

BookTalk

RED, NOT WHITE AND BLUE

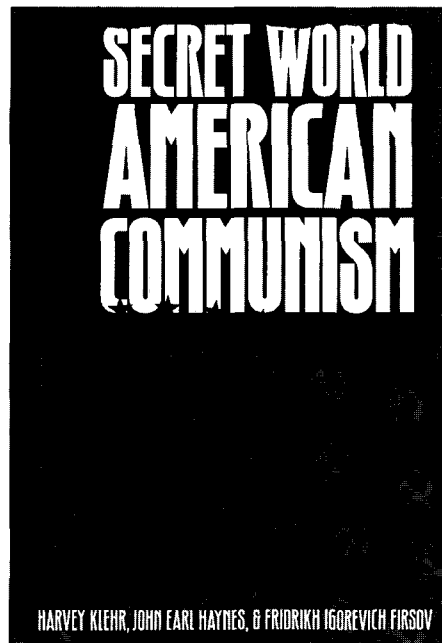
by Richard Grenier

The Secret World of American Communism
By Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, &
Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov
(Yale University Press: New Haven)
348 pages, \$25

“Memorandum to Comrade Dimitroff,” begins a January 1938 classified letter from Earl Browder, head of the American Communist Party, to Georgi Dimitrov, head of the Communist International in Moscow. At the time the document was written, Browder’s younger sister Marguerite was an operative in various European countries for the NKVD, ancestor of the KGB. In the body of his memo Browder expressed concern over the effect it would have on the American public if his sister’s secret work for Soviet intelligence were to be exposed. “In view of my increasing involvement in national political affairs and growing connections in Washington political circles,” he writes, “it might become dangerous to this political work if hostile circles in America should obtain knowledge of my sister’s work.” He “fraternally” requested that she be released from her European duties and returned to America to serve “in other fields of activity.” Browder’s request was followed in short order by a classified letter from Dimitrov to “Comrade Yezhov,” then head of the NKVD (shortly to be executed in one of Stalin’s purges) requesting Marguerite’s transfer.

These two letters, drawn from the recently opened records of the celebrated Comintern headquarters in Moscow, are documents 64 and 65 in *The Secret World of American Communism*. American scholars

Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes and Russian scholar Fridrikh Firsov have produced the volume, along with a Russian editorial advisory committee running from A. N. Sakharov to former KGB general D. A. Volkogonov. The letters from Brow-



der and Dimitrov are merely two pieces of a huge mountain of material that has suddenly become available to researchers, although there are signs that these archives are gradually being closed again on orders of the Yeltsin government. KGB files were never opened, mind you, and may never be opened. And even the Comintern files, before being made public, were picked over by intelligence officers to remove material still considered “sensitive.” But even the material that has so far come to light is overwhelming.

It is now literally impossible for any sane person to maintain—as so many

persons of kindly disposition did during the “Red Scare” years following World War II—that the American Communist Party (CPUSA) was just another political movement whose only sin was to dissent from prevailing norms and whose supporters were loyal Americans, untainted by allegiance to any foreign power. This attitude prevailed for decades in U.S. public discourse, and continues to hold the field among many U.S. academics even today. But tons of evidence have at last poured forth from Moscow proving beyond doubt that at its upper levels the American Communist Party never had the slightest shred of independence. It was from beginning to end nothing but an instrument of Moscow policy and, write the authors, a “Soviet weapon in the Cold War.” Furthermore, the CPUSA had a permanent relationship with the Soviet intelligence services, recruiting spies and serving as base, cover, conduit, courier, and paymaster for Soviet operations in this country. Documents now prove, the authors of *Secret World* summarize, that “the Communist Party of the United States of America was a conspiracy financed by a hostile foreign power that recruited members for clandestine work, developed an elaborate underground apparatus, and used that apparatus to collaborate with espionage services of that power.”

American Communists were heavily bankrolled by Moscow, and the newly disclosed documents even give some of the sums disbursed. John Reed, author of *Ten Days That Shook the World* and called “the playboy of the Revolution,” received over a million rubles for his playfulness. Armand Hammer, later of Occidental Petroleum and a very successful American financier and friend of presidents, was first set up in the banking business by Moscow to launder Soviet monies destined for Americans. The list goes on and on. Records now show that Agnes Smedley, to whom the U.S. Army had to apologize when she threatened a libel suit after General Douglas MacArthur’s intelligence

chief accused her of being a Soviet agent, was exactly that. Morris Cohen, who recruited physicists to penetrate the Manhattan Project and fled the country when the Rosenbergs were arrested, appears in the Comintern files as well. Much of what Whittaker Chambers testified and wrote has now been specifically corroborated, say the authors, "greatly strengthening his credibility as a witness."

