

THE NEWSLETTER

Edited by Peter Fryer, 180 Clapham High St, London, S.W.4. Subscription 8s. for 12 issues, post free.

Vol. I, No. 26 Sixpence November 2, 1957

THE WRITER AND THE COMMISSAR

A LONG THE WAY I will, inevitably, be asked: Where am I going? Thousands have already asked. For it is, I think a characteristic of men of good will to see our brief time on earth as a passage—wherefore the destination assumes supreme importance. Yet even when the destination becomes a faith akin nearly to certainty, there are those who see it as secondary to the particular roads leading to it.

For me, the destination has remained unchanged—total brotherhood of man, a world-wide entity of love and creativity, in which life is neither wasted nor despised.

For many of us, the road to this goal was the Communist Party, and in all too many of us the road became primary to the destination. In time, the road became sacred, whereas the destination blurred with increasing unreality.

In what follows, I shall reveal something of the particular experience of a writer within the Communist Party of the United States, and also as a part of the world communist movement.

This is not a record of disillusionment, for a broadening of knowledge and deepening of experience must be the very opposite of disenchantment.

Nor am I bitter. If I and so many others have paid a considerable price for certain knowledge, no knowledge comes cheaply and others have paid in larger sums.

I have not turned 'anti-communist,' for I believe that 'anti-communism,' as we know it in America, is as fraudulent as 'anti-Sovietism' is dangerous.

* * *

Many things in my story will evoke anger and resentment from various people, and some will hold that these things are better left unsaid. But to me, at this point, truth is the only criterion of what should be said. I will make the attempt at least to be as truthful as I can.



HOW HOWARD FAST CEASED TO EXIST

I HAD BEEN honoured by the Soviet Union as few living writers had, Russian or otherwise. Millions of copies of my books had been printed and sold there. One book alone, *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*, had an initial printing of half a million copies.

Two of my plays had been produced there; two others dramatized from my books; and another book became the basis for a Soviet opera.

Dozens of critical articles had been written about my work, as well as two book-length critical studies that I know of. The

Russian critics and the Russian readers were warm, receptive, over-generous, and extravagant in their praise.

In the course of years, I had developed a copious correspondence with people all over the earth. My life as a communist was very open; I have always detested concealment and conspiracy as unbecoming and degrading, and I wrote openly to whom I pleased.

I thus developed a large correspondence with Soviet people concerning my work; not a week went by without my receiving three, five, or a dozen letters from Soviet students, children, teachers, workers, critics, engineers, scientists, and so forth, telling me what they had or had not liked in my writing.

An airmail letter to the United States from the Soviet Union takes between two and three days. The interview in which I announced publicly my separation from the Communist Party appeared on the morning of February 1, 1957.

On February 4, I received my last mail from the Soviet Union, except for two letters from two officials of the Writers' Union.

In other words, a gate had closed; a curtain, the very existence of which I had so hotly denied in the past, had been quietly drawn.

The Soviet post office had quietly and efficiently halted and seized every piece of mail addressed to me; for no one, apart

This article is published with acknowledgments to Prospectus, a new American magazine. The article as it appeared in Prospectus is about half of a book due to be published in the USA later this month.

from the party bureaucracy, knew that anything was different about Howard Fast.

Not a word about my interview in the [New York] Times ever appeared in the Soviet Press, nor one word about a theoretical statement of my position published a month later in *Mainstream*, an American pro-communist periodical.

On February 1, 1957, I simply ceased to exist in the Soviet Union. All reference to me in retrospect also ceased. A play of mine, 'General Washington and the Water Witch', was currently being performed at the Red Army Theatre in Moscow; the performances continued, but no reference to the play appeared in the Press again.

The millions of books continued to be read, but the author disappeared from being and memory. Thus, within Russia, no anger, no attack, no debate, no refutation, no criticism—simply a negation. I was not.

Consider this, and you will understand something of what I felt. I had been prepared for anything else—rage, persuasion, mockery, even for the possibility that the reaction might be

1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957

See back page for details of next week's special 44-page issue of *The Newsletter* commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957 1917—1957

civilized to the extent of stating, 'Well, Fast has the right to do as he wishes. We do not judge him by what organization he belongs to, but by what he does. He has the right to join the Communist Party or leave it, as he desires.'

Instead, both question and answer were completely blotted out.



CONVERSATION WITH A DIPLOMAT

THERE IS an addendum to the above, almost in the way of a footnote, yet a little more than that. It concerns a moment of bitter decision, the moment when I ceased to be a communist, and turns upon a pledge not to remain silent when I know I must speak.

I will speak to the harm of no man and name no man ever, if naming him confronts him, in his turn, with injustice. But when men coast on the awful tides of history, they must be spoken of.

The story of this moment of bitter decision is the story of such a man, but I cannot name him, for it would bring death to him. I will therefore never identify him, or even the country he represented, and you must take the story on my word.

He will know that the story is true, and others will recognize the genre. I call him the diplomat.

I left the Communist Party in February, 1957. Earlier, in June, 1956, I wrote in the [New York] *Daily Worker* a bitter denunciation of the lack of civil rights and liberties in the Soviet Union.

Between the appearance of that denunciation and the public announcement of my leaving the party, a number of diplomats and newspapermen from the 'satellite nations' sought me out. Some were very high-placed persons in the foreign service of their countries; others not so high-placed.

Felt free to talk

Because of my past reputation, and the fact that, as a part of the communist movement, I had openly ranged myself against the Stalinist forces in the Communist Party of the United States, they felt free to talk to me.

They spread before my already tortured eyes such a picture of terror, injustice, and sheer nightmare as to make a Khrushchev 'secret' speech seem but a moderate outline of a never-to-be-itemized totality.

