

MORE COMMENTS ON HOWARD FAST

Herbert Aptheker

HOWARD FAST, eminent American novelist, felt it necessary to leave the Communist Party, and advisable to announce this decision in an exclusive interview with Harry Schwartz of the *New York Times*. At the request of the editors of *Mainstream*, Mr. Fast explained at length, in its pages, the reasons for his decision.

As one who is himself a member of the Communist Party and has come to his own decision—to remain a member—I propose to comment, briefly, since space limitations are severe, upon Howard Fast's article.

Essentially, his decision is posited upon a particular estimate of the world today. This estimate finds the government of the Soviet Union to be the main danger to the perpetuation and purification of socialism in one-third of the world; it finds this government to be a central source, also, of the war danger; it is, furthermore, according to Mr. Fast, the major obstacle to the realization of mankind's progressive and democratic aspirations. The obverse of this finding is also explicitly affirmed. The Government of the United States is chargeable, he finds, with "petty tyranny" and an undefined "assorted madness" in its foreign policy; but what one really has here is "that most splendid thing, American Democracy."

Hitherto, Howard Fast had believed "that the only truth about the Soviet Union was the picture presented by friends of the Soviet Union"; but now he knows this to have been false, and the Khrushchev revelations concerning the crimes and brutalities associated with a period of Stalin's rule, shows him that, believing as he did, he was "a victim of the most incredible swindle in modern times."

We have, in the U.S.S.R., Mr. Fast now believes, something monstrous, a "socialism without morality," and in the period since Khrushchev's report, we have been treated, in Hungary, to "a new kind of socialism—socialism by slaughter and terror." This new kind of socialism has a foreign policy befitting it: "From the crisis in Egypt we learned of the new brink-of-war tactics of Soviet foreign policy." All in all, while Howard Fast announced a retention of his own basically optimistic outlook for humanity, he persisted in this despite the Soviet Government: "Nor do I believe that mankind will be turned aside from socialist democracy and from the vision of the good world we will one day create. No power-clique of men of small soul and less humanity can long resist the tide of history."

When charges gush from an extraordinarily prolific pen with one major charge per sentence, another writer may well be appalled at the task of explaining his rejection of the charges, especially where not a line, but a book

is required for each. Yet, within the limits of this brief note, we will hazard a few remarks.

In Hungary, the slaughter and terror were fundamentally the work of counter-revolutionary forces, internal and external, who took advantage of a popular bona-fide, peaceful effort—culminating a three-year-old process of change—at speeding up the very much delayed purification of socialism; these forces then turned this mass effort into a violent movement to destroy socialism and restore landlordism and capitalism.*

In Egypt, there was not a "crisis"; there was an imperialist war of aggression and intimidation. When Howard Fast writes from a sense of outraged morality, let him beware of demagoguery. Egypt was attacked by the air, sea and land forces of Israel, France, and Great Britain. One month, Premier Ben-Gurion said: "Preventive war would be madness"; and he promised: "We will never start a war. We do not believe that wars provide comprehensive solutions to historic problems." The next month, that Premier's army and bombers attacked Egypt in force. And within 24 hours of that assault, Britain and France bombed the city of Cairo. The whole attack was coordinated by all three powers; it was a contemptible outrage, seeking, in ways reminiscent of the worst features of white-supremacist imperialism, to destroy the national liberation movements of North Africa. Even the London *Manchester Guardian* said it was "wrong in every count—moral, military and political"; it said the attackers were "guilty of an atrocious act of war."

But Mr. Fast, in his moral dudgeon, calls it a "crisis," and can find nothing to criticize in it except his false version

of Soviet reaction thereto. It is easy to be contemptuous of the Socialists in World War I days (and some in the days of World War II, like the Hungarian Socialists) who in the name of "patriotism" forgot their Socialism, and defended the Czar or the Kaiser or the Prime Minister, or the Premier, or the President (or Horthy); the test is what one does when he himself is faced with this choice. Mr. Fast ran to his own private tent, in this case; in doing this he is neither defending the cause of Israel, nor freedom, nor democracy, nor peace, nor decent morality—let alone, Socialism.

The U.S.S.R. did not use "brink-of-war tactics" when Egypt was attacked. In that case, as so often in the past, the Soviet Union took a stand in defense of peace and against imperialist assault. In notes unprecedented for their firmness and directness, it demanded the immediate cessation of the use of force against Egypt. This stand, buttressed for the moment by U.S. support, stopped that colonial war and for the first time in history there followed the relatively quick withdrawal of imperialist aggressors with their aims not accomplished.

