

Who's *Un-American*?
Citizenship and the "HUAC" Battle of the 1940s and 1950s

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One of the most controversial domestic battles of the Cold War—if not recent American history generally—was the fight between Congress's House Committee on Un-American Activities (HCUAA, more commonly known as "HUAC") and those accused by the committee of harboring private loyalties to the Soviet Union. It was in hearings before this committee that certain American citizens were asked the dramatic question, "Are you now or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?" Many of those asked (particularly the guilty) pleaded the Fifth Amendment.¹

There is much to this drama that today is misunderstood or unappreciated. For instance, the actions of the House Committee are often identified with conservatives, with the political right, with McCarthyism and the man of Joe McCarthy. In truth, *Senator* McCarthy was never a member of this *House* (of Representatives) Committee. In fact, throughout its history, the committee was chaired primarily by anti-communist Democrats. Its Democratic chairs ranged from Rep. Martin Dies (D-TX), to Rep. Francis Walter (D-PA), to Rep. Richard Ichord (D-MO), among others.

But more than that, and fundamental to the theme of this paper, is that the nature of the committee's work, and the composition of the committee's very name—specifically, the word "un-American"—is a hot button that still evokes powerful emotions to this day. And yet, while that history is well-known, virtually forgotten was the counter-campaign against the House

¹ Congressmen and their staffs frequently remarked on this phenomenon. Those who pleaded the Fifth Amendment tended to be guilty, whereas the innocent were eager to talk and prove their innocence. Of course, not everyone who invoked the Fifth Amendment was guilty. Today, with the aid of declassified archives, we have an even stronger sense of the number of guilty among the accused.

Committee. That counter-campaign is known today only by a narrow group of Cold War researchers who have actually dug into the declassified archives—archives ranging from Soviet files in Moscow to the Comintern Archives on Communist Party USA (CPUSA), housed at the Library of Congress, which I spent several summers researching. A look at those archives, and yet more material still, illuminates an interesting counter-response to the House Committee. That counter-response was a campaign called Operation Abolition. And at the center of the campaign was the question of *who*, exactly, was *un-American*.

As this paper will show, Operation Abolition was spearheaded by American communists (most of which concealed their loyalties) and their “fellow travelers” among liberals and progressives. These leftists sought to abolish the House Committee, and, in turn, insisted that the committee itself was “un-American.” This was a rather ironic twist. Consider: The political left was thus, in effect, arguing that the *true* Americans were the accused card-carrying, closet American communists—those literally sworn and pledged to Stalin’s USSR—whereas the *un-Americans* were the anti-communists, especially those elected to Congress and fulfilling their duty of investigating possible secret Soviet agents who endangered national security. For these congressmen, their duties to the U.S. Constitution mandated that they pursue potential indigenous security threats.

In all, at the core of this debate was the very charge of “un-American.” What did that mean? How were both sides applying and using (or misusing) the label? What did this also say about both sides’ views of Americanism, and who and what they deemed a *true American*? And how did such accusations bear upon the question of the citizenship of those accused?

These are compelling questions on which there is very little scholarship. This paper hopes to help open up this interesting, unappreciated area of the Cold War and 20th-century research.

Communist Campaigns

Before examining Operation Abolition, it is worthwhile to consider the concept of communist campaigns, which was central to this initiative.

Communists excelled at “campaigns;” that is, carefully concerted efforts where they meticulously exploited an issue or cause to further their agenda. Such campaigns were a very significant tactic vigorously employed by the communist movement throughout the 20th century. They were carried out with great effect, so much so that many of the outright un-truths in these underhanded campaigns have slipped their way into history books as quasi-legitimate versions of 20th-century history.

These campaigns took on such a discernible, consistent, and publicly vocal pattern that they eventually prompted a full-scale investigation by the U.S. government, which deciphered a clear tactic requiring constant surveillance. The FBI in the 1950s produced a 100-plus-page report (classified) strictly on the subject of campaigns.² There, the bureau defined campaigns as, “concentrated, continuous, and concerted succession of agitation and propaganda activities specifically devised and timed to sway public opinion. All communist campaigns are intended to arouse, influence, and mobilize as many people as possible to further communist goals.” Those goals were anchored by the overall objective of promoting the “welfare of the Soviet Union.” As will be shown in this paper, for American communists, the end-goal was always a “Soviet America” and to ensure “the triumph of Soviet Power in the United States.”

Importantly, communist campaigns, like communist fronts, thrived on deceit, and American communists were vigilant in concealing their coordination. They needed to be ever

² See report titled, “Communist Propaganda in the United States, Part VIII, Campaigns,” June 1959, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Declassified copy on file at Harvard University (where I found the report) under the formal citation, “The Communist Party and Radical Organizations, 1953-1960, FBI Reports from the Eisenhower Library.”

ready to deny their participation. Their chief target audience in these campaigns was gullible liberals/progressives that communists believed could be duped. The dupes—a common phrase used throughout the Cold War to describe liberals/progressives misled by communists³—were indispensable to success. If the campaigns marshaled only the support of communists, they would be transparent and would collapse under public exposure. The presence of liberal/progressive dupes helped diminish the presence of communists and lent some sense of legitimacy to the cause. These dupes were sought out as foot soldiers—literal marchers. Beyond them was the wider general public that also required hoodwinking, and who might also be duped to some degree.

The FBI noted that “no other organization has ever engaged in so many diverse, intensive, and extensive campaigns conducted with so much perseverance, deftness, and potency as has the Communist Party, USA.” CPUSA was “never without” a campaign of one type or another, and had been responsible for “an inestimable number of campaigns.”