They talked coldly, they talked with passion, they talked with hatred. Some wept as they talked. Some relived the agony of cherished comrades murdered by the Soviet secret police, of men tortured and beaten, of others robbed of every sense of their own human quality.

Some cried out, in strangely similar words, 'We have learned how to wait. My land will not be another Hungary.' Others said, 'We will wait and wait. History has a way of being truthful.'

But one spoke quietly, never raising his voice, spoke, over a luncheon table, in the quiet simple tones one uses discussing the weather. So quiet and simple that there was never room for doubt.

The pall of fear

He spoke of the pall of fear over his land, of the enshrinement of ignorance, of the punishment meted out to those who dared to disagree or offer a fresh opinion.

He told how the communist leaders who ruled his country lived, of their sleek black limousines, servants, country homes, and bejewelled wives, of their mistresses and their passions.

He talked about the crumb that belonged to the people, and, because he was a Jew, he talked about anti-Semitism. Most horrifying of all, he spoke of this hatred of Jews as something I was familiar with, both long and well.

When I explained that I knew it neither long nor well, but have only recently learned of Russia's anti-Semitism, and only this very moment of its existence in the other nations who called themselves 'socialist,' he was both astonished and abashed, as perhaps he had reason to be.

In any case, if what he told me was new to me then, it is

not new to many people today. Some of it I would like to put down here, but I cannot. Because this is what the diplomat said when we rose to leave our luncheon table:

'I must do something that makes me deeply ashamed of myself—because my very mention of it impugns you. Yet do it I must, if not for myself, then for my wife and children. I must tell you, Mr Fast, that if my delegation should learn, not what I told you, but simply that I met with you alone, I will be arrested when I return to my homeland and in all likelihood put to death. I am not pleading for myself; but my wife and children need me. It is hard for a woman and children to be alone today in what my country has become, harder for them than any joy on my part in continuing to live.'

Thus did both this man and I come to understand the stuff out of which our dreams had been made.

I could say, there but for the grace of God go I; he could not. I could leave the Communist Party and live; he could not.

In this sense, then, he, this nameless diplomat, is the ghost and the spirit of this essay. It is of his agony, multiplied a hundred thousand times, that I write; my own is insignificant and unimportant beside it.



THE SPEECH AND THE DAILY WORKER STAFF

WITHIN THE PARTY, and particularly the *Daily Worker*, the reports of the Twentieth Congress had come as an explosive force of mental liberation. Not because of their content (the 'secret' speech was still secret) but because there appeared the first trace of iconoclasm in any party congress in our memory.

It was little, but it was enough for us on the *Worker* to seize sledges and begin to break the hateful images with the zest of a drowning man gulping air.

Everyone on the staff joined in, to one extent or another. Myself, I struck out in every direction with a joy I had not known for years.

A whole group of us in the party had been secret believers in psychiatry, but had long been silenced by the terror of expulsion. Now I could defend Freud and the science of the mind.

I was able to lash out at the idiotic Soviet doctrine of 'cosmopolitanism' as anti-Semitism; to denounce capital punishment as barbarism; to charge that the Jewish people were prisoners within the Soviet Union.

The leaders were silent

I wrote about my love and admiration for my own native land, the United States, and comrades of twenty and thirty years in the party came to me with tears in their eyes to thank me. Alan Max, Joseph Clark, Ben Levine, Bob Friedman, and others, reacted in a fashion similar to mine.

Throughout all this, because they had never coped with thought, ideas, change, or the excitement of shattering a worthless and senile idea, the national leaders of the party were silent.

We had the feeling that they had crawled into holes to hide from this tempest that was blowing through the intellectual corridors of the communist world.

We spoke of them with shame and looked upon them with contempt and disgust; like the king in the Anderson fairy tale, they were so pathetically naked!

But what a time it was for us! What freedom! What glory in the realization that all the years of waiting, mental hiding, intellectual servility, had not been in vain!

We said to each other that we had known that the core of the party was good and healthy. We opened the pages of the *Daily Worker* to hundreds and hundreds of letters. We printed everything, the crackpots, the lunatics, the diehards, the sober and thoughtful, the literate and illiterate, the wise and the foolish; and for the first time in our memory free, open discussion spread like fire through the party.

Everyone had something to say—except the national leadership. From their mental dugouts not a shot was fired.

Finally, they spoke. Not ideas, not change, but a whining attempt to remove John Gates from the paper and expel him from the party. The staff laughed at them. 'If Gates goes, we all go.'

So the 'leaders' retreated and joined the discussion, mouthing the same things they had mouthed for years in the same numb, senseless, tired language they had used for years.

But their main weapon, the source of all power, had for the moment been blunted—the power to expel from the Communist Party anyone who disagreed with them, who challenged their thinking or their actions.

And by so doing to expel such an 'iconoclast' from the friendship of those he had spent his life with, from the society and respect of a whole area of men of good will; to turn an independent into a criminal mind; to do what in Russia was capped with torture and death; to do it short of physical destruction, but leave the human soul seared.

The final bankruptcy of what the Communist Party euphemistically called 'leadership' came on the 28th of March, when the Internal Revenue Department committed the ultimate idiocy in a long series of senseless repressive measures against the party.

Having contrived a ridiculous tax case against it, Federal agents moved into our offices, seized what they pompously called assets—a collection of dusty morgue files and ancient office furniture — and by attempting to close down a daily newspaper with peripheral devices, violated every law and tradition of a free Press in America.

To give a bitter taste to a stupid jest, they chose to do this at the very height of our revolt against the prison of thought we had inhabited for so long.

At that moment, Eugene Dennis, then general secretary of the party, was at home writing a speech. A whole generation of communist leaders, having put religion behind them, had embraced a newly erected structure of magic.

Its ritual was that miracles could be performed by invoking spells. A resolution was such a spell. A political book was such a spell. A particular speech or statement was such a spell.