Those are the facts; it is these facts that Mr. Fast must square with his newly-discovered picture of a world where the Soviet Union is the source of the war danger, and the fountainhead of repression. Finally, we turn to the revelations of personal tyranny and of criminality in the leadership of the Soviet Union and of other So-

* The present writer has completed a 256-page book attempting to convey his understanding of the recent Hungarian events; it is scheduled for publication very soon.

cialist countries for various periods of time.

We observe that in the list of teachers whom Howard Fast names as most influential in his own life there occur the names of fourteen individuals from Jefferson to Bernard Shaw, Upton Sinclair to Marx, Douglass to Engels, but there is no room for Lenin.

He is, I think, an important teacher, too; indeed, in my view, Lenin is the greatest figure in the whole galaxy of world revolutionary leaders. He is, certainly the greatest analyzer of and fighter against imperialism. I believe it is no accident that in the United States today, Howard Fast does not see American imperialism, but rather "that most splendid thing, American Democracy"; and that at the same moment, dazzled by the splendor, he forgets Lenin.

One can, I suppose, forget Lenin, but it is unwise to forget American imperialism if he wishes to understand the world today. The fact is that if one forgets the imperialism of American Big Business he omits a basic aspect of the reality of the American economic, political and social order; and he omits a fundamental component of the world today.

The ultimate source, but not the only one, of the difficulties, mistakes, aberrations, and crimes marking the transition from capitalism to socialism lies in imperialism. It lies, internally, in the vestiges of capitalist society; it lies, externally, in the hostility of the capitalist world. We do not here have reference simply to imperialist plots.

These conspiracies, and the internationally organized apparatus for counter-revolutionary subversion certainly exist, on a scale hitherto unprecedented in history, and their center is our own

country. But this apparatus of counter-revolution, with its budget reaching into the billions each year, constitutes only one manifestation of the policy and strategy of imperialism—the destruction of socialism. It is in this sense that the *system of imperialism*—which encompasses its apparatus of reactionary terror and subversion—is at the root of many of the mistakes and worse than mistakes that have so far marred the building of socialism.

More important than the billion dollar annual budget of the American Central Intelligence Agency are the fifty billion dollars annually appropriated for arms, by the United States. More important than the saboteurs sent to East Europe, are the twenty-five additional air bases (nine of them capable of handling aircraft carrying atomic bombs) now being built in West Germany at a cost of \$375,000,000 (*N. Y. Times*, Jan. 7, 1957). More important than the Western efforts to assassinate Communist leaders (which in the case of the leader of the Belgian Party succeeded, and in the case of Togliatti barely failed), is Secretary Dulles' calm announcement that "U.S. forces almost everywhere were equipped with atomic weapons" (A. P. dispatch from Canberra, March 13, 1957). More important than the filthy shenanigans of Allen Dulles and his partner, the Nazi chief saboteur, Reinhard Gehlen, is the announcement that General Hans Speidel ("scholarly soldier," the *Times* delightedly called him) formerly in charge of the Nazi occupation of France, is now Commander of Allied Land Forces in Central Europe, and that General Adolf Heusinger, formerly Operations Chief of Hitler's General Staff, is now in charge of the Armed Forces Department of West Germany.

These are facts—and there are a thousand more like them. They show the policy of Western imperialism to be reactionary, aggressive and war-like. They are buttressed by acts, by deeds, from the policy of remilitarizing West Germany and Japan, to propping up Franco, from destroying democratic governments in British Guiana and Guatemala, to warring upon Egypt and Algeria.

In terms of what one is dealing with and what kind of a world is the "free world" which is headed by the American imperialism that Howard Fast now forgets, one may glance at just one of the less publicized of its continuous acts of atrocity. For example, here is an item in the *N. Y. Times* of November 8, 1956, telling of "a strange war" which "the outside world ignores." It is the war of suppression waged by servitors of American imperialism now looting the nation of Colombia. Stuck away in this item is the President's remark to the *Times* newsmen "that more than 100,000 civilians and soldiers have been killed since the civil war erupted in 1949." That is, over one hundred thousand dead in a nation whose total population comes to less than twelve millions. This is one of the "minor" illegalities (or shall we say, pieces of "petty tyranny") in a "forgotten war" in a side alley off Wall Street.

When it comes to "illegality" as a whole, one must bear in mind the *essential* character of law in a capitalist society—i.e., the maintenance of capitalism. There are differences among capitalist countries; in some there are democratic rights, most of them won from the bourgeoisie through mass struggle, and more or less implemented, depending upon time and place and cir-

cumstance, but always and everywhere precious. Yet basically the great American journalist and crusader, Henry Demarest Lloyd, expressed the nature of bourgeois law, half a century ago, when he said, apropos of political prisoners: "The bird of freedom has always been a jail bird"; and of law enforcement in general: "Only the rich can get justice, only the poor cannot escape it."