The Anti-“HUAC” Campaign

This brings us back to Operation Abolition, the campaign against the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

Operation Abolition was a 1940s/1950s campaign, led by (among others) CPUSA, the *Daily Worker*, the ACLU, and an ACLU splinter group, the National Emergency Civil Liberties Committee—headed by Corliss Lamont and I. F. Stone, two men of the extreme left.⁴ Stone, we

³ Paul Kengor, *Dupes: How America’s Adversaries Have Manipulated Progressives for a Century* (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2010).

⁴ Kengor, *Dupes*, 68-79 and 306-24.

now know, was a paid Soviet agent from 1936-38.⁵ The aim of this coalition of left and far-left sources was to abolish the House Committee on Un-American Activities, or at least to so question and demonize the committee in the public's mind as to discredit the committee.

Among these contingents, it was incredibly ironic, and plainly outrageous, that after two decades of being wrong and being duped by Stalin, by Stalinists, and by secret supporters of Stalin in the United States, that certain liberals/progressives—spearheaded by the ACLU and National Emergency Civil Liberties Committee—would come together to find their demons not in the pro-communists who defended Stalin as he murdered tens of millions, but in the *anti*-communists who tried to tell the truth to Americans about Stalin, his murderous state, and his secret supporters in the United States. That is precisely what happened.

So intense was this campaign that Congress itself ultimately investigated. The campaign built upon a larger “anti-anti-communist” campaign that liberals/progressives pushed for decades and still advance to this day. That push had been so intense and problematic in the 1950s that the Senate Judiciary Committee (run by Democrats) held hearings and published a report titled, “The New Drive Against the Anti-Communist Program.” As noted during the hearings, leading the charge in many of these anti-anti-communist thrusts was the *New York Times*. As testified by the feature source in the hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee, the *Times* was one of the

⁵ In their recent book for Yale University Press, historians John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, and Alexander Vassiliev conclude: “To put it plainly, from 1936 to 1939 I. F. Stone was a Soviet spy.” For that quote and an easily accessible summary, see the excerpted article published in April 2009 by the online version of *Commentary* magazine, titled, “Special Preview: I.F. Stone, Soviet Agent—Case Closed.” Also see: John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 247-9; and Herbert Romerstein and Eric Breindel, *The Venona Secrets*, (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2000), 432-9. On page 436 (book published in 2000), Romerstein and Breindel write: “It is clear from the evidence that Stone was indeed a Soviet agent.” Of course, Stone (in death) has defenders who dispute the allegations (not convincingly, in my view). To see the refutations, visit the I. F. Stone Tribute Web site: <http://www.ifstone.org/biography-refuted.php>.

primary “organs of anti-anti-communism,” doing so *ad nauseum* with “heavyweight, comatose gibberish.”⁶

Whether gibberish or not, this anti-anti-communist work was extremely effective in stirring the emotions of liberals/progressives, with the effect of inadvertently advancing the communist cause.

Implicit to this effectiveness, and a huge propaganda success, was the very use of the acronym “HUAC,” which became central to the debate. Consider:

America’s communists, socialists, and liberals/progressives happily inverted the phrase “un-American,” charging the House Committee itself (and its heads and members) with being “un-American.” In fact, the political left did this so effectively then and still today that the historically common term for the House Committee on Un-American Activities is not the proper acronym, “HCUAA,” but the widely known and popularly accepted “HUAC,” which is actually a mis-ordered acronym that incorrectly reads: House *Un-American* Committee. That incorrect acronym itself is a major statement. Note, too, that the acronym shows that the political left in America is not shy about labeling certain people “un-American”—a tactic that the left claims is the typical domain of the right—so long as the left is doing the labeling.

Again, the left has done this so aggressively that it has succeeded in permanently labeling HCUAA as “HUAC.” I have noticed the results when teaching college students. In my courses, when I attempt to use the correct acronym, HCUAA, I get quizzical looks as I scribble the letters on the chalkboard. To the contrary, the moment I revert to “HUAC,” students nod, finally understanding what I am referring to. The left has won this battle over language. And most

⁶ “The New Drive Against the Anti-Communist Program,” Hearing Before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, 87th Congress, First Session, July 11, 1961 (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 1961), 11.

ironic, the greatest champions of the term “HUAC” were American communists, who used the term incessantly in the *Daily Worker* and all their publications. When non-communist liberals/progressives today use that term, they are actually, whether they know it or not, employing the propaganda language of CPUSA.

Particularly brazen was the *Daily Worker*. In fact, it is almost laughable that the *Daily Worker* put “communists” in quotes when reporting on actual communists identified by HCUSA, while simultaneously not placing HUAC in quotes, as if the former were fantasy and the latter reality. Oftentimes, communists and liberals/progressives alike simply called HUAC “the Un-American Committee” (leaving out “House”).⁷

Even harsher, throughout the Cold War, and even post-Cold War, CPUSA maligned what it dubbed “the racist, McCarthyite forces of evil” and the “fascist House Un-American Activities Committee.”⁸ Yes, *fascist*. This was an obscene accusation from a generation that had faced the Nazis. And yet, typical of the American left, opponents were transmogrified into political monsters: “racists,” “fascists,” “*Nazis*.” Liberals/progressives hurl around these vicious names still today, almost reflexively. It isn’t anything new; the left generally has done this for a long, long time.