Divorced from almost every reality of plain people, it did not matter whether anyone attempted to put the resolution into force; whether anyone tried or sell or read the book; whether anyone came to a meeting and heard the speech or statement: what alone mattered was the magic ritual of writing.

A sorry joke for years

From that all things were supposed to flow. For years, it was a sorry joke among the membership that few read, and fewer could make sense of, Political Affairs, the theoretical journal of the Party; not change to make it readable was important, but that it should exist, thereby performing the magic act in its silent being.

Upon such ritual was Eugene Dennis labouring when people were frantically telephoning him that the party newspaper had been seized. He was indignant and angry that he should be interrupted in his work.

All that day, and the following, we battled and won a fight to save the paper. We wrote it in other offices; the editors put it together literally on their feet and in motion; John Gates was tireless, defiant, fencing with the Federal men, snarling at them like an angry bulldog; and one brave Left-wing lawyer fought alongside us all that day and the next.

It did not matter whether we were a communist paper or a vegetarian or the New York Times; alone, we fought for the finest tradition of our democracy, and we won.

They had seized the offices, the assets, the morgue, the typewriters and blue pencils and all the rest, yet we proved that a fighting paper is in the hearts and hands of the people who make it, not in a suite of offices.

And all through that time, not one national leader of the party, except Gates, turned up to give us strength, leadership, or confidence. The rank-and-filers came: devoted, hard-working, tired, they came with their dollar—and five-dollar—bills but the leaders remained away.

Do I dwell too much on this question of leadership? They are not accidents, abortions, sports, or misfits, who wormed their way into an organization; they are the terrible logic of such an organization.

What a tragic moment it was when the Russians, after de-

tailed the most unbelievable horror-of modern times, blithely assured the world that it was all due to the 'cult of the individual,' and that now the 'cult of the individual' had been extinguished and all was well.

No analysis of what made these individuals into the monsters they were; no analysis of the organization they led, no mention of power and paranoia, no hint that perhaps a 'benign' tyranny begets less than benign tyrants—no hint of reason; when one embraces magic, why bother with reason? Say 'cult of the individual,' and all is well.

Yet it was a Russian diplomat who told me that for the last seven years of his life Stalin met with no worker or peasant, only with his own kind, his own lackeys. Another Russian diplomat told me of Beria's record as a womanizer.

A communist newspaperman, returned from Russia, held us spellbound for an evening detailing Khrushchev's record of butchery and quick execution.

The foreign minister of a satellite country spoke of the Russian leaders' execution of his comrades:

'We communists taught the world a lesson in how to die with dignity and courage, but when it came our turn to die at the hands of Stalinist murderers, we were denied even the small solace of dignity. They beat and tortured us until we lay at their feet and confessed to the unspeakable crimes they had invented and written down for us to sign.'

We'll cast out our filth

From still another satellite land a diplomat said to me, fervently: 'We will not become a second Hungary. We will live with our pain until in its own good time the Soviet Union will cast out this filth—and then we will cast out our own.'

He was referring to the communist leadership, and he was himself a communist. That must be understood.

To speak of these things and condemn socialism is to be short of sight and shorter of understanding.

The lords of the Communist Party are not socialism; they are not Russia; they are not even their own party. They are a product of this party. It is a naïveté of the worst kind to believe that these men built socialism in the Soviet Union.

Whoever so believes should read Khrushchev's 'secret' speech, then decide whether Stalin and the collection of hangmen and murderers around him were builders of or monstrous enemies of socialism.

By testimony of Khrushchev himself, it was in spite of Stalin and his lickspittle crew that the nazis were defeated, in spite of them that a new land rose out of the ashes.

Let me return to the time of freedom of thought and action in the communist Press that began early in March 1956, full of faith and hope in a rejuvenation of the party, then started to fade in June of the same year, the June Khrushchev's 'secret' speech ceased to be secret.

The speech was published in the Times on the 5th of June. The next day, the staff of the Daily Worker met in Alan Max's office. We had all read the speech.

The terror of it was in our eyes and on our faces, and now the discussion was whether or not to print it in the Worker. Few of us were any longer young. Most of our adult lives had been given to the communist movement. All of us had made sacrifices, accepted war and prison and poverty.

The end of the road

Here were brilliant careers abandoned, success and wealth sacrificed by some, respect and honour by others, all of us joined in a tiny minority group that had been hounded for a decade, all of us driven by the dream of brotherhood and justice, all of us knowing each other well and long. And in this group, compelled by an idea that had fastened upon me, I said:

'I wonder if there is any comrade here who can say now, out of what we know and have seen, that if our own party leaders had the power of execution, he or she would be alive today?'

They all looked at me, but no one broke the silence. We had come to the end of a road, and we knew by what grace we were alive.

Some better, some worse, but each according to his talent and ability, had given his life to the cause of mankind, and we knew that for this the reward was death.

So the 'secret' speech became a reality for us, not because of what had happened in Russia, but because of our experience here, in the Communist Party of the United States.



THOSE WHO CALLED US RENEGADES

CERTAIN KINDS of non-party sympathizers were unequivocally hostile to the Gates point of view. Among them was a body of very wealthy upper-middle-class people, many of whom I knew.

Their total relationship to the radical movement consisted of grudging gifts of money, money that had to be pleaded for, begged for, to the humiliation and degradation of those who asked for it, not for themselves but for the cause they believed in.

These people walked no picket lines; they were not seen in the mass struggles of the past decade; they did not work endless hours without reward or remuneration; they gave money, and precious little of it.

Yet when the inner-party rebellion took place, they were the first to call us renegades, stool-pigeons, opportunists, and FBI agents.

In the apartment of a millionaire rentier, who will not speak to me now, for she considers me a renegade, I heard the wealthy owner of a chain of restaurants, a former saloon-keeper not fit to wipe John Gates's feet, call Gates a 'traitor, opportunist, and renegade.'