The strange part, and the part which remains to be explained, is why the left-liberal American educated class was so resistant—and indeed remains so resistant—to the idea, obvious to anyone who had contact with Communists in Europe or other parts of the world, that the Communist Party was not just another political party. France's General deGaulle, for instance, proclaimed in one of his lapidary declarations: "The Communists aren't to the Left, nor to the Right; they're to the East." By this he meant that Communists weren't a French political party at all, as their allegiance was to a foreign power.

In 1968, having just been released from arrest by the invading Red Army in Czechoslovakia, and passing from Prague through Paris, I noticed that Joan Baez was scheduled to sing at La Fête de l'Humanité—with *Humanité* being a Communist daily newspaper and the fête in question being its annual jamboree. In France, no one but an orthodox communist of purest hue would come anywhere near such an affair. Exactly how organizers identified the newspaper's politics to Miss Baez to secure her cooperation I have no idea, but, communist publication or not, she undoubtedly thought of it as belonging to the same good-hearted Left she identified with. Upon the events in Prague, Baez abruptly called a news conference. Why, these people had just launched an enormous armed invasion of Czechoslovakia! How could good people do such a thing? She wouldn't sing for them! No, she would not!

Decades come and go. But many Americans still have warm, fuzzy feelings about an undifferentiated Left whose heart is at least always in the right place. Pious American left-liberals are naturally reluctant to admit they were wrong on the big question of American communism's

true nature. But a Left that refuses to study and learn from its dangerous miscalculations will miscalculate again.

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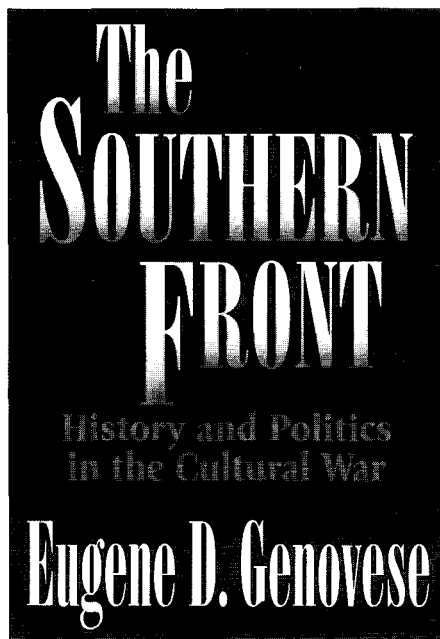
THE RIGHT'S FAVORITE MARXIST

By Katherine Dalton

The Southern Front: History and Politics in the Cultural War

By Eugene D. Genovese
(University of Missouri Press: Columbia, Missouri) 320 pages, \$30

It's a pleasure to read Eugene Genovese, for the clarity of his mind as well as his English. Of how many academics can you say the same?



His latest book is a collection of essays and reviews from the 1980s and 90s—and don't stop reading here on the assumption his is another bundle of ephemera. Anyone interested in Southern history, black history, Marxism, and the paleoconservatives will enjoy *The Southern Front*.

Real life is full of odd alliances. This atheist, ex-Communist, Italian-American black studies professor from Brooklyn has earned the respect of many conserva-

tives—and what is more surprising, their friendship. Genovese is the Old Right's favorite Marxist, for many reasons. For one, he is an excellent scholar. As a historian interested in class, power, and culture who has concentrated much of his work on American blacks, he has written several excellent books, including *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. But I think the main reason he is so well regarded by his admirers on both the right and the left is simply that he's not a liar. In the two spheres he lives in, public affairs and academic history, truthfulness is rare.

Over the years, Eugene Genovese has apparently concluded that he has more in common with honest conservatives than with some of his colleagues on the Left. Oddly enough, he has come to an alliance of sorts with the Old Right via slavery. His research on black slaves made research on their masters necessary, and in these men and their apologists, Genovese found much to admire and to agree with. In his essay "The Slaveholders' Contribution to the American Constitution," Genovese argues that those leftists who criticize states' rights because the issue has been used to justify slavery and segregation, must

pretend not to notice that [states' rights have] been inextricably bound up with opposition to finance capitalism and the voracious appetite of big business. From John Taylor of Caroline to John C. Calhoun, and, in our own century, from Allen Tate and the Southern Agrarians to Richard Weaver and the late M. E. Bradford, southern conservatives have proclaimed their hostility to both capitalism and socialism and especially to the concentration of economic and political power inherent in each.

As this passage shows, he has extended his regard for Southern planters to their political descendants in this century, who have the same interest in local autonomy, and strict construction of both the Constitution and the Bible. In the paleoconservatives Genovese has found a Christianity he can respect if not believe in, a reading of constitutional history that makes more sense to him than the Supreme Court's