It is pressures from this kind of system which is the basic source of the difficulties experienced in building socialism. He who ignores or minimizes this—who does not estimate it in its full and overwhelming significance—does not comprehend the world today.

When Howard Fast speaks of "that most splendid thing, American Democracy," he opens up an area of judgment too vast for even the beginnings of comment herein. Here I want to say only this: sometimes "little" things are more revealing of the essence of a matter than bulky tomes. We had such a little thing recently. The United States Government sent Richard Nixon to the inauguration of the Prime Minister of Ghana; despite Nkrumah's personal request, it refused to allow Dr. Du Bois to be present at this ceremony. If that incident is weighed and probed, it will reveal more about "that most splendid thing," American imperialism, than ten thousand words.

It is the system which dominates the Government and compels the choice of Nixon over Du Bois which is the central foe of adherents of socialism, and the source of basic contradictions in today's world. But this is not the sole source of the fearful blunders, errors, and crimes that mark the rise of socialism. These arise too from the fact that this leap into a new quality of social relationship must be made and

can only be made by human beings evolved out of an exploitative social order. And in making this unprecedented social transformation, on a national and international level, there are limitations in personnel and profound psychological problems, hardly stated, much less solved as yet. In addition, there is the whole question of power per se, of its own logic, its own energy to distort, and to deceive, to corrupt. These and other questions—national feeling, religious belief, different levels of technique, for example—are new questions in large part, because socialism has operated nowhere more than forty years.

The effort to resolve these problems, and contradictions springing from them, is the work of Communist Parties, to begin with, assisted by all friends of a purified, fully democratized socialist life. The struggle comes basically from Communists, and is conducted in the first place within Communist parties. This does not prove a "swindle"; it proves that all life is a struggle. It proves that building and perfecting socialism—a new enterprise for mankind and the most difficult it has yet attempted—is not simple and does not proceed smoothly. It proves, too that socialism, within itself, generates the forces leading to its own purification, because unlike capitalism, inequality, injustice and tyranny are alien to the system of socialism.

Howard Fast cited Frederick Douglass as one of his teachers. Let him remember that Douglass faced many moments of despair, but none was so bitter as those which came just before victory. Let him remember that it was Lincoln's Government which ordered its Army to return fugitive slaves to their masters; which refused for two

years to permit Negroes to fight in its Army. It was in the North that Negroes were lynched by the scores during the Civil War. Douglass might well have despaired and quit—others did. What hope was there for a republican form of government? What hope was there for "government by the people," when racism had so corroded it that it preferred suicide to purification?

But Douglass fought on, within that country and within its institutional limits because he knew that the basic source of the poison was in the system of slavery, and he knew that the fundamental enemy of his people and of democratic advance, at that time, was in the Confederacy. He knew the difference between fundamental and peripheral contradiction; he threw his great genius against the main foe, while striving to purify that foe's opponent, the better to win the battle.

Howard Fast cited Thomas Jefferson as one of his teachers. Let Mr. Fast recall that Jefferson had the profound patience needed by all true revolutionaries; he had the maturity needed by all who seek to get at the roots of social change. Jefferson was in France during the great Revolution there. He wrote of its "difficulties and dangers," but he said one need "not expect to be transported from despotism to liberty in a feather bed." He knew that in France "many guilty persons fell without the forms of trial, and with them, some innocent," and surely to none were the forms of trial more precious, nor the rights of the innocent more sacred, than to Thomas Jefferson. But did he, like many others—like Wordsworth, like Coleridge—abandon the struggle and denounce the Revolution? He did not. On the contrary, seven years after the Revolution had started,

he wrote: "It is unfortunate that the efforts of mankind to recover the freedom of which they have been so long deprived will be accompanied by violence, with errors, and even with crimes. But while we weep over the means, we pray for the end."

Howard Fast did not cite Lenin as one of his teachers. Yet he will grant, surely, that Lenin knew something about workers and about revolution. In August, 1918, when the commercial press of the world was denouncing him, his Party, and the Revolution he was leading, Lenin wrote a *Letter to American Workers*. In it he said:

"Let the kept bourgeois press howl about each mistake made by our revolution. We are not afraid of our mistakes. Men have not become saints because the revolution has begun. The toiling classes, oppressed and downtrodden for centuries and forced into the clutches of poverty, savagery and ignorance, cannot be expected to bring about a revolution flawlessly. And the cadaver of bourgeois society . . . cannot be nailed in a casket and buried. . . ."