A millionaire factor-banker referred to Joseph Clark of the Daily Worker, screaming as he did so, as a 'lousy agent of the F.B.I.'

Another woman slipped off her five-thousand-dollar mink coat as she said: 'It has to be one way, the only way. You're going to have civil war, barricades, and the workers are going to have to fight and die until blood runs like water in the streets!' She panted with appetite as the workers' blood ran like water.

'What guilts,' I wondered, 'are these people trying to wash away with their crazy dreams of barricades and rivers of blood?'

Never have I heard a communist talk in such terms, but these sick people, who had seen no other death than a painted corpse in a funeral parlour, no other violence than an auto crash, these people literally lusted for an Armageddon their mad dreams had promised them.

A businessman at this same gathering, whose doll-like wife carried a price tag of ten thousand dollars in gown and jewels on the hoof as she stood, raged at me:

'So what if twenty-five thousand people died in Hungary! You pay a price for this kind of thing.'

For what kind of thing? For the rape of Hungary in the holy name of the Bolshevik Party?

'Yellow,' this man of wealth continued to rage. 'You, Gates, Max—the whole crew of you—yellow—yellow!'

And all over the nation, the mental revolutionaries, the parlour pinks, the living-room warriors, the mink-coated allies of the working class wept that people like myself had betrayed the holy cause of communism.



A BOOK WRITTEN IN COMMUNISTS' BLOOD

IN that strangely written concoction, *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, which has been a textbook for a whole generation of communists all over the world, there are surprisingly few clear references to the tactical thinking that went into the creation of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The subject of the book frequently has the ghost-like attributes of a new god, and even more often the holy authenticity of a new god, but its own shape remains a mystery.

Nowhere is there a clear, precise description of how this

party actually functions, nor, although it is referred to over a hundred times as a 'new type' of party, of how it differs from the old type of party.

And though we are treated to bizarre and often incomprehensible accounts of how the Bolshevik Party's organizational and theoretical purity was successfully defended against counter-revolutionary attacks by 'Trotskyites,' 'Zinoviev-Kamenyevites,' 'Bukharin-Rykovites,' and other groups, we are never quite sure what the core of the difference actually was.

Told in detail of the Bolshevik position on dozens of questions, we are never informed of the minority positions—except where the minority position was public property and its supporters for the most part safely executed and interred.

Altogether, it is a most curious book, written in a language all its own, filled with venom and gutter adjectives. Yet it is the major text of the party.

Originally, we in the party were told that the book was compiled by a collegium of leading 'Marxist' thinkers in the Soviet Union, a collective work—a statement used also to explain its lack of grace, style, or literary character; the point being that it contained wisdom, not rhetoric, grammar, or style.

We were also informed that Chapter Four, a vulgarized simplification of dialectical materialism, was particularly to be noted, since it came from the hand of the master himself, Stalin.

When, from 1946 on, Stalin was credited with the authorship of the entire book, we were naturally confused, the more so since, throughout its pages, the book lauds Stalin in the third person.

We were told then that Stalin did not actually write the book but merely inspired it, and that the authorship designation was against his will and in tribute to the esteem in which he was held.

Not as Lenin intended

Later, when detailed accounts from Russia spelled out his 'act of writing,' we were told by our harried leadership that they were as amazed as we, and that the important thing was the book and not who wrote it. (The Khrushchev 'secret' report reveals the true if disgusting history of the authorship of this book.)

At any rate, the only categorical definition of the 'new party' is framed in Stalin's language.

'The Party strengthens itself by purging its ranks of opportunist elements [emphasis in the original]—that is one of the maxims of the Bolshevik Party, which is a party of a new type fundamentally different from the Social-Democratic parties of the Second International.'

I believe that this book was compiled sometime in 1938 (the American edition, International Publishers, was issued in 1939).

It followed the series of purges described in the book as the 'liquidation of the remnants of the Bukharin-Trotsky gang of spies, wreckers and traitors to the country,' and the so-called 'history' was itemized by men whose hands were still wet with the river of blood that flowed from the executions.

It is evidence after the fact, and the definition does not describe what the party was intended to be, by Lenin or anyone else, but what it became in the hands of Stalin and his circle of executioners.

* * *

Though the Communist Party is disciplined and often splendid in military action, it cannot claim credit for the events we have seen.

Socialism and justice are mighty and irresistible forces. They will grow to fruition in spite of the Communist Party—and Soviet society will not forever lie supine under the heel of the commissar.

The party, with its dogma, its religious, pseudo-Marxist cant, its hatred of ideas and invention, creation and change, its priesthood, temple, and fumbling, small-minded gods, is not a product of civilization and sunlight; nor will it last long in a world that can win and keep peace.

Its own membership, which has left it in thousands and hundreds of thousands throughout the world, is beginning to understand its nature.

No more can those of us who speak in these terms be dismissed as 'Trotskyites' or 'agents' of the capitalists. We are going to speak and be heard—and raise a loud voice against any organization that bids men silence their minds.



WHERE WERE YOU, SOVIET COLLEAGUES?

IT was Ignazio Silone who cried out so poignantly to the editor of the Russian *Literary Gazette*, in the recent exchange of correspondence between them, that if a poet were murdered by the government of Italy, the voice of the people's rage would rise like thunder.

I do not know that as fact, for I do not know Italy; but in a land where poets and novelists can be tortured, beaten to a pulp, then executed in silent degradation, freedom is a stranger.

I asked about a poet, Itzik Feffer. Some of us here in America knew Feffer personally, for early during the war he came here on a good-will mission and won our hearts.

A tall, handsome man, wearing the uniform of a colonel in the Red Army, he appeared to be a symbol of what the Soviet Union had pledged in the way of wiping anti-Semitism out of Russia; for Feffer was a Jew, a beloved poet in the Soviet Union, an army officer, and a man who in every word he spoke breathed love for his fatherland.