Frank Marshall Davis

As a case instance, one of striking political relevance today, this language war was waged not only at CPUSA organs like the *Daily Worker* but, of special relevance, also by Frank Marshall Davis in his writings and publications.⁹ Who was Frank Marshall Davis?

⁷ I cover this at length in *Dupes*, 211-30.

⁸ This example is a post-Cold War one, showing the lasting power of these vicious words among communists and the American left, taken from the precise words of Gus Hall, CPUSA national chairman, in his May 31, 1998, tribute to Paul Robeson at Winston Unity Auditorium in New York City.

⁹ Frank Marshall Davis, “Threaten Film Folk with Jail Terms in ‘Red’ Hunt,” *Chicago Star* (November 1, 1947).

Frank Marshall Davis (1905-87) was a pro-Soviet, pro-Red China, literal card-carrying member of CPUSA—member no. 47544.¹⁰ In the 1940s and 1950s, he edited and wrote for Party-line publications such as the *Honolulu Record* and the *Chicago Star*, which included contributors who served as agents to Stalin’s Soviet Union. Davis did outrageous Soviet propaganda work in his columns, at every juncture agitating and opposing U.S. attempts to slow Joseph Stalin and Mao Tse-tung. He favored Yalta and Red Army takeovers of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Central and Eastern Europe as a whole. In China, he urged America to dump the “fascist” Chiang in support of Mao’s Red forces. He wanted communist takeovers in Korea and Vietnam. He was adamantly, angrily anti-NATO, anti-Marshall Plan, anti-Truman Doctrine, and utterly excoriated President Harry Truman and his administration. He argued that U.S. officials under Truman and under secretaries of state George Marshall and Dean Acheson were handing West Germany back to the Nazis, while Stalin was pursuing “democracy” in East Germany and the Communist Bloc. He portrayed America’s leaders as “aching for an excuse to launch a nuclear nightmare of mass murder and extermination” against the Soviets and the Chinese.

Frank Marshall Davis’s targets were chiefly Democrats, especially President Truman. Why target Truman? Because Davis’s peak period of pro-Soviet propaganda work was the latter 1940s, when Stalin’s Red Army was rampaging through Eastern Europe. Standing in Stalin’s way was Harry Truman. And so, Davis’s *Chicago Star* trashed Truman with headlines like “White house to white hoods: KKK hails Truman’s policy as its own” and “TRUMAN KNIFES HOPE FOR PEACE.” Davis excoriated the Democratic president as trigger-happy Truman,

¹⁰ Paul Kengor, *The Communist: Frank Marshall Davis: The Untold Story of Barack Obama’s Mentor* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

pursuing “a new world war,” a “program for World War III,” in a bloodthirsty bid to “rule Russia.” He framed Truman’s Marshall Plan as a new form of “colonial slavery,” intended “to re-enslave the yellow and brown and black peoples of the world.”¹¹

Generally speaking, Frank Marshall Davis’s work and writings were irresponsible and outrageous. Congress certainly noticed. In December 1956, the Democrats who headed the Senate Judiciary Committee summoned Davis to Washington to testify on his pro-Soviet activities. He pled the Fifth Amendment. No matter, the next year, the Democratic Senate, in an official report titled “Scope of Soviet Activity in the United States,” publicly listed Davis as “an identified member of the Communist Party.” Moreover, Davis’s political antics were so radical that the FBI placed him on the federal government’s Security Index, which meant he could be immediately detained in the event of a national emergency, such as a war breaking out between the United States and USSR.¹²

Most striking and of special relevance today is that Davis, in Hawaii in the 1970s, would mentor a young man named Barack Obama, future president of the United States of America.¹³

As to the issue of interest to this paper, namely, Operation Abolition and the anti-“HUAC” campaign, Frank Marshall Davis was an enthusiastic participant; this form of agitation and propaganda was one of Davis’s specialties.

I counted 43 examples of Davis using the word “un-American” at the *Honolulu Record* in just 1949-50 alone. Some of these were in defense; others on offense. Three times the words

¹¹ Kengor, *Communist*, 124-64.

¹² Kengor, *Communist*, 204-19.

¹³ It was Obama’s grandfather, Stanley Dunham, who introduced Davis to Obama for the purpose of mentoring. In my research on Davis, I quote over a dozen biographers and associates of Obama and Davis describing Davis as a vital, lasting influence. We know about Davis because of Obama’s own lengthy acknowledgment. In his memoir, *Dreams from My Father*, Obama notes that Davis offered him advice at several significant levels. Obama directly mentioned “Frank” 22 times over the course of thousands of words and every section of his memoir.

were typed into titles of his columns. Twice he used the word “un-Americanism.” Davis was not reticent about blasting “the aptly named un-American committee.”¹⁴

Some of Davis’s uses of this phrase are worth highlighting, as they shed light on how pervasive this tactic was used by the far left:

In a May 1950 piece for the *Honolulu Record*, Davis painted what he referred to as a natural alliance desired by bigoted anti-communists on “the un-American committee:” an alliance with Hitler’s disciples. “This alliance with a revived Nazi Germany,” wrote Davis, “may please such persons as John Rankin of Mississippi and John Wood of Georgia, two past and present chairmen of the un-American committee whose ideas on race parallel those of Adolf Hitler.” In fact, said Davis, Rankin and Wood were not merely run-of-the-mill Democratic Party racists, but were themselves “upholders of master race theory of the Nazis.”¹⁵

Frank Marshall Davis did not mince words: If Americans wanted to see “Nazis,” they should look to Washington, and specifically at anti-communist congressmen at “HUAC,” the “Un-American Committee.”

