, believed in "the democratic form of government, the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, Washington, Lincoln, and Jefferson."

Neither the Holmes commission nor many outside it were moved by Browder, who was never technically a witness and whose remarks did not appear in the commission's final report. Although commissioners found his position difficult to rebut, they were happy to share their own views. Senator Thomas Burke responded to Browder by suggesting that "all who wish to overthrow democracy and American institutions should be put in a ship, towed

out into the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, and sunk.” Father Coughlin, paying attention from afar, portrayed Browder’s statement in a manner exactly at odds with the man’s words, declaring in *Social Justice* that “revolution is coming to the United States.” The Browder speech injected further tension into a political environment that was already on edge. “The alarmist accuses everybody who disagrees with him as being in the pay of Moscow,” Boston University president and Methodist minister David Marsh observed. The city needed to cure its “communisticphobia.”³¹

But Holmes was just getting started. Soon she summoned Edward Hunter, the executive secretary of the Industrial Defense Association of Boston, a group that supported manufacturers combating union activity. By 1937 Hunter had gained a reputation as Nazi sympathizer. He also had plenty of experience chatting with legislators on the “subversives” beat. In 1930 he had testified to the Fish Committee, a subcommittee of the US House Special Committee to Investigate Communist Activities in the United States. On that occasion, Hunter claimed to have uncovered “Soviet Sunday Schools,” sponsored by the CPUSA in the Massachusetts cities of Worcester, Quincy, and Brockton. “You do not mean schools teaching a form of religion?” Maine Republican John Edward Nelson asked. “Atheism and class hatred are the principal things,” Hunter replied. Hunter also told the committee that “Bolshevism in New England is largely under Jewish leadership,” as he rattled off the names of twenty-one Jewish men who were leaders of what he deemed Communist-affiliated organizations.³²

Hunter’s visit to the Holmes commission might have mollified the senator’s anti-Communist base, smarting over Browder’s invitation. But while Browder was speaking freely, Hunter was under subpoena. Anti-Communists saw this as deeply unfair. Furthermore, while Browder was questioned only by legislators, Hunter was questioned by John Spivak, an “expert on Nazism.” The hearing proved to be intense and eventually devolved into name-calling. Senator Burke, who seemed genuinely aghast at both Communists and Nazis, accused Hunter of carrying a gun into the hearing, which turned out to be true. Spivak sniped that Hunter was getting direction from Nazis; Hunter shot back that Spivak was in the pay of Communists. The heated exchange was a glimpse into the house of mirrors that wartime Boston would become: in fact both men were guilty as charged. By 1940 Hunter was meeting secretly with Nazi Party officials, and it was revealed in the late 1990s that Spivak was an agent of the KGB and its predecessors.³³

In April 1938, as the hearings were winding down, the committee received testimony from “a student of Communism.” This turned out to be Moran, although nothing in the Holmes archive explains how the senator knew of the former insurance salesman turned political organizer. From his pulpit at the State House, Moran preached with gusto, demanding that the legislature “drive all the rats out of state government.” The substance of his remarks is otherwise unknown, as nothing from his testimony appeared in the commission’s final report. But Moran got his chance to speak as a professional and an intellectual of public importance. The experience went to his head: in December of that year, when he applied to the Boston Police Department for a permit to carry a pistol, he “described himself as a lecturer” and claimed, no doubt proudly, that “his life had often been threatened.”³⁴

While Moran’s testimony was apparently too banal to earn any attention—unlike Hunter’s, which garnered massive notoriety in the press—his appearance before the commission was not lost on Massachusetts politicians, Coughlinites, Communists, and anti-Communists. Indeed, because the hearings were such a disaster for Hunter, Moran found himself in the right place at the right time, the heir-apparent to the very sort of anti-Communist organizing that the commission’s “Red Report” implicitly encouraged. Released to the public in June 1938, the report disregarded Browder’s opening remarks and insisted that Communists amounted to “a conspirative body” that “took orders from a foreign power” with the objective of “replacing American Constitutional Democracy with a dictatorship of the workers.” Only 16 of the report’s 600 pages were dedicated to “Nazi and Fascistic Activity.” Still, for Hunter and the Industrial Defense Association, the damage was done during his testimony. While the organization survived, it was discredited by its Nazi associations, its growth stymied. Hunter was never again a player on the Boston anti-Communist and anti-Semitic scenes. Moran, whose own anti-Semitism was deepening at this time, was ready to fill the vacuum.³⁵

A Christian Front in Boston

One of the few people who recognized that a changing of the guard might be underway in the Boston far right was Arthur Derounian, the undercover journalist who infiltrated the Christian Front in New York. On June 14, 1939, Dernounian sent a report to the FBI on Hunter’s Industrial Defense Association but added that “there is one other Boston group deserving attention.”