How come, then, that we heard a rumour, a good while before the Twentieth Congress of the Bolshevik Party, that he was dead, and that he had died strangely? We didn't know. I asked and others asked:

'Where is Itzik Feffer and how did he die?'

A hundred times that question was asked and left unanswered, and we who asked it were looked at as fools because we could not understand the political subtleties of the murder of poets.

I asked it of a Pravda correspondent, only a few days before I finally broke with the party, but I was an unwelcome guest by then in the beautiful building on Park Avenue, which houses the Soviet delegation to the United Nations, for I had already spoken my first angry criticism in the pages of the *Daily Worker* and the pro-communist cultural magazine *Mainstream*. As the diplomatic reception eddied around us, this man from Pravda, talking with the voice of 'socialism' and 'brotherhood,' said to me angrily, in English, which he spoke very well:

'Howard, why do you make so much of the Jews? Jews! Jews! That is all we hear from you! Do you think Stalin murdered no one but Jews?'

I will go under oath that I quote him exactly and precisely, for while there are some words that eddy away like smoke, these were graven on my mind.

When my children were small, we used to make what we then called jump-ups. We would cut out paper figures and objects, and fasten them one behind the other to a sheet of paper. When the paper was unfolded, the recumbent figures would pop up.

So did a whole epoch pop up in his words: the word 'Jew' turned into an epithet, the brown shirts of the Brown House of Berlin, the gas chambers and the slaughter houses where green soap was produced from the body elements of murdered Jews.

Yet to his own retort I had no answer; there are memories that are meaningless if another must be reminded of them.

The Twentieth Congress came and went, and still a mocking, derisive silence greeted the question, 'Where is Itzik Feffer and how did he die?'

But the death of a poet is not so small a matter as some think. Bit by bit, we put together the story of Itzik Feffer.

After the Twentieth Congress, communists went to Russia and communists came back, and each had a little of the whole story and a few a great deal of it. Perhaps this reconstruction of that story is not exact, but it is all I could find.

It begins with the arrest of David Bergelson, the internationally famous Jewish-Soviet writer. Why he was arrested, we don't know; only the Russians can answer that. But in all likelihood, it was part of the 'Zionist plot' invention, and the fact is that, whatever other reasons may have been given, Bergelson was arrested because he was Jewish.

He was put in prison and systematically beaten so that he might confess to crimes concocted for him to confess to.

No brainwashing, no truth serums, none of the science-fiction fantasies, just the truncheon and the whip and the injunction of Stalin, 'Beat, beat, beat—and beat again.'

Before Bergelson died, Itzik Feffer learned where he was and what was happening to him, and, being a friend of his, set out to try to save him.

Writer after writer refused to join with Feffer. They were afraid. They told Feffer that if he persisted, he would be arrested.

Feffer pleaded with Ehrenburg, and the story goes that Ehrenburg refused. Ehrenburg stood high and well with Stalin. The story also goes that Feffer cried out to Ehrenburg:

'Then I'll do it alone—and when they arrest me and kill me, my death will be upon your soul for as long as you live!'

As it was. Thus, because he was driven by his human conscience, Feffer perished with Bergelson. Where, then, was Fadeyev, who shot himself after the Twentieth Congress? Where Polevoy, whom I loved and respected as I have loved and respected few men? Where Simonov? Where Sholokhov?

Where all those who had lectured the world upon the honour and integrity of human-kind—these 'socialist' men? Where the preachers and righteous ones of the *Literary Gazette*? Where those Soviet writers of honour who call America a land of barbarians without a heritage or a culture?

Yes, we killed Sacco and Vanzetti, but our own cry went out to haunt the world. Was my own voice ever silent concerning injustice in my own land?

In the name of all that is holy to you, my Russian colleagues, where were your voices when murder walked in your land? And today, the question of the poet still remains unanswered.

I am not shedding guilt. I take no refuge in the fact that I made my voice heard against injustice here. Joseph Clark, then foreign editor of the *Daily Worker* and before that its Russian correspondent, sat in my living room in January, 1957 and cried out to me, in a tortured voice that only poorly disguised his own heartsickness and guilt:

'If you and Paul Robeson had raised your voices in 1949, Itzik Feffer would be alive today!'

And I had not the spirit to claim that I did not know in 1949, as no one outside Russia had known then that Feffer stood before the firing squad. For in a sense, Clark was right in his accusation.

But it is not with this failure to know, to believe, that my Russian colleagues charge me; not at all. They shriek that I have betrayed them because I can no longer remain silent.

Lightly enough did we become writers in the beginning. We loved the sound of a story and the music of words, and we loved the books that we dreamed of making.

There was no one to tell us that desire would turn into passion and passion into a curse; and that eventually our obligation would be at odds with the whole world.

Some of us learned, but at the price of terrible pain. Because wherever we stood, we came to know that sooner or later we must break the false images, because we had singled ourselves out to be enemies of obedience!

It is a reversal of the old Faustian legend, for unless we spit in the face of the devil, in whatsoever form he be, we end with the barter of our souls.



WHAT STALINISM DOES TO A WRITER

BUT I CANNOT love the party for what it did to writers, and not the worst was to the dead. The living are also naked.

I am alive, Boris Polevoy is alive. We were comrades in a movement that I believed in with all my heart and soul, he the head of the Union of Soviet Writers, I a communist writer in America.

We came to know each other by correspondence, and, through our letters, love and warmth and mutual respect grew and flowered.

When finally I met him in New York, where he had come as leader of a delegation of Soviet writers, I embraced him as a beloved and old companion. Big, warm, open, his smile a thing of joy to see, my wife and I dragged him home with us.

'No fear?' he wanted to know. 'My coming to your home?' But how could fear exist when the two of us were together?