"For every hundred mistakes of ours . . . there are 10,000 great and heroic deeds, the greater and the more heroic for their simplicity. . . . But even if the contrary were true—although I know this supposition to be incorrect—even if there were 10,000 mistakes for every 100 correct actions of ours, even in that case our revolution would be great and invincible, and *so it will be in the eyes of history*, because for the first time, not the minority, not only the rich, not only the educated, but the real masses the vast majority of toilers are *themselves* building a new life, are deciding by *their own experience* the most difficult problems of Socialist organization."

We have now a better and sobering appreciation of the meaning of those words, "the most difficult problems of socialist organization." But they are soluble and we will master them. Mankind faces them now for the first time; but this is a case for elation, not despair. It is a cause for more intense devotion and fuller participation in the supreme end of human endeavor, the creation of a just, equal, abundant, creative, and peaceful world. In that effort, the Communists hitherto have been in the forefront, in the United States as everywhere else. We Communists will continue to stand in the front ranks of such fighters, for this is what it means to be a Communist. Nothing, neither imperialism's fury nor our own severe limitations, will prevent us from holding to this fundamental commitment.

Despite Howard Fast's disillusionment, the Soviet Union stands today, as she did when she saved the world from Hitlerism (Howard made no mention of this little fact, in recounting his decision) as the leading force in the struggle against imperialism, colonialism, racism, and war. It seems to me that it is the prime duty of an American citizen to help bring about a condition in his own country where it may be possible to say that in forwarding these supreme goals, the United States stands on a par with any other country in the world.

Phillip Bonosky

I read the galleys of Howard Fast's testimony that his god had failed under circumstances, let me confess it immediately, that were extremely unfavorable to it.

The first circumstance was that I was completing a long book in which Communists—*American Communists*—play an important role. To write this book I had to ponder a great deal over what American Communists have meant and do mean to this country of ours. In the three years or more that it took me to write the book, the world didn't stand still. In those years my thesis was subjected to a severe test, and I was forced to confront the question, in the middle of my book (since events like Hungary and the Khrushchev revelations very rudely interjected themselves) from an even more fundamental point of view than I had anticipated when I began. My conclusion had to pass, first of all, an *artistic* test. Do the Communists I have known, and the events I have experienced, lend themselves to artistic truth?

It's not for me to say whether I've been successful or not. All I can say is that I have not needed to overcome any subjective hurdles; I have not needed to lie to myself: my problem as an artist was to probe more deeply; and, frankly, in this sense, I am even grateful to the severe test that events have forced me to make.

What, then, is my conclusion after thinking as profoundly as I can, in the way an artist must, about Communists in America and their future?

My conclusion is that the Communists have written a proud and unique page in American history; and after they have digested and refashioned their own vision, under the blows both of persecution and historic events, they will find their way to the American people, and first of all to the most deeply oppressed, the workers and their allies.

This is and remains an epic theme which no artist can reject or fail to gauge correctly except at his own peril.

What is the second circumstance that made me even more unsympathetic to Howard Fast's account of his nine month's gethsemane which produced yet another document to be added to that fairly long list of arid and unhelpful testimonies of despair, so much like the cry of the child who learns a human truth about a fearfully elevated and glorified mother or father?

The second circumstance was the suicide of my friend, Frank Balwood. By a rather grotesque coincidence I was reading Howard Fast's statement when I was informed of Frank Balwood's suicide by phone. Frank Balwood also left behind him a statement—a very short one; one in which he said he could no longer endure this life and would take "the easy way" out—hanging himself by his belt; and his total effects consisted of an unpaid laundry bill and a key to a subway locker. In his pocket a poem he had written: *Day Dreams*.

And who was Frank Balwood? He was a talented musician and composer who could not make it in this vile and merciless jungle that passes for civilization. He could not even wait until his book of compositions was published and for the banquet at which I was to speak a few words about him to take place. The day he hanged himself he spent most of the afternoon trying to muster up enough courage—or enough of it to kill his pride—to ask for a loan. He spent hours in his own private hell that day, and in the end he did not, *could* not, swallow his last remnant of pride to ask once more, yet again, to beg for that last loan which

would have extinguished the final fragile wisp of his pride. Rather than give that up he preferred "taking the easy way out": hanging himself.

Frank Balwood was one of the millions of Americans who lead lives of "quiet desperation" here in America; sometimes they kill themselves and sometimes they simply dwindle away into human mummies of hopelessness and despair, fearing being young, desperately living through middle age, dreading the sentence of old age.