This was “the American League for the Defense of Constitutional Rights . . . , headed by Francis P. Moran.” Derounian got the organization’s name wrong—it was the Committee for the Defense of American Constitutional Rights—but he was correct to note that the group was “definitely a Coughlin unit.” Derounian observed that “whenever there is a Coughlin rally, Moran pops up,” but, otherwise, both the organization and its leader were hard to pin down. “So far [the group] has no headquarters—it can only be reached by mail by writing to the Copley Square Hotel. Mr. Moran is equally elusive.” Moran was “not listed in the telephone directory and no one seems to know how to locate him.” To most observers, such a phantom organization would merit little scrutiny. Something told Derounian to be wary of Moran, though. “It is quite possible that he will develop into a more important person than Hunter,” Derounian concluded.³⁶

The Committee for the Defense of American Constitutional Rights (CDACR) was Moran’s bridge to the Christian Front. As CDACR director, he was in a position to fundraise and ask for speaker fees. It was also in this context that he began presenting Communism as a theological issue. In one lecture advertisement, Moran promised to explain why his anti-Communist project was “founded on Christian principles enunciated by Robert Bellarmine,” the Catholic Counterreformation thinker who “systematically applied the idea of the Mystical Body of Christ to the Pilgrim community of the church on earth.”³⁷ In another public lecture, Moran argued, “Whereas in New York Communistic doctrines have received much support from state and civic authorities, in Boston, our political leaders are as a rule religiously and patriotically opposed to such an ideology.” The idea that public officials in New York supported Communism is difficult to credit, but it is true that, more than in other East Coast cities, Catholics in Boston successfully pressed politicians to treat political questions in moral and religious terms. An example was the Red Report itself, which contained an extensive section on Communism and religion. “Communists remain implacable enemies of all organized religion, whether of the Old or New Testament,” the report maintained. “The practice of Marxism-Leninism entails as a basic and absolute fundamental the ultimate destruction of organized religion.” Holmes’s commission baptized anti-Communism, much as Moran did.³⁸

When Moran spoke of New York authorities giving aid and comfort to Communists, he may have had in mind the WMCA affair of late 1938, which was a turning point for Moran as much as it was for Cassidy. No public offi-

cials were involved, and no one who was involved was acting in sympathy with Communist ideals. But these details tended to be lost in the misleading discourse of First Amendment martyrdom surrounding WMCA's eviction of Coughlin from its programming roster. Allen Zoll, the Presbyterian anti-Communist and anti-Semite, roused 2,000 Coughlinites to march on WMCA studios in support of the priest's freedom of speech. Zoll also organized daily picketing and nightly "vigils" for Father Coughlin.³⁹ The Zoll blueprint was so effective that he soon took his picketing playbook to Boston. There, he linked up with Moran.

In January 1939 Zoll gave a CDACR-sponsored lecture to an audience of 800 at Boston's prestigious Mechanics Building. While defending Father Coughlin against the supposed censorship he was suffering, Zoll announced that "Communism was the greatest national danger" facing the United States. "I know of no Fascist or Nazi who is a member of the government, but I can give you the names of hundreds of Communists who are members of the government and even members of the cabinet," Zoll declared. Although Zoll and Coughlin each denied any association with the other, they were strongly aligned politically, and Moran's group was making a name for itself by profiting from Zoll's and Coughlin's intersection.⁴⁰

It is no surprise that, in New York, Cassidy's organizing and recruitment efforts were also taking off at this exact moment. But, in what may be another reflection of cultural differences between Boston and New York, only Cassidy was a press darling. Thus in March, when Moran allied with Sybil Holmes to support creating a Division of Citizenship within the state Department of Education, Moran and the CDACR were not quoted in any news stories. The proposed agency would conduct background checks on teachers and staff, to "meet the threats of both Communism and Nazism in the education department," Holmes said. The press did not quote Moran directly, although one newspaper pointed out that the division was "advocated principally by the special commission" on which Moran had served.⁴¹

Sometime between April and October 1939, the CDACR morphed into the Boston wing of the Christian Front. It is impossible to pinpoint an exact date. Whereas we know precisely when Father Coughlin commissioned Cassidy to lead the New York Christian Front, there is no similar documentation with respect to Moran. Coughlin's blessing for Moran—if there was one—may have been contained in a letter stolen by the Boston Police when they illegally swept Moran's office at the Copley Square Hotel. In January 1940 officers

William J. Goldston and Benjamin Goodman of the Radical Squad broke into the office and, according to an FBI report, “managed to secure a copy of a letter addressed to Mr. Frank Moran, Copley Square Hotel, Boston from the Rev. Chas. E. Coughlin, Royal Oak, Michigan.” It seems that in fact the police took the original, not a copy; the Radical Squad was adamant that “no other copies were in existence.” Whatever the case may be, the letter is nowhere to be found.

We might nonetheless suspect that Moran was officially installed as chief of Boston’s Christian Front because in March 1939, the very month that Cassidy was elevated in New York, the CDACR’s outreach began to wane. Although the CDACR continued to publicize events, Moran stopped writing letters to the editor on the CDACR’s behalf and no longer sought press for the organization. One way or the other, the transition was clear to Phillip Young, the manager of the Copley Square Hotel. He must have had his suspicions: the day after the New York arrests, he ventured to Moran’s office suite on the second floor unbeckoned. “Entering with a pass key,” he found nothing out of place, with one exception. About a year earlier, he had rented the office to Moran, “who represented himself as the head of a ‘Committee for the Defense of American Constitutional Rights.’” Now there was no sign in the office of any organization operating under that name. Instead “near the wall there was a large placard reading: ‘CHRISTIAN FRONT,’” the name of the organization the US government had just accused of revolutionary activity. Moran had changed colors in plain sight. His skills in evasion would keep the Christian Front operating in Boston, both above and below ground, for another five years.⁴²