We had rich lives to share; we had lived and seen and ventured a thing or two; and we were knit beyond politics, beyond continents, in the brotherhood of our craft. What an evening that was—of warmth and closeness and drink and food and fellowship!

We saw him again the following day, my wife and I, at a party given for him and his comrades. Again the warmth and openness. Here were a round dozen of us, Russians and Americans, and our feeling was, may the devil take politics and politicians too.

We were together, as may all the people of both our nations come together, openly and in good friendship.

During the course of that evening, I happened to be in a little group talking to Polevoy. The conversation concerned Russian writers and what they were currently doing.

Since Polevoy speaks no English, the translation was provided by an old friend of mine, a brilliant student of Slavic languages whose Russian is perfect. The faultlessness of his Russian is important, for I have since checked and rechecked this story as to accuracy.

Someone asked Polevoy whether he couldn't provide us with some information concerning the Jewish writer Kvitko. The interrogator explained that for some time rumours had been circulating to the effect that Kvitko, among other Jewish writers, had been arrested and subsequently put to death. Could Polevoy settle these rumours once and for all?

Polevoy said that he could. The rumours were, of course, the usual anti-Soviet slanders. Fortunately, Polevoy said, he was in a position to refute them, for Kvitko was at present living in the same apartment house as he, Polevoy. Could there be a better denial of any rumour? he asked.

We were relieved and delighted. We asked what Kvitko was doing, and Polevoy said that he was finishing a translation and planned a new book after that.

He also added that he had seen Kvitko before leaving for America and that he, Kvitko, had asked Polevoy to convey his very best regards to friends in America.

So Polevoy answered, and this was witnessed by too many people that night to be denied.

But after Polevoy had gone home, after the Twentieth Congress, we learned, via a Jewish-Polish communist paper, that Kvitko had been dead for years, beaten and executed even as Feffer had been, even as Bergelson.

May all the implacable justice of time and history be visited upon those who not only murdered men and artists, but who dirtied the soul of such a man as Boris Polevoy.

For it was not merely a tragic and grotesque lie that Polevoy told; his invention was the summation of what the Communist Party does to a writer.



FIRST CLASH WITH THE COMMISSARS

FOR ME, a time, a life, a long thread of motion came to an end after the Twentieth Congress. It would be both a lie and an act of unbearable priggishness for me to pretend that I did not, during all the weeks and months I pondered Boris Polevoy's invention, ask myself whether I might not have done the same thing in his place.

Nor can I truthfully say that I know the answer to such a question for, like Polevoy, I underwent a process. But the mind of man is a marvellous instrument, and it compensates for distortion of reality.

From the very beginning of my party experience, I, like so many others, began to accumulate a store of hatred.

I say flatly that there is no communist of any integrity and

intelligence who does not accumulate such a store of hatred during his experience in the party; for rebels do not take easily to obedience; they must be whipped into it, and a whip leaves scars.

* * *

My first meetings, the rapid and clever argumentation and quoting of 'scripture', the skill of refutation, left me a little bewildered and humble.

The first commissar I met—he was the paid organizer of the section to which I was assigned—compensated for this very cleverly. A thin, slight, intellectual-looking man of about forty, he stressed his own humility and laid out for me two worlds of knowledge and skill.

In the non-communist world, he acknowledged my achievement and knowledgeability; in the communist world, he emphasized his own know-how.

He explained very matter of factly that I would want and need either a crutch or a strong staff to lean upon, depending on how you looked at it. He was that crutch or staff.

He contended also that I would have constant need of that attribute which, in communist circles, is pronounced like the name of the holy of holies, to wit, 'clarity'.

Until now I had, it was taken for granted, lived cheek to cheek with confusion; I could no longer afford this; it would be, in the private phraseology of the party, 'detrimental to my political development'. He would supply this much-needed clarity.

At the time I did not, as I did later, recognize the priest of a new temple. I saw only a personable man with a vast store of knowledge about the organization with which I had allied myself.

I was sick and horrified

As for myself, I knew no more of that organization than its name and stated purpose. Not for years to come would I begin to understand its working mechanism.

My novel, 'Freedom Road', had just been completed, printed and bound, and was scheduled for publication in the near future. I had given this section organizer a copy to read, and now he asked me for additional copies.

The book presented problems, he explained. It was quite true that I had written it before I joined the party; nevertheless, the problem was a difficult one.

He did not want to see the party attack me and the book so soon after my joining, yet the party could very well make such an attack as a matter of 'principled action', another holy term in the party lexicon.

I was sick and horrified to hear this, a feeling I was to become increasingly familiar with as subsequent books of mine were published, and I begged to know what awful mistake I had made.

He corrected me. In party terminology there are no mistakes, only 'errors', 'errors of judgment', 'political errors', 'errors of a bourgeois nature', etc. I had indulged in an error.

A misinterpretation of history, surely?

No, said the organizer, my error was more serious. I had used the word **nigger**. Throughout the book. This in itself constituted grounds for expulsion, and, together with the fact that Mike Gold had seen in my previous novel, 'Citizen Tom Paine', Trotskyite tendencies, could create a very serious situation. Not, he said, that he agreed with Mike Gold. Mike was a damn fool about Trotskyite tendencies. But there it was.

I tried to justify my use of the word. I made it plain how utterly despicable I thought the word was.

But, I contended, since in the period with which my novel dealt the word was used in the manner I had used it, how could I possibly avoid it? The whole question of plausibility would be undermined; and how could I capture the reader's attention and belief if I engaged in anachronisms and contrivances?

In any case, the book had already been printed in a very large edition, and at this point there was nothing I could do about it.

The functionary acknowledged that the discussion was after the fact, but no more. I was arguing in bourgeois premises

and missing the whole point of 'socialist realism', to the elevation of 'naturalism'.

