

him not only to dubious analysis but to suicidal (for Democrats) political advice.

WILLS concludes his book with an unsatisfactory treatment of church and state. It is now "our task in a society of increasingly complex articulation," he declares, "to complete the effort of [James] Madison in removing religion from state ceremony and proclamations." But he does not specify what he means by this—presumably he would join with the ACLU in trying to ban every last crèche and menorah from the public square, every last amen from public schools and the halls of Congress. And he fails even to note, much less to address, the much larger issues of religion and politics before the nation today: should the public-school system remove not only religious belief but also instruction about religions and religious history? Should states provide or refuse relief to taxpaying parents who send their children to parochial or church-related schools? More generally, should states make accommodations in their laws that take into account the religious beliefs and practices of the American people?

Wills is not unaware that in our society litigation has become a form of politics by other means. But he offers little discussion of the varieties of litigation that have affected religion and morality. Nor does he examine the impact of relevant judicial decisions, especially by the Supreme Court. He simply denies that "recent court decisions have made religion less important or effective in America or even in our politics."

Yet a study of these decisions bears on any sound analysis of the origins of the religious Right, which organized in large part for defensive reasons. More fundamentally, it bears on any judgment about the historic ability of the American people—an ability weakened dramatically in the past fifty years—to decide questions of moral and inevitably religious significance through the ordinary political process. These and other matters will have to await a writer as informed religiously as Garry Wills but politically less tendentious.

About-Face

BEING RED: A MEMOIR. By HOWARD FAST. *Houghton Mifflin*. 370 pp. \$22.95.

Reviewed by RONALD RADOSH

HOWARD FAST is best known as the author of a score of historical novels which epitomized what the Old Left liked to call the true spirit of "progressive" America—*Citizen Tom Paine*, *Freedom Road*, *The American*, and *Spartacus*. He was also one of the last writers in America to give his allegiance to the American Communist party, of which he was a member from 1944 through 1957.

Now, in a memoir of that period, Fast offers us a very strange book indeed. It is a book which Rhoda Koenig in *New York* magazine called a wonderful remembrance of "the anti-Communist mania of the postwar period," and which inspired Christopher Hitchens, in the *Washington Post Book World*, to describe Fast as one who "left the Communist party for the same reason that he joined it . . . because he was interested in social justice and historical truth." Yet, as is clear from a comparison of *Being Red* with the book Fast wrote in 1957, *The Naked God: The Writer and the Communist Party*, the one thing he is not devoted to is historical truth, not even about his own experiences in the Communist movement.

Fast's earlier memoir was a strong indictment of American Communism. In that volume, for example, he declared:

There was the evil in what we dreamed of as Communists: we took the noblest dreams and hopes of mankind as our credo; the evil we did was to accept the degradation of our own souls—and because we surrendered in ourselves, in our own party existence, all the best and most precious gains and liberties of mankind, . . . we betrayed mankind, and the Communist party became a thing of destruction.

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Now, nearly thirty-five years later, Fast has produced a new memoir in which he keeps telling us that the Communist version of events, which motivated people like himself to join the party, was essentially correct. For Fast, the enemy of enemies is still Harry Truman, whom he blames for both the cold war and McCarthyism. As for the Soviet Union, whose internal faults he readily acknowledges, it is seen as having had no responsibility for the international tensions of that age.

So too with the American Communist party. After all, American "Communists had laid down their lives" fighting "for the hungry and the homeless and oppressed," and they had a well-deserved "reputation for integrity and decency and honor." Moreover, Fast now asserts, "a very substantial number of the best minds and talent in these United States were party members." It is a pity, he tells us, that their identities cannot be revealed, because their very names would "refute the uncensored slanders hurled against the Communist party." Why, having once strongly renounced the party, Fast now seems so eager to rehabilitate it, he never makes clear.