Nobody is going to save these people, except—I say this quite consciously—the Communists—that is, the working class which the Communists express, and the profound and selfless leadership which they can give, and alone can give, for that vision is theirs to give and is the most precious thing they can offer to suffering humanity. For theirs is the transcendent knowledge that this system of daily human murder, not only of bodies but of souls, which is capitalism, can be and will be replaced by a truly human system: socialism. And they also know that in the process they must go down into the depths, mix with filth, break bread with monsters, breathe in decay: and no guarantee in the world exists that they can wholly extricate themselves from pitch and decay without soiling themselves. Those who fall because they could not resist corruption are also fallen heroes, and must not be wholly scorned and despised. Knowing real life, and knowing that the essence of capitalism is barbarism and the defenders of barbarism are barbarians, no matter how they deck themselves out, the real fighters for socialism therefore know that the struggle will never be easy, pretty nor guaranteed by words, noble sentiments, books,

the qualified allegiance of self-appointed moralists, nor by anything else but their own struggle and sacrifice. They also know that "great men" alone, even if they truly were all that a Joseph Stalin seemed to be, will not guarantee anything for them that they themselves are unwilling to or cannot.

It should have been Howard Fast's private business that he became a Communist and that he chose no longer to be one. But neither the public nor Howard Fast himself considered that to be so. Howard Fast signaled his defection under two conditions, both of them very strange and very disturbing. The first was that he resigned *before* the convention of the Party that he belonged to, and whose rules he subscribed to, and whose policies he had every right to attempt to influence and change. He chose not to try to, and it becomes I think a legitimate thing to ask whether he resigned because he feared the convention would make no changes, or—and this is very important—because he feared it *would*?

The second was that news of his defection appeared first of all in the *New York Times*, which has steadily boycotted his books, and under the name of Harry Schwartz, a long-time anti-Communist, whose talent for making black look white and white black, whenever the facts related to the progressive movement both here and abroad, is notorious, and who, of course, correctly saw Howard Fast's action as another blow in the cold war, no matter what Howard Fast's subjective intentions might have been.

Under such circumstances I think all who have ever been in the workers' fight can do nothing other than to characterize this as desertion under fire. I am not impugning his personal courage

in the sense that I had any doubts that he would deal with the Un-American committee as any decent person would. But in that most important struggle of all—in Blake's "mental fight,"—he left the field at a most crucial moment.

I am not going to try to answer Mr. Fast's attacks on the Soviet Union. Nobody has qualified me to; in any case I hope spokesmen for the Soviet Union take this opportunity of answering Howard Fast; and I am sure *Mainstream* will be glad to publish any statement.

On the Soviet Union, my opinion remains the opinion of the person who first said that that country had reached such an epic stage in its historic development that to comment on it might reveal very little about the country, but would most certainly reveal a great deal about the commentator!

Howard Fast declares that, though he was no dupe, nevertheless he was the "victim of the most incredible swindle of modern times!"

In what way was he, and therefore myself, and a whole generation, "swindled"? Were we being swindled when the Soviet Union demanded of the League of Nations that sanctions be placed against Mussolini when he invaded Ethiopia in 1935? Were we, and the Spanish people, being swindled when the Soviet Union sent aid to Spain in its heroic fight for democracy, while the "democracies," and the "socialists," like the government of Leon Blum in France, stabbed that martyred nation in the back? Were we being swindled, when we were starving during the Depression, and the Soviet Union declared that unemployment was an unnecessary and historically outmoded element of society, and proved it by its own example? Were we being

swindled when the Red Army destroyed Hitlerism single-handed, "helped" only in the end when the "allies" finally crossed the Channel not to destroy Hitler but to keep the Red Army from taking over all of Western Europe? Were the Jewish people being swindled when thousand upon thousands of them were snatched from the Hitlerite ovens, placed on trains commandeered for them, and sent east while Ukrainians and Russians died in their place? And when the Red Army moved into German and Polish territory and released the prisoners of the death-camps, who was being swindled? How many Jews owe their lives to that? How can one forget so quickly, so easily, so petulantly what was only yesterday a heroism of historic proportions? And are the Jewish people being swindled in a country where 260,000 of them are in the state apparatus, the party, industry, science, literature and art, in fact from top to bottom of that country, far out of proportion, on a percentage basis, to their actual population? And in a country where anti-Semitism is a *crime*—and despite the cynicism and polemics around the question of its national role—*remains* a crime, *is* a crime, and which thereby advances the moral and ethical level of this question farther than it ever had been before?

Who is being swindled? The world—progressive humanity—by the historic deeds of the Soviet Union, or those who are being fed grotesqueries of "disillusionment"—a "disillusionment" which is merely an index to their own fantastic immaturity or lack of understanding of the most elementary laws of social growth and conflict?