Another illuminating Davis piece was a September 20, 1947, column for the *Chicago Star*, titled, “I got radical thoughts.” “I’m so un-American right now,” wrote Davis, “that I want to see price controls clamped back on this minute, a new and stronger excess profits tax put into operation, and the whole packing industry nationalized.” Here, Davis candidly stated that he wanted to flat-out nationalize the packing-house industry, as well as imposing national price controls and a federal tax on the rich and their “excess profits.”

¹⁴ That label is used by Davis in “Paul Robeson’s Stand,” *Honolulu Record*, (August 11, 1949).

¹⁵ Frank Marshall Davis, “Our New ‘Democratic’ Partner,” *Honolulu Record* (May 18, 1950).

What is fascinating about this article is who Frank Marshall Davis worked with at the communist-controlled packing house workers' union, and how that relates to the "un-American" issue and to contemporary politics. He worked with Vernon Jarrett, future father-in-law to a young woman named Valerie Jarrett, who today is President Obama's single most important adviser. He also worked with the Canter family, specifically Harry and David Canter, who in the 1930s lived in the Soviet Union while the senior Harry worked for Stalin's government as an official translator of Lenin's writings. In the 1970s, David Canter would mentor a young man named David Axelrod, who today is President Obama's chief strategist, the man who got Obama twice elected to the White House.¹⁶

Those are links of extraordinary modern political relevance, but they also strike at the historical focus of this paper: All of these political ancestors to Obama—Jarrett and Axelrod—that is, Frank Marshall Davis, Vernon Jarrett, and the Canters, respectively—incessantly called for the abolition of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Today's political left is not all that far removed from yesterday's political left.

Our Communist Founders

There is another interesting aspect of Frank Marshal Davis's work that relates to the concept of Americanism (or lack thereof): American communists like Davis constantly exploited and misappropriated the American Founding. And it was indeed an exploitation and misappropriation, given that their ultimate purposes were nowhere within the political/moral universe of the American Founders.

American communists lifted the language and symbols of the Founding. This is something that the progressive movement, too, has done for decades, and which has been

¹⁶ Kengor, *The Communist*, 112-5 and 292-93.

recognized and documented by certain conservative scholars.¹⁷ Yet, unrecognized by both scholars and the general public is the degree to which communists did the same, but far more wrongly and shamelessly. America's Marxists-Leninists attempted to argue that they were the new revolutionaries, the inheritors of Jefferson and Madison and Washington. They quoted the Founders and the Founding documents, from Ben Franklin and Tom Paine to the Declaration and Constitution. When they were not invoking the Declaration's inalienable rights to advance their Marxist-Leninist ideology, they were appealing to the Constitution and Bill of Rights (First Amendment, Fifth Amendment) to counter and denounce accusers who suspected them of Soviet sympathies and even potential espionage. They did this constantly and consistently, from literally the very founding of the American Communist Party in 1919.

Frank Marshall Davis was among them. Quantifying the number of times that Davis did this in his columns is difficult, though during a short window of 1949-50 alone, I counted seven examples of Davis in the *Honolulu Record* citing the "Founding Fathers," primarily Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, one case of him pointing to the Declaration of Independence; two instances where he invoked the Declaration's inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; over 30 references to "liberty" or "freedom"; and nearly 70 citations of the First Amendment, the Bill of Rights, or the words "Constitution," "constitutional," or "unconstitutional."¹⁸ As to the latter, Davis was not shy about declaring something unconstitutional. "That, it seems to me, is unconstitutional," he pronounced without hesitation.¹⁹

Bear in mind, Frank Marshall Davis was a committed pro-Soviet communist.

Nonetheless, to hitch his (red) star to the wagon of the American Founders was old hat for Davis.

¹⁷ Among them, Matthew Spalding and Joseph Postell have done yeoman's work on this subject in their work at the Heritage Foundation's B. Kenneth Center for Principles and Politics.

¹⁸ Kengor, *Communist*, 181-92.

¹⁹ Davis, "Hawaii's Loyalty Oath," *Honolulu Record* (June 23, 1949).

He did so in his first column for the first edition of the *Chicago Star*. In his kick-off “Frank-ly Speaking” column for the *Star*, titled “Those Radicals of ’76,” Davis claimed he and his comrades as the true “spiritual descendants of ... 1776.” Speaking precisely the language of the Marxist dialectic, Davis noted that all radicals of “past and present” “anticipate the logical course of history and lead humanity on its way.” “So it was in 1776; so it is today.” Like “this nation’s forefathers in the 18th century,” exhorted Davis, it was time to “force into effect a modern Declaration of Independence.”²⁰

There seemed to be an upsurge in such Davis efforts once he left Chicago for Hawaii in 1949, no doubt because Congress was investigating Davis and his comrades. As Congress accumulated evidence, America’s communists did what they did best: spun propaganda. Because Congress was looking into these genuinely un-American activities promoting a Moscow-directed “Soviet American Republic,” American communists wrapped themselves in the American flag. As the insightful British commentator Alistair Cooke put it, upon observing the conniving tactics of Hollywood’s communists in this period, they were “down-the-line communists coolly exploiting the protection of the First and Fifth Amendments to the Constitution.”²¹

Taking a close look at this phenomenon is important for understanding the far Left in America over the last 100 years, and the egregious lengths to which communists descended in their deception. And yet, Davis was far from alone. Others who joined him in invoking the Founders in order to defend or advance communists and communism included Louis Fraina, one of the core founders of the American Communist Party; Howard Fast, the Hollywood screenwriter, winner of the “Stalin Prize,” and a colleague of Davis at the *Chicago Star*;

²⁰ Davis, “Those Radicals of ’76,” *Chicago Star* (July 6, 1946).