FAST informs us that he joined the party in 1944 with full knowledge of the Nazi-Soviet pact and the purge trials of the 30's. But those episodes were "part of the past," something to be forgotten at a time when Soviet troops were destroying Nazism and restoring hope to humanity. In any case, "Stalin was no great presence in our thoughts," and the lies being told about the party were so severe that there was simply no way of "winnowing out the truth about Russia and Stalin from the mass of manufactured indictments." No way? What about the writings of Anton Ciliga, or Victor Serge, or Walter Krivitsky, or George Orwell? In continuing to act as though such writings did not exist, Fast shows that he has still not learned to deal with the truth.

Nor is this the only example. Thus, attempting to nail what he considers crude slanders about the party, Fast recalls that once, at Indiana University, when he commented that the novelist James T.

Farrell was "one of the finest social realists of our time," a member of the English department announced that Fast could not say such things and be a Communist, "since any party member would face expulsion if he dared to praise Farrell." Fast offers this as typical of "the arrant nonsense" that was spread about the party.

Is Fast simply being disingenuous here, or has he suffered a complete lapse of memory? For he himself played a major part in the famous Albert Maltz affair. Maltz, a well-known author and screenwriter, once published a piece in the Communist magazine *New Masses* in which he called James T. Farrell (then a Trotskyist) a great writer even if ideologically incorrect. In response, Fast accused Maltz of, among other sins and crimes, perpetrating "the ideology of liquidation," while Maltz's Hollywood party cell called a special meeting at which scores of his closest comrades and associates denounced him. Finally, two months later, to save himself from expulsion, Maltz published a humiliating retraction.

In *The Naked God*, Fast admitted his own role in the Maltz affair. Maltz, he then said, was "a writer of talent and unshakable integrity," who had been "denounced by his own comrades as one seeking to strike a death blow at man's holiest hopes and aspirations . . . he had sinned, and the aim was to make him submit to a process of total degradation." In 1957 as well, Fast was able to acknowledge that he himself was "among those who blew up [Maltz's] criticism all out of proportion to its intent; a matter for which I have never forgiven myself." Yet today he can dismiss an "arrant nonsense" the idea that "any party member would face expulsion if he dared to praise Farrell."

ANOTHER discrepancy between *The Naked God* of 1957 and *Being Red* of 1990 concerns the so-called Waldorf Peace Conference in 1949. Anti-Communist intellectuals like Sidney Hook and Mary McCarthy correctly saw this event as part of a Communist-controlled attempt to win the minds of the world's

intellectuals, while participants in the conference, like the playwright Lillian Hellman, claimed, then and later, that it was not run by the CP. On this point Fast confirms the anti-Communists (whom he and so many others attacked at the time for "Red-baiting"): "Over 500 of the nation's leading intellectuals were willing to put their careers and names on the line for a conference created by the Communist party . . . the lines were clearly drawn, and no one at the conference had any illusions as to who the organizers were."

Yet the official conference booklet, published by the National Council of Arts, Sciences, and Professions, stated that the meeting included sponsors who "ranged in their political orientation and social philosophy from a half dozen outspoken Communists to another handful of persons barely Left of the political Center. . . . The majority were . . . merely New Dealish liberals." In other words, the party then engaged in its usual attempt to make it appear that the conference was the effort of a broad front, in which only a few Reds participated. Moreover, the conference brochure noted that a campaign had been waged in advance to discredit the meeting. How? "The Red label was to be pinned on the meeting."

This makes it all the more puzzling when Fast now writes that the intellectuals "rallied to the cause of peace with the Soviet Union," as if that were the conference's purpose, when, as he well knows, it really was to defend Soviet policy and build up a movement against America's response to Soviet aggression.

In another change of tune, Fast also ridicules Mary McCarthy's attempt at an intervention (she "was neither a supporter nor was she invited, but she appeared, umbrella in hand, striding fiercely down the center aisle . . . where the literary panel was in session," at which point Fast "took the wind out of her sails" by helping her onto the platform).