No, let's have no more talk about having been swindled when the deeds

in which millions of people participated—that were supposed to have swindled us—are writ big in history, for all humanity to see, while the deeds that took place behind closed doors and in secret letters and by the wiles of the enemies of socialism are being repudiated as quickly as they are brought to the light. And let us not match our injured senses with the true grief of those who not only suffered for those crimes but also, in a way we can never share, suffer even more profoundly a tragedy in having dealt so bitter a blow to the cause for which they have made such historic sacrifices! The tears that were shed by the members of the Twentieth Congress who listened to the account of Stalin's crimes are tears we have no right to belittle, or if the truth be spoken, parody with our complaints.

We have not earned that right yet.

So I end as I begin. I ponder over a book about Communists and over the suicide of my friend. And I look out of the window as I write this and before me stretches one of the greatest ghettos in the world—Harlem; patrolled day and night by police on horseback like an occupied country, exploited mercilessly by landlords and store-keepers, and insulted and injured daily by a world which manufactures hypocrisy on a world-scale and spreads over its naked horror the sacred constitution and Bill of Rights like a cynical fig-leaf.

I hope that the socialist countries which published Howard Fast while he was boycotted here, and first of all by the *New York Times*, will continue to do so. For if Howard Fast has a future, it will be among those wonder-workers of the world and not among the death-dealers. Many men have been remem-

bered for the good they did, while the bad they did has generously been forgotten.

Joseph Starobin

Listening to Howard Fast's outcry of "mental anguish and turmoil" in the March issue of *Mainstream*, the normal instinct urges respectful silence. A man has been hurt in broad daylight, his guts spilling blood in the streets, and he screams in pain. "Something broke inside of me, and finished," he cries. "A lifelong structure of belief lies shattered around me." He feels himself "the victim of the most incredible swindle of modern times."

These are terrible words, and no doubt this is how he feels. It is the moment of unspeakable misery which is captured so often by the photographers, the ones who win the prizes: it is the photo of the mother, losing her grip on the child as the boat goes down, the moment when the automobile mounts the curb and crashes into peaceful bystanders. What shall we say? It is the visage of agony, of horror, "the moment of truth," as the followers of the bullfights say.

Truth about what? About whom?

Some will say that Howard Fast is talking about crimes in the Soviet Union, of Jewish writers murdered in their prime, about Hungary. Very well. But about the tragedy of himself, he tells us little, and little has been said. Yet, until we talk about this, we do not know for whom to weep and we do not understand our own share in the guilt.

The real crime took place to a talented young man who became a myth, and was compelled to live up to the obligations of a world myth beyond his own power to do so. What was done to Howard Fast by his own religious prostration before what should have been a rational, scientific cause is just as much the commentary on the Soviet leaders and on the American Communist Party as those great crimes which he now indicts with anguish.

Here was a young writer, one of the many writers and artists of talent who came to be influenced by Communist thought and activity over this quarter of a century. He came with a fine gift for story-telling, and a sense of the great themes of his country's history; with great activity he wove these into books that were remarkable for their narrative skill and emotional quality; these were the promises of an important novelist. Such a man needed the hard work and the self-restraints without which the artist cannot grow; he needed to beware glibness, and he needed the warmth of comradely criticism; he needed humility and the suffering of human experience.

Instead Howard Fast had a reckless romance with the bitch-goddess of success, that traducer against whom William James had warned Americans. In the Communist Party, Howard Fast found adulation; and if I may use the harsh word—exploitation. But he did not find or could never accept the criticism to shape him, the standards to become better as a man and writer. And he reveled in what he should have resisted.

When he tells us now that he has just discovered in the American Communist Party "a destroying rigidity and unbendingness, a narrowing of ap-

proach and purpose that made it impossible for many good people to remain within it" so many of us shake our heads. What a strange man! For even now, in this moment of truth, how little does he recognize it.

For Howard became in the Communist Party the oracle on every issue from Negro rights to socialist realism; he ran for office on tickets that weren't his own, and headed every conceivable committee, took the floor each time without saying too much, refused the pleas of his best editors to revise his first drafts, published the best novel of the year every year. A man of energy, and yes, of courage; he took his turn in prison when persecution stalked the land and cut the tongues of a generation.

But throughout it all he neither grew as a writer nor gained wisdom as a man. He exhibited such a destroying rigidity and unbendingness, such a narrowing of approach and purpose that so many good people—shall I name their names?—found it impossible to contribute of their gifts and skills in a Left which had lost all sense of proportion about Howard Fast. He was a spokesman for us, and when he spoke we were too often ashamed, but said nothing. Many leaders of the American Communist Party knew this was as destructive of him as it was of everyone else. They did nothing to stop it.