²¹ Quoted in Gerald Duchovnay, *Humphrey Bogart: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), 29.

Hollywood's Committee for the First Amendment, a group of liberal/progressive celebrities who were completely used and fooled by (closet) communist colleagues; and Clarence Darrow, the famed "Scopes Monkey Trial" attorney, who invoked the Founders in his dramatic and embarrassing defense of American communists during several major trials in the 1920s.²²

Needless to say, in truth, Karl Marx and the American Founders had nothing in common. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx expressed revulsion for all sorts of fundamental rights and things, from religion to morality to the family to free enterprise, and, most of all, for private property. Marx's rejection of private property is the common thread throughout the *Manifesto*. Stated Marx unequivocally: "The theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property."²³ That is the essence of communism.

Of course, as the American Founders understood, abolishing private property is contrary to human nature, to what Jefferson called the "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." To banish private property is to violate the most innate precepts of all peoples, from the cave to the courthouse. Such thinking shatters Judeo-Christian thinking, Western philosophy, the beliefs of the ancient and modern worlds, Cicero, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Sophocles, Francisco de Vitoria, John Locke, Jefferson, Old Testament, New Testament, Moses, Jesus Christ, just for starters. All human beings are entitled to certain inherent, inalienable rights, and men and governments have no right to deny those rights to anyone. They cannot deny what the Creator endowed. It is a truth so obvious, agreed the Founders, that it is "self-evident."

What is the job of government at its essence and most fundamental? As Jefferson put it in the Declaration, "That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men." The

²² Kengor, *Communist*, 181-6.

²³ Kengor, *Communist*, 67.

Founders' view was that governments exist to help human beings secure basic rights that are rightfully theirs because the Creator conceived them. Governments and men cannot dare take them away.

Marx and his disciples took them away, and violently so, beginning with right of private property and then on to all the full sweep of First Amendment freedoms, from religion to press, speech, assembly, and more. There was no greater mass murderer of civil liberties than communism. Moreover, in communist societies, the God that endowed those rights was Himself targeted. For communists, it was elemental to obstruct the very fountainhead from which all rights flow; they even took the right to life—the first and most fundamental of all freedoms, without which no other freedoms can exist.

And to imagine that communists invoked these same American Founders, and claimed that anti-communists were *un-American*, whereas communists were the American ideal? It was a truly amazing claim. Nonetheless, American communists claimed precisely that, boldly and loudly.

Desiring a "Soviet America"

In truth, American communists were dedicated to anything but the American Founding. To the contrary, their loyalty lay in a system of government far from America's shores, and which was the antithesis of Madison and Jefferson and Adams.

The American Communist Party was launched in Chicago in September 1919, just six months after the launch of the Soviet Communist International, i.e., the "Comintern." Located in Moscow, the Comintern was to be the literal headquarters for the global communist revolution. Communist parties would be established worldwide, with no more than one per country. In turn, each party would answer—without question—to headquarters in Moscow.

From the very outset, the Comintern made clear that members of foreign communist parties—from Europe to America—must give total subservience to Moscow. It stated flatly that those “who reject in principle the conditions and theses put forward by the Communist International are to be expelled from the party.” This was the classic “party discipline” that was a trademark of communist parties everywhere. And befitting the militant regime that was its source, the 1920 Comintern Congress evoked war rhetoric as central to its mission, stating explicitly in point 17 of its famous 21-point manifesto: “The Communist International has declared war on the entire bourgeois world.”²⁴

It cannot be emphasized enough that American members of the Communist Party always saw themselves as fully beholden to Moscow. A telling document, one of the first that resides in the Soviet Comintern Archives on CPUSA, was issued from the Chicago convention of September 1-7, 1919. Typed on the letterhead of the newly established Communist Party of America, at 1219 Blue Island Avenue, Chicago, it is a brief celebratory salutation to the Comintern from the Communist Party of America’s executive secretary, Charles Ruthenberg.²⁵ It bears four simple sentences:

In the name of the Communist Workers of the United States organized in the
Communist Party of America I extend greetings to the Communist Party of Russia.

Hail to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat!

Long live the Russian Socialist Soviet Republic!

²⁴ The 1920 Comintern Congress further added as a condition for admission and membership to the Comintern: “Every party which wishes to join the Communist International is obligated to give unconditional support to any Soviet republic in its struggle against counter-revolutionary forces.” See: Richard Pipes, *Communism: A History* (NY: A Modern Library Chronicles Book, 2001), 93; V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 28 (Moscow: Progress, 1965), 477-80; Brian Crozier, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Rocklin, CA: Forum, 1999), 38-40; and Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International, 1919-1943: Documents*, vol. I (London, 1956), 166-72.

²⁵ Communist Party USA in the Comintern Archives, Library of Congress, Fond 515, Opus 1, Delo 9.

Long live the Communist International!

The devotion in this letter speaks for itself. Members of communist parties around the world, including in the United States, saw themselves as loyal Soviet foot-soldiers. It would be Moscow first. These communists served not America but the Soviet Union. Their loyalties were elsewhere.