It was true that in some instances of direct quotation, the party permitted the use of n---r, but never the spelled-out word.

However, all was not lost. He had some powerful and reasonable friends high in the party apparatus; he would give each of them a copy of the book to read; if they threw their weight into the picture, an exception might be made in this case.

His political know-how was effective, and, though by the skin of its teeth, 'Freedom Road' was reviewed favourably in the party Press. I had crawled through the first barrier.

* * *

The commissars changed as the years passed, but not the nature of the insanity . . . The fact that I was reduced to a point where I scanned each manuscript microscopically in the hope that I could frustrate the end-critique is utterly contemptible.

My only virtue lies in that I continued to sin against the commissar for years to come.



THE BOOKS THEY COULD NOT DESTROY

THERE is a notion current that communist writers are told what to write, but this contains as little truth as most of the popular legends about the party.

There are two reasons why this is impossible. First, the party leadership has neither the wit nor the imagination to contrive content for any novelist. Second, even they recognize that such a procedure would make writers impotent.

There is another popular notion that communist writers must submit manuscripts to be read before publication.

In all fairness, I must say that no one in the party leadership—with the single exception of Steve Nelson, a wonderful human being who was never admitted into the top leadership during my years—ever showed the slightest interest in what I was writing or in reading any manuscript of mine before publication.

In any case, interest came only when my 'bourgeois literary sins' were unearthed by the specialist in the field and brought to the attention of the leadership.

Yet I have known many writers who, of their own free will and sense of discipline, submitted their manuscripts to be read by so-called cultural leaders of the party.

I have seen such manuscripts savagely torn to pieces, dogmatized and robbed of essence, until the writer, beaten and hopeless, reduced his work to the lifeless husk the party demanded.

In my own case, quite by accident, a manuscript of a play of mine entitled '30 Pieces of Silver' fell into the hands of a petty party functionary. It was given to him by an actress who was reading it for a part.

After he had read it, he telephoned me, demanded that I meet him at a certain place, and there arbitrarily, in terms of savage vindictiveness, ordered me to change the third act.

He told me quite bluntly that he was very close to Pettis Perry, then general secretary of the party, and that unless I made the changes he demanded, he would see to it that Perry expelled me from the party. He also let me know that Perry would in no way be displeased to have an excuse for taking such action.

The reiteration and itemization of this type of thing is both degrading and boring; yet for all the mean and sordid humiliation of the process, I can say, looking back now, that I think I was right in refusing to allow myself to be expelled from the party.

Had I allowed it to come to that, as so many others did, I would have lost all power to influence the hundreds of thousands the world over who today see themselves in much the same position as myself.

Yet it was no easy task. When I published my novel 'Clarkton', I was charged with anti-party action because I had depicted an Irish worker, a communist, as taking on a bit of a load when his problems became too great for him. The

admission was forced on me that no communist ever got drunk.

When 'My Glorious Brothers' appeared, I was brought up before the secretariat of the party on charges of **Jewish bourgeois nationalism**.

When 'The Proud and the Free', a novel of the American Revolution, was published, I was brought up before a subcommittee of the secretariat, then consisting of Betty Gannett and Pettis Perry, with V. J. Jerome added as special cultural consultant.

This time I was charged with **white chauvinism**, most seriously, and given to understand in no uncertain terms that unless I made a satisfactory public apology, I would be expelled.

I have always had a particular affection for 'The Proud and the Free'. It was my last book of that period to be brought out by a commercial publisher of established standing, and was published in the fall of 1950 by Little, Brown and Co.

Understandably, it received little public attention then, at the high point of both the Korean War and McCarthyism; yet at the risk of being decidedly immodest, I will say that I feel it to be one of the best novels on the American Revolution to appear in recent years, superior to the other novels I wrote in that same period, and certainly my most lyrical work.

In it I attempted to catch the essence of revolution, to bare the eternal soul of the revolutionary, as symbolized by the poor devils of Anthony Wayne's Pennsylvania Line, and by so doing to create my own song and symbol of America.

On the basis of years of research, of listening with a not unskilled ear, and of intimate association with people who still speak the language of our ancestors, I attempted to recreate the speech of that period.

How well or poorly I succeeded I hope that some day more impartial critics than those who judged the book originally will decide; but even my attempts were of no interest or importance to the three who sat in judgment on me.

They were concerned with the original sin that marked my entrance into the party, for in the book under discussion I had used the eighteenth-century word **nayger** for Negro, putting it on the lips of Colonial soldiers who had actually used it.

To make up for the 'heresy' I was to write a public confession, a degrading apology, to appear in Political Affairs, along with an additional confession that I had made the soldiers of the period too knowledgeable, since in acting as they had they violated cardinal principles of 'Marxism'.

But this I could not do. Seven years had passed since the first incident, and I had come to understand much better the nature of this sickness.

Whether I would have accepted expulsion from the party then, I do not know; ironically enough, I was saved, if one wants to call it that, by government action against Political Affairs and its editors.

It was conceded that at the moment it would be unwise for me to appear in the magazine with a confession of this sort, and a year and a half later, when the issue might have been raised again, a new culprit appeared on the scene, this time my novel 'Spartacus'.

Only another writer can understand what went into the making of 'Spartacus'. A book I had dreamed of writing for years, I developed it in my mind and gave it structure in a Federal prison.

Free again, I sat down to write a trilogy of twelve hundred pages, wrote and pruned for a year and a half—and emerged finally with 550 manuscript pages and the feeling, for the first time in my life, that I had mastered my material and created an enduring book.

As I read them over, all that I had written in the twenty years before seemed immature, half-finished. That was not a considered judgment; it was merely that I was flushed with gratification of having licked the hardest job I had ever undertaken as a writer and also produced something of worth.