For what intervened and aggravated the matter was the world audience, and those who molded it. The Soviet leaders needed a mythological Howard Fast and they invented him even at the cost of damaging the real one. They needed a certain portrait of American life; for a whole era they had kept their own hard-working folk from understanding contemporary America, its good and its

bad, through Faulkner and Hemingway and Richard Wright, Eudora Welty and others. A no-man's land existed because the truth was not being told. It had to be filled. Whether he was *the* American intellectual in fact was a less important question to the Russians than the fact that he was on their side. It can be argued that the fault was not their own; they were borrowing an emerging image created over here. Yet I feel it was blind and reckless of them. It was something less than opportunism on their part if the mentors of Soviet culture knew no better. But Ehrenburg and Fadeyev and Simonov knew better.

Howard Fast thus became the vehicle for a deception of which he was also the first victim. Instead of asking himself whether it was wholesome that a world audience increased while his own people found each successive book less important, he rode the gap. He won the prizes, was photographed with the happy children of beaming—and temporary—consular officials at the UN cocktail parties, and accepted the invitations to write on every conceivable subject for distant magazines whose editors cabled him as though he were a world power. Benjamin Franklin, in his beaver hat at Passy, would have found it all amusing. Howard was not amused. He was in dead earnest.

There are those who will now derive a certain satisfaction that it should be Howard Fast who now denounces the Soviet leaders and their works. The irony is obvious. I have no sympathy for the way the Soviet leaders have behaved: their society should never have been taken as the model for what we wish to build, and it is not that today. But Howard's indictment is as extravagant and oversimplified as his

passion used to be. The deep sickness of contemporary Socialism, of which the Stalin era was a symptom, lies not only in what was terrible and wrong over there; it lies in what was done to Howard Fast.

American radicalism now faces a re-definition of first principles. American Socialists face new beginnings, and the reasons long antedate the Soviet 20th Congress. Despite the nostalgic hopes of *Mainstream's* editors, I doubt very much whether the things that have to be done will be done by the American Communist Party, however much its present or past members may contribute.

In the re-doing of an American radical movement, all sorts of men will be needed, men and women of a certain evangelism. However, we shall not be able to do our thinking with our hearts, but with our heads. There will have to be a sense of proportion, a sense of the tragic in life and a lot of hard work. The bright lights, the hoopla will yield us little.

Writers and artists will be joining to refashion an American Left, for the ivory-tower is no answer. But they will be themselves, and become better writers and artists, and they will leave it to history to judge which of them are world-personalities. It will do little good to edify millions of peasants of other countries in the process of becoming workers unless American workers find something meaningful and durable in such writers and artists.

All of us need each other's help. The tragedy is everyone's. We all let it happen. But how is a man to be helped who is not listening, and who is not listening because he hasn't stopped talking? For example, when Howard concludes his outcry in *Mainstream*

with a ringing testimonial to "that most splendid thing, American Democracy. . . . I feel like shouting: "Hold it, fellers, here we go again."

Yes, a vital thing, this democratic tradition which is the fruit of so much suffering, so different from what other peoples have had to start with, so much the necessary terrain for great battles to come. But let us talk about it with a small "d." We do not need anything in capital letters any more. The capitalizers have caused us all—and themselves—too much damage. This will never lead us out of capitalism.

Bert Cochran

Editor, American Socialist

Howard Fast's break with Stalinism is the only way one should make this kind of a break, be it individual or collective—straight-from-the-shoulder, clear-cut, and public. What has been so disturbing about many of the post-Twentieth Congress reformations was their queasiness. It has been written long ago that nothing important is ever done in this world without passion. All the more is it true about this kind of a proposition. Far better that the stick be bent a bit in the opposite direction in the act of cutting loose from a school of Jesuitism than that the break be announced in a voice so quavering and uncertain as to cast its purpose into doubt, and qualified with so many reservations as to make dubious its permanency.

Also commendable in my opinion is Howard Fast's long anguished wail on discovering himself the victim "of the most incredible swindle in modern

times." After all, there is more to socialism than a belief in the nationalization of the means of production and exchange. You don't make a socialist by simply demonstrating with a lot of charts and graphs that collectivization is superior from an engineering point of view. Beyond an understanding of society and history lies the passion for truth, for justice, for equality, which the modern world has now put within the grasp of mankind. That is why one may look askance at those who adopt resolutions about past "mistakes" with the same ease and unthinking repetition of ritualistic phrase with which they whitewashed any and every outrage in the past. In counter-distinction, Howard Fast's statement has the earmarks of something personal, something deeply felt and sincerely meant. That is why it deserves to be taken seriously.