As Lincoln Steffens, the popular journalist for *The New Republic*, unforgettably put it, “I am a patriot for Russia; the Future is there; Russia will win out and it will save the world.”²⁶ Emphatically agreeing with Steffens was Langston Hughes, the celebrated African-American poet. His devotion is evident in one of his most infamous quotes: “Put one more ‘S’ in the USA to make it Soviet,” declared Hughes. “The USA when we take control will be the USSA.”²⁷ He urged the Marxist faithful to rise and fight for the “great red flag ... of the [Communist] Internationale.”

Herb Romerstein, himself a former communist and today arguably America’s greatest expert on communism, repeatedly stresses this loyalty point: “Communist Party members were loyal Soviet patriots.... Most were not qualified to be spies, but those who were qualified were recruited through Party channels and made available to Soviet intelligence for classic espionage, agent-of-influence operations, or as couriers.” He says that “almost every spy” tapped by the Soviets was a member of the American party.²⁸

CPUSA was a major recruiting ground for Soviet espionage, and some of those communists, in turn, saluted the Red flag and consciously collaborated with Moscow. And,

²⁶ Among others, see the discussion in Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims* (NY: Harper & Row, 1983), 64.

²⁷ See: Jean Wagner, *Black Poets of the United States: From Paul Laurence Dunbar to Langston Hughes* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 435; and Faith Berry, *Langston Hughes: Before and Beyond Harlem* (NY: Citadel, 1992), 296-297.

²⁸ Email correspondence with Herb Romerstein, April 16, 2007 and June 23, 2007.

indeed, they were loyal Soviet patriots, regardless of the nation of their citizenship. To that end, formal CPUSA members swore a formal oath to Moscow. It stated: “I pledge myself to rally the masses to defend the Soviet Union, the land of victorious socialism. I pledge myself to remain at all times a vigilant and firm defender of the Leninist line of the Party, the only line that insures the triumph of Soviet Power in the United States.”²⁹ This was the actual oath agreed to by sworn Communist Party members.

One well-known ex-party member, Theodore Draper, who famously went public when he left the communist movement—and was, thus, duly ostracized—shared the language inscribed on his party registration card when he joined in New York in the 1920s: “The undersigned, after having read the constitution and program of the Communist Party, declares his adherence to the principles and tactics of the party and the Communist International: agrees to submit to the discipline of the party as stated in its constitution and pledges to engage actively in its work.”³⁰

A telling display of this loyalty to the Soviet Union was a 1930 exchange between Congressman Hamilton Fish (R-NY) and William Z. Foster, longtime head of CPUSA, who spoke openly of CPUSA’s goal of creating a “Soviet America,” the title of his 1932 book. Here is the exchange between Fish and Foster:³¹

Fish: Now, if I understand you, the workers in this country look upon the Soviet Union as their country; is that right?

Foster: The more advanced workers do.

Fish: They look upon the Soviet flag as their flag?

²⁹ This particular oath was issued in 1935, the heart of Stalin’s rampage, just after Paul Robeson returned from his visit. Printed in “The Communist Party of the United States of America: What It Is, How It Works,” Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, 84th Congress, 2nd Session, April 23, 1956 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1956), 2.

³⁰ Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia: The Formative Period* (NY: Viking, 1960), 162.

³¹ William Z. Foster, *Toward Soviet America* (NY: Coward-McCann, 1932).

Foster: The workers of this country and the workers of every country have only one flag and that is the red flag.

Fish: ... If they had to choose between the red flag and the American flag, I take it from you that you would choose the red flag, is that correct?

Foster: I have stated my answer.

Fish: I don't want to force you to answer it if it embarrasses you, Mr. Foster.

Foster: It does not embarrass me at all. I stated very clearly the red flag is the flag of the revolutionary class, and we are part of the revolutionary class.³²

Foster's sentiments speak for themselves.

Foster's successor was Earl Browder (1891-1973), who was general secretary of CPUSA from 1934 to 1945. He, too, did not shirk from expressing where his true loyalties resided. "Above all," he stated in his 1934 CPUSA convention report, "we arm ourselves with the political weapons forged by the victorious Communist Party of the Soviet Union, with the mighty sword of Marxism-Leninism, and are strengthened and inspired by the victories of socialist construction won under its Bolshevik leadership headed by Stalin." The pro-Stalin, pro-Soviet patriot continued: "Our World Communist Party, the Communist International, provides us the guarantee not only of our victory in America, but of the victory of the proletariat throughout the world."³³

The Comintern of the 1930s, during Browder's time, had not backed down from its earlier 1920s triumphant and militaristic pronouncements. In its published "conditions for admission," the Comintern stated that its members—which, of course, included CPUSA—"must

³² This exchange appears in "Investigation of Un-American Activities and Propaganda," Special Committee on Un-American Activities, 75th Congress, House of Representatives, January 3, 1939, 18-21.

³³ Earl Browder, *Report to the 8th Convention, Communist Party* (NY: Workers Library, 1934), 104.

render every possible assistance to the Soviet Republics in their struggles against counter-revolutionary forces. They should conduct an organized and definite propaganda to induce the workers to refuse to make or handle any kind of military equipment intended for use against the Soviet Republics, and should also carry on, by legal or illegal means, a propaganda among any troops sent against the Workers' Republics."³⁴ For members of CPUSA, things remained crystal clear: Your first priority was the Soviet Union. Period.

And as for CPUSA, it stated candidly: "We want our Party to become like an army, a Bolshevik army, who, while understanding the policy behind each decision, is prepared to carry it out with military promptness, without any hesitation or question, and further, to carry out the decisions with Bolshevik judgment and maximum effectiveness."³⁵

Fighting for Stalin

Speaking of a Bolshevik army, a major U.S. concern that arose throughout this period, which got to the crux of the debate over domestic communism and the "un-American" matter, was whether American communists, given their pledged loyalties to the USSR, would fight for the Soviet Union against America if the two countries ever came to blows. It was a question that communists wisely belittled in public, and could count on a large number of liberals/progressives to join in the mockery.