During the following months, the book was submitted to seven other publishers, all of whom declined to publish it. At that point, unable to endure the humiliation of further rejections, I decided to publish it myself.

So it began, the editing, printing, packing, distributing—and finally the miracle of a book published by myself turning

into a best seller and selling 35,000 copies in a few months.

But the commissar knew I had sinned and must be punished for my sins. This time he was the 'cultural overlord' of the West Coast, in New York at the time, and filled with hate and anger for my book.

My own stupidity was inexhaustible; my own inability to learn beyond correction. For two years and more, I had laboured to produce a book which would be an epic of the oppressed, a paean to liberty and the high conscience of mankind.

I had laboured under the notion that I was furthering and giving fuller expression to the values that had guided my life. But the lashing tongue of the commissar informed me otherwise.

I had written a study in **brutalism** and **sadism**, the West Coast commissar reiterated over and over. He said to me, in no uncertain terms: 'I think it is a bad book, an evil book, a rotten book!'

He turned to V. J. Jerome, who was listening, and cried: 'I think Jerry, that we must attack this book and denounce it! I think that we must not hold back in this case! I think this book must be destroyed. It is a rotten book.'

Jerome will remember the incident well. There was to be no arena of discussion, review, criticism. I was judged guilty, but unlike certain legal situations, I was not even to be given an opportunity to prove my innocence.

But they could not destroy 'Spartacus'. The petty shame of party periodicals rejecting reviews they had asked for because these reviews praised the book was drowned in the excitement of people who read it—and it sold edition after edition. Power the commissars had, but it was limited to the structure of the party, and that structure was already beginning to shake.



THEY FAILED—AND WILL ALWAYS FAIL

WHILE MY OWN brief story may seem tiresome, though it is so small a part of the whole, it has a reason for being, and a deep meaning too. The endless slights, hurts, indignities, and broken hopes that a man like myself endures in the Communist Party are of small moment.

They would make intriguing chatter for a gossip column, but I am not interested in that. To the point is only the brief history of how the priest-commissars functioned to destroy me as a writer.

Yet they failed. They failed with every writer of stature and integrity who was ever a member of the Communist Party of the United States.

Lacking the firing squad and the truncheon, they failed the world over—and even in the lands they ruled, the writers were not docile. As with us, so with other people.

The writer's conscience is the matrix of his art, and he pays a special price when he surrenders it. But all people pay a price, as we must come to understand.

* * *

No force on earth can destroy the Communist Party, but the application of truth will melt it as rain melts salt. Its time is past.

The Russian people and the Chinese people are on the brink of such growth and fruition as was never dreamed of in the first decades of this century—even as the whole world stands on the doorstep of an internationally functioning civilization that can forever abolish war and want.

Only a fool can believe that the clique of madmen who, by Khrushchev's own testimony, almost lost the war with Germany are a positive asset in the building of Russian civilization.

There is nothing conceivable of creation in the Soviet Union that its people—the workers and engineers and scientists, the teachers and artists—cannot create.

Rid of the parasitic burden of the Communist Party, given a democratic government upon their industrial base, they could in short order turn their land into a garden of plenty.

* * *

History appears to have spelled out the finish of the time of the Communist Party, and perhaps the dawn of socialist democracy and humanism. But only the people of the lands ruled by Communist Parties can decide this issue.

* * *

NEXT week's issue of The Newsletter will be published on November 7. It will be a special issue entirely devoted to the Fortieth Anniversary of the October Socialist Revolution in Russia.

The special issue will have 44 pages, and will cost 2s. to non-subscribers. Newsletter subscribers, however, will receive it without extra charge.

There will be a two-colour cover, pictures of some of the leaders of the Bolshevik Party, and two drawings by Paul Hogarth. Here is a full list of authors and articles:

COMMENTARY MARTIN GRAINGER

WILLIAM HUNTER
GEORGE CUNVIN
MICHAEL BANDA
ROBERT ANDREWS
ROBERT HUNTER
DON RENTON
JOSEPH HANSEN
TONY GUTHRIE
JOSEPH CLARK
KAMINI MEEDENIYA
TOM KEMP
GEORGE I. LORMIN
HYMAN LEVY
J. H. BRADLEY
A SOCIALIST DOCTOR
BEATRIX TUDOR-HART
JOHN DANIELS
PAUL HOGARTH
PAUL SIMON
JERRY DAWSON
BERNARD STEVENS
DONALD VEALL
JOHN PETERS

No Force Can Quench the Flames Lit Forty Years Ago by Russia's Workers and Peasants
How They Took Power in Petrograd
Leaders of the Revolution
Honest, Realistic, Disciplined, Democratic: That was Lenin's Bolshevik Party
The Soviets—Reality and Caricature
Why and How the Bureaucracy Arose
The Bolshevik Resistance to Stalinism (1923-28)
The Purgers and the Purged
The Red Army: Mirror of Soviet Society
The Communist International and Soviet Foreign Policy
The Soviet Union and the 'People's Democracies'
An American Journalist in Moscow
The October Revolution and the Peoples of the East
The Giant Strides of Russia's Industry
Unsolved Problems of Kolkhoz Agriculture
Soviet Philosophers in the Doldrums
Secrecy, Mistakes and Crimes Have Not Stopped Science Forging Ahead in the USSR
Hard-won, if Undramatic, Medical Successes
Theories and Practice of Soviet Psychologists
Advanced Education Will Destroy Stalinist Mysticism
The Future of Soviet Fine Arts Depends on the Lopatkins' Struggle
Soviet Architecture is Not Yet Socialist Architecture
Heroes, Cult and Spectacle on the Soviet Screen
Great Performances, but Few Creative Minds
Soviet Law and the Struggle for Civil Liberties
How the Revolution Was Presented to the Readers of the Yorkshire Post
A Chronology of the Russian Revolution
What to Read on the Russian Revolution