Many writers and intellectuals have broken from Communism in the past fifteen years, and most of them have travelled long distances on to conformity from the points at which they stood at the moment of their break. The pressures of this society are many and powerful, and the bitter disillusionment which an experience with Stalinism invariably breeds, made them easy victims for succumbing to the wiles and competing for the rewards of official public opinion. What political outlook Howard Fast will finally work out for himself no one can say. It is a matter of satisfaction that his present statement is written from the standpoint of an independent radical who pledges to continue the good fight. If he stays true to this vow, Fast can be of considerable importance in helping to

create the climate for a new democratic socialist movement in this country. He is in a position to render great service.

Louis Harap

Managing Editor, Jewish Life

Deep and even ultimate questions are precipitated by Howard Fast's explanation for leaving the communist movement. Here I can only note a few personal thoughts on the matter.

Howard Fast gives as his first reason that this was the only "meaningful and purposeful" form that he could give to his "extreme protest" at the shocking revelations of past months. One can understand and sympathize with his shattering recoil from these events. Socialists will spend many years of searching thought and analysis to explain how such inhumanity and anti-socialist occurrences could take place in the first socialist country. And communists and friends of socialism will have to work for years to efface the legacy of these tragic events.

But was Howard Fast's the only or even the most effective mode of protest? Could he not be more effective through fraternal discussion and criticism from within the movement?

Howard Fast's indictment of Soviet ethics seems to me swayed by emotion to the point of distortion. There is far more to the question of Soviet ethics than the totally negative, oversimplified picture that he paints. This can be illustrated from his allusions to the Jewish question in the USSR.

It is apparent that the brutal, anti-socialist treatment of Soviet Yiddish culture and the execution of outstanding Jewish writers and leaders, as well as recent Soviet policy bearing on the

Jews, played a large part in bringing Howard Fast to his decision. One can understand his reaction, even if one does not agree with the consequences he draws. For there can be no mitigation of the violations of socialist theory and morality with respect to the Jews, as well as other nationalities, which are by now established facts.

But for Howard Fast these constitute the whole picture, which it is not. There are equally indefeasible facts that must figure in any overall evaluation. There are few more radically democratic acts in history to compare with the Soviet policy toward formerly oppressed nations and nationalities, even if the picture is marred by the crimes of the Stalin regime. The first socialist country did institute equality for the Jews of the Soviet Union. From the classic land of oppression in old Russia, the Soviet Union became a place where Soviet Jews took their place in leading positions at every level and in every corner of Soviet life. The saving of hundreds of thousands of Soviet and Polish Jews from Hitler annihilation by evacuation to the Far East during the war was no small aspect of Soviet policy toward the Jews. One contemporary fact tells volumes: while Jews form about one and a half per cent of the total population, about ten per cent of all Soviet scientists are Jews (24,620 out of 223,893). There are about 260,000 Jews in the Communist Party apparatus, in government, in industry and the professions today.

But it would be no less a distortion of the true situation to limit oneself to such facts than to dwell wholly on the negative side of the picture, as Howard Fast does in his statement. It is true that a wave of discrimination

that inspired fear among the Jews took place in the "black years" between 1948 and 1953. What seems to me a theory of "integration" that amounted in reality to forced assimilation prevailed during those years. Unfortunately, from evidence available to us, this false application of the theory of integration is still made by many Soviet leaders today. A number of measures for the revival of Yiddish culture have been taken since 1954. But it appears that the right of Jews to Jewish cultural expression in the freest and effective sense is still a subject of debate among policy-makers, since projects, such as a Soviet Yiddish theater, are still in the discussion stage.

Any total judgment of the situation is therefore complex. But Howard Fast's view as expressed in his statement is lopsided and, it seems to me, not calculated to be helpful toward a restoration of the socialist approach to the Jewish question that prevailed until the middle thirties. Communists outside the Soviet Union have the responsibility to engage in fraternal discussion with the Soviet party to make a genuinely socialist approach to the Jewish question once more operative.

Protest is not enough; efforts toward correction are the best form of protest. Can this not best be done from within the communist movement?

Howard Fast gives as his second reason for leaving the communist movement that he believes it to be "compromised" to the point of ineffectuality. I cannot share his certainty on this point. It is decidedly premature, it seems to me, to have such a definitive view. A great number of valuable advocates of socialism are organized in this movement. Many of them have shown that they grasp the need for radical reorientation to the problem of American socialist action. Who can say at this point that this new approach will not in time—not tomorrow, perhaps after a few years—bring the communists back into acceptance as a valid American force? Whether they will is not a question of theory nor is it a subject for speculation. The answer will be determined by how they actually *work*. The fact that they are the largest organized Marxist grouping in this country makes it highly important for the future of American socialism that the attempt to regain their place in American life should be made.