Here, by dramatic contrast, is how he described the same incident in *The Naked God*:

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It should also be noted that when . . . [Fadeyev, the Soviet Cultural Commissar] was asked directly by Mary McCarthy and some of her friends to explain what had happened to a number of Soviet writers, whom they carefully named, he not only gave his solemn word as a Soviet citizen that all of the named writers were alive and well, but he brilliantly ticked off the titles and description of the work that each particular writer had engaged upon. He . . . even repeated details of their merry reaction to the "capitalist slander" that they were being persecuted. So smooth and ready was his rejoinder, so rich was the substance of his quickly supplied background, that one might as well credit him with more creative imagination than he had ever shown in his own books. As chairman, . . . I was quite naturally provoked that Miss McCarthy . . . should so embarrass this fine and distinguished guest. His conviction and meticulous sincerity were above suspicion . . . how could they possibly have believed that a man would create such a monstrous and detailed lie and expect it to hold water? . . . Yet this is precisely what it was . . . and all of the men Fadeyev had spoken of so casually and lightly and intimately were, at the time he spoke, either dead from the torture chambers of the secret police or by firing squads, or lying in prison, being tortured and beaten.

THE Rosenberg case provides yet another instance of Fast's inability to deal with historical truth. He writes that "with all the books and articles about the Rosenbergs, no one ever questioned why the important atomic physicists of the time were not brought in as witnesses." But in *The Rosenberg File*, Joyce Milton and I show that the defense had indeed approached the major scientists—including sympathetic fellow-travelers—and

they all responded that the information supplied by David Greenglass could well have been of value to the Russians.

Again, Fast accurately notes the party's reluctance to enter the case, and he claims credit for persuading it to change its mind. The evidence, however, strongly indicates that the American party went in only after it was sure that the Rosenbergs would not cooperate with the government, and after French CP chief Jacques Duclos began an international campaign around the case, meant to deflect the West's attention from the anti-Semitic Slansky purge trial going on in Czechoslovakia. The Rosenbergs, Duclos proclaimed in Paris, were being sentenced to death because they were Jews, while the Slansky group had received a death sentence because they were traitors.

Fast's own contribution to this propaganda campaign was to paint a picture abroad of a United States in the grip of fascism, with Truman and then Eisenhower playing the role of Hitler. Today, instead of repudiating that version, he endorses it: "The terror was not slackening," he writes incredibly of those years in *Being Red*, "the Rosenberg case had been orchestrated to an anti-Communist frenzy that matched the exuberant hysteria of the Nazi horror."

In general, Fast seems intent on propagating the myth of moral equivalence—in particular the idea (also espoused by Carl Bernstein in *Loyalties*) that America too had its gulag and reign of terror. Yet Fast once knew better. In his earlier account, Fast acknowledged that although he himself went to prison for contempt of Congress and was forced to become his own publisher because his books had been dropped by his commercial house (as well as being removed from library shelves), he nevertheless "continued to write" and "con-

tinued to live," while his Soviet counterpart "was silenced . . . [and] cruelly tortured and . . . put to death."

Today, amazingly, he seems unaware even that the McCarthy era is over. He says that the Communist Control Act of 1954—which, due to Supreme Court decisions, became inoperative—is "still part of the criminal code of the United States," and writes that "there is no law extant in any country . . . as all-embracing and terrifying." He even says that, for all he knows, the internment camps set up under the act still exist. Does he not know that these camps, which were kept intact but never used, were finally closed down by the hated Nixon administration?

YEARS ago, Fast co-authored a polemical article with his comrade Paul Robeson called "We Will Never Retreat." Events forced Fast to make precisely such a retreat, and when he did, his old comrades spewed their venom on him. Lester Cole, a Communist screenwriter and one of the Hollywood Ten, gave his own reason for Fast's quitting the party: "The swimming pool and house on the hill in Hollywood . . . are now his at last." Now, nearly thirty-five years later, it almost sounds as though Fast wants to end his days winning back the admiration of those unreconstructed Communists—"some of the noblest human beings I have ever known."

How ironic that, when Communism is collapsing everywhere, one of the earliest defectors from the American party should look back to reaffirm the "nobility" of that lost cause, and to condemn the anti-Communist American administrations of the 40's and 50's which repelled Stalin's advances in Europe. And how ironic too that, in our strange culture, a book written from that point of view should be so warmly received.