³⁴ "Conditions of Admission to the Communist International," *Party Organizer*, February 1931, 31.

³⁵ Quoted in "Structure and Function of Party Units," *Party Organizer*, February 1931, 2. As further evidence of such thinking, M. J. Olgin, communist and Browder colleague, said during FDR's first year in power: "The Communist Party of the U.S.A. is thus part of a worldwide organization which gives it guidance and enhances its fighting power. Under the leadership of the Communist Party the workers of the U.S.A. will proceed from struggle to struggle, from victory to victory, until, rising in a revolution, they will crush the capitalist State, establish a Soviet State, abolish the cruel and bloody system of capitalism and proceed to the upbuilding of Socialism." M. J. Olgin, *Why Communism?* (NY: Workers Library, 1933), 95.

In reality, it was no laughing matter, especially as the 1940s proceeded, as the Cold War intensified, as the USSR took Eastern Europe and abused and jailed countless of its citizens, as Stalin lived on, as the Soviets blockaded Berlin, as the Nazis' Buchenwald became Soviet Special Camp No. 2, and as the Russians got the bomb. This was a most important question that merited careful consideration and investigation, and, importantly, varied in answer among communists. And though it varied, communists often—*too* often—responded in the affirmative: yes, they would fight for Mother Russia.

Earl Browder himself had once admitted this frankly to the House Committee on Un-American Activities, compelling Congress to look into the matter at length.³⁶ Congressmen, both Democrats and Republicans, were mortified by the affirming testimonies they received from some American communists. Most troubling, they heard these words in the middle of World War II, when the vast majority of normal Americans were patriotically fighting for America—gung ho for Uncle Sam, not “Uncle Joe” Stalin.³⁷

Interestingly, Hollywood dealt with the question, even before congressmen had publicly raised it, which is another reason Congress was so troubled by communist infiltration of the film industry. One of the more compelling, authoritative testimonies was that of Edward Dmytryk, a movie director who was one of the “unfriendly” Hollywood Ten called to testify. Once World War II was over, and with the Cold War raging, the USSR and United States found themselves pitted against each other. This opened the eyes of the likes of Dmytryk. Previously, he had

³⁶ “Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States,” Special Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, 78th Congress, Second Session, on H. Res. 282, App. Part IX, Vol. 3 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1944), 1768-9. The report stated: “When he was a witness before the Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Earl Browder stated categorically that he would attempt to plunge this country into civil war in the event of a war between the United States and the Soviet Union.”

³⁷ The aforementioned report, which quoted Browder, Clarence Hathaway, and William Weinstone, stated that, “The foregoing quotations are only a few among hundreds which might be cited from official Communist Party sources.” “Investigation, Un-American Propaganda,” Special Committee, 1769.

sincerely believed that Stalin's Russia wanted peace, and that CPUSA did as well. "I had never heard, before 1947, anybody say they would refuse to fight for this country in a war against Soviet Russia," Dmytryk told the House Committee in April 1951.³⁸ Now he thought otherwise.

What had changed his mind? Many things: a hot war on the Korean Peninsula, high-profile espionage cases like the Rosenbergs and Alger Hiss, and more. Such betrayals revealed to Dmytryk the "love of the party" and the USSR by American communists, which took precedence over any love he thought they had for America. Dmytryk felt that the party encouraged this treachery, which it did, as a natural result of its unwavering allegiance to Stalin's Soviet Union.

Mike Shotwell's Testimony

This paper could provide innumerable examples of the Soviet loyalties of communist Americans. Here I will conclude with one more, the experience of a man named Mike Shotwell.

Shotwell was born in St. Louis in November 4, 1942, and grew up largely in the Midwest and California. His parents were communists, though they masqueraded as "progressives"—as many communists did. His stepfather, Orville E. Olson, was no minor player. Orville was a major figure in the far-left Progressive Party, running for governor of Minnesota on the party's ticket in 1948. It was the same year that Henry Wallace ran for president on the Progressive Party ticket. Olson served as the principle organizer/manager for Wallace's Minnesota campaign. Generally, he was a major figure in the national movement. As Shotwell puts it, Olson was "one of the principal organizers of the Progressive Party movement in 1948." He was also, like many Progressive Party activists, a secret communist, fully dedicated to the Soviet Union, to Red China, and to communism worldwide.³⁹

³⁸ Dmytryk said this before the House Committee on April 25, 1951.

³⁹ Email exchanges with Mike Shotwell, August 20 and September 4, 2012.

Speaking of his parents' admiration of Stalin and Mao Tse-Tung, Shotwell today recalls: "Imagine growing up in a household where your mother and stepfather worshipped two of the greatest mass murderers in the history of mankind." As a child and teen, Shotwell, a self-described "red-diaper baby," was thoroughly indoctrinated into this toxic philosophy and political "madness," which required years of painful struggle and psychological therapy to reverse. Shotwell says that he had undergone a complete "brainwashing."⁴⁰

The "brainwashing" included what Shotwell received at a Unitarian Church in Los Angeles, where, he says, there seemed to be no Christians and not even anyone who believed in God: "I can never remember meeting a single member of the congregation that believed in God, or an afterlife, or considered themselves religious in any way." It was a "pro-Russian" "church" that was not about religion but radical-left politics—and about blaming and hating America.⁴¹

Generally, says Shotwell, the communists he knew were a "miserable" and "angry" lot, his parents foremost among them. I asked Shotwell if it was fair to classify his parents as "un-American." Here is his answer:

My step-father and mother were truly "un-American." They bitterly fought the goings-on of the House Committee reports on un-American activities, and identified with those that they felt were so unfairly singled out by these 'right wing crazies.' If somebody asked them if they were good Americans, they would have carefully explained, 'Of course, the best, following in the footsteps of Jefferson and Paine.' If someone were to say to them 'You don't sound an act like a normal American,' their chests would have swelled with pride.

⁴⁰ Shotwell is writing a short, unpublished memoir by the title *Brainwashing: My Upbringing as a Red-Diaper Baby*.

⁴¹ Shotwell, *Brainwashing*, 13.

Shotwell emphasizes that his parents never gave up the communist faith and their anti-Americanism. He describes an incident that occurred when he accompanied his aging mother as she looked for a unit in a retirement building in the luxury towers at a Laguna Beach development in southern California. “We found a perfect unit with a perfect exposure on the 4th floor that looked out at the beautifully manicured courtyard,” Shotwell recalls. “In the background, framing the view, [were] the fluttering flags of CA and America. She refused to consider the unit, confiding with a dismissive snort for the prime reason that there was no possibility that she would purchase a unit where she had to stare out at an American flag.”

Shotwell also speaks to his stepfather’s certainty that Soviet power would one day triumph in the United States:

[He] just assumed that Russia would assume control of the world, including the US. This was a Darwinian truth ... pure Marx/Engels. It wasn’t an issue to debate. It was a foregone conclusion. The only issue was the timeframe. This rotten, disgusting, predatory, and duplicitous [American] society would simply crumble at the feet of the proletariat and be obliterated from the world memory. Prior to ’53 [the year Stalin died], it was assumed Joe Stalin would assume the reins.⁴²

Shotwell was taught that Stalin’s Russia was the ideal, especially compared to America: “Uncle Joe was a perfect model. Weren’t the Russians all lucky? After all, no society had ever progressed so rapidly.” He said that his parents refused to see that they were living in an America with “the highest standard of living and the most personal freedoms that the world has ever

⁴² Interview with Mike Shotwell (via email) October 13, 2012.

seen.... All they wanted to do was obliterate it and replace it with a totalitarian, communist system.”⁴³

It is crucial to realize that Shotwell’s testimony is far from unique. It is standard fare for ex-communists like Theodore Draper, Louis Budenz, Whittaker Chambers, Ben Gitlow, James Burnham, and on and on. Perhaps they could be summed up by repeating the words of Herb Romerstein: “Communist Party members were loyal Soviet patriots.”

* * *

Ronald Reagan liked to say that America is “less a place than an idea.” Indeed it is. For America’s communists, however, and specifically those literally sworn to Stalin’s Soviet Union, America was more a place than an idea. They were living in America as, in effect, exiles from another land. Their true home, their ideal, was the Soviet Union. Their vision for man and the state and the citizen was a Marxist-Leninist one, grounded in the Soviet state’s founding principles established by Lenin and Trotsky and Stalin. Their vision for man and the state and the citizen was not grounded in the founding principles of Jefferson and Madison and Adams. Their invoking of the American Founding was fundamentally dishonest; it was tactical.

In short, these American communists wanted to replace the principles of the American Revolution with those of the Bolshevik Revolution, the U.S. Constitution with the Soviet Constitution, and American market democracy with Soviet totalitarian communism. Their guiding light was not Philadelphia, 1776, but St. Petersburg, 1917; it was not George Washington and James Madison but Vladimir Lenin and Joe Stalin. If that was not quintessentially un-American, then it is hard to imagine what is.

⁴³ Shotwell, *Brainwashing*, 18-20.

This, of course, does not mean they were not citizens, nor American citizens. They were. But they were not exactly *good* citizens, nor *good* American citizens. Sure, they were technically “Americans,” and they were officially “American citizens.” But in spirit, they were far from it; their loyalties were thousands of miles offshore. If anyone ever aptly earned the tag “un-American,” it was these Soviet patriots living, in essence, in exile in their native America. That is the truth, and we should not be afraid to say it.

To be sure, some anti-communists actually wanted some American communists stripped of their citizenship and deported to the Soviet Union. Long before the House Committee on Un-American Activities was even up and running, President Woodrow Wilson and his attorney general, Alexander Mitchell Palmer—both liberal/progressive Democrats, incidentally, but neither of them duped by communists—deported the likes of Emma Goldman to the Soviet Union. And even when not advocating the stripping of citizenship, many anti-communists at least argued that these communists—dedicated and sworn as they were to a “Soviet America”—were not *good* American citizens, thus, the term “un-American.” And yet, in turn, these American Bolsheviks and many of their liberal/progressive defenders insisted that it was their anti-communist accusers who were un-American, who were not good citizens. They maintained that the essence of good citizenship is practicing the right to be anything you want to be in America. That “right” even included devotion to the triumph of a “Soviet America,” possibly by forcible overthrow.

The American left, and particularly modern liberals/progressives, still recoil at those words, “un-American,” and continue to cover for these American Stalinists. That is a mistake. It is incumbent upon the political left to explain how an undercover American communist,

dedicated wholeheartedly to a Stalinist takeover of the United States, was pro-American. Such a person was not pro-American, and we should make no apologies for saying so.