

than it has ever been in history, the welfare rolls are growing.... By its own accounting, in one year HEW lost through fraud, abuse, and waste an amount of money that would have sufficed to build well over 100,000 houses costing more than \$50,000 each. The waste is distressing, but it is the least of the evils of the paternalistic programs that have grown to such massive size. Their major evil is their effect on the fabric of our society. They weaken the family; reduce the incentive to work, save, and innovate; reduce the accumulation of capital; and limit our freedom. These are the fundamental standards by which they should be judged.

What can possibly take the place of all this coercive, so-called "government compassion"? The Friedmans call for a negative income tax, which I wonder about, and remind us that for most of the life of this country charitable activity flowered, especially in the nineteenth century. Private schools, including parochial schools, and private colleges multiplied; private hospitals, orphanages, old people's homes were everywhere; foreign missionaries combed the world for converts; patrons across the country founded art museums, opera houses, symphony orchestras, and public libraries. Public service organizations blossomed, from the Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, to the YMCA and YWCA, from the Salvation Army to the Indian Rights Association—private enterprises all.

Private enterprise and humaneness? Why not? Consider the alternative, especially the fallout from "government compassion." Consider these lines from Milton and Rose Friedman:

The difference between Social Security and earlier [private] arrangements is that Social Security is compulsory and impersonal—earlier arrangements were voluntary and personal. Moral responsibility is an individual matter, not a social matter. Children helped their parents out of love or duty. They now

contribute to the support of someone else's parents out of compulsion and fear. The earlier transfers strengthened the bonds of the family; the compulsory transfers weaken them.

Washington Post, please copy.

Reviewed by WILLIAM H. PETERSON

The Red Decade Revisited

The Dream of the Golden Mountains: Remembering the 1930's, by Malcolm Cowley, New York: Viking Press, 1980. xii + 328 pp. \$14.95.

MR. MALCOLM COWLEY'S engaging account of his revolutionary activities during the thirties reveals a man whose political acumen lagged behind the power of his pen. Occupying the strategic position of literary editor of *The New Republic*, Cowley mingled with the artistic giants of his age. His book contains insightful portraits of Sinclair Lewis, Hart Crane, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Allen Tate, and Theodore Dreiser. The sketches of the May Day marches, Harlan County, Kentucky, Popular Front solidarity meetings, which dissolved into bitter factionalism, and his awkward attempts at stump speaking provide the most entertaining aspect of the book.

In rare moments of self-criticism, Cowley exposes the pretentiousness of the writer as revolutionary. The literary fellow travelers could have the best of both worlds. They comfortably subsisted on a bourgeois income while cooperating with the Communist Party hierarchy at a safe distance. They exercised their sense of commitment by signing innumerable declarations sharing the clubbishness of clandestine front groups, and enlivening their prose with odes to the working class. Hazardous duty on the picket lines was discretely avoided. They did not chafe

under party discipline since they were deemed too suspect to become card-carrying members. Revolution became a popular parlor game.

Cowley emerges as a man of humane sentiments and intentions ultimately betrayed by communist Machiavellianism. If his actions were politically innocuous, or if he was indeed a naive enthusiast, Cowley's account would not require much additional comment. However, he barely scratches the full dimensions of his personal corruption for the cause. He endeavors to render understandable why hundreds of writers willingly allied themselves with Moscow. Intellectuals were offered hope for the future, comradeship with the oppressed, and an *Ersatz* religious faith. He implored writers to aid the communists and also to retain their fidelity to the truth. Only later did he acknowledge that these two aims would fatally conflict. Cowley simplified the political universe into a choice between either Fascism or Communism. Once this logic was embraced, the capacity for Stalinist apologetics became firmly rooted. By no means is Cowley's anecdotal history a "God that failed" confession. Though tempered by age, he is now evasive about confronting the darker details of his fellow traveling. Significant episodes have vanished into non-history.

After taking sides in 1931, Cowley served very effectively as a Soviet transmission belt who made palatable the party line for the intellectual community. While regular party members might be carefully indoctrinated and insulated from the truth, Cowley was continually admonished by colleagues and exposed to harsh testimony about Stalinism. Many liberals were initially sympathetic to the Soviet Union but grew disenchanted as grim disclosures mounted. Despite his inner doubts, Cowley persevered as a vigilant tool of the party until after the Stalinazi pact. He routinely excoriated books critical of Stalin and chastised writers deficient in social conscience. Like Lenin, he compared an exiled former prisoner of the G.P.U. to a parasitical insect on society. When com-

munists broke up a Socialist Party meeting at Madison Square Garden, John Dos Passos was disgusted by this hooliganism. Cowley maintained a sickly silence. Reviewing a book by Anna Louise Strong, he insisted that the Soviet party line was a cooperative policy planned by millions which seemed "the most democratic ever invented."¹ He also defended political censorship. Amidst the purges, he characterized Stalin as a man of integrity rather than genius who was a dictator in spite of himself. Cowley admitted that Stalin had made some human mistakes. He confessed a loyalty to Stalin but not a blind loyalty.² These rationalizations strove to persuade liberals of the deeper historical necessity of Stalinism, which was "the most progressive force in the world." Every revolution had its unpleasant turmoil but this was only part of the truth. The future would unveil utopian vistas. By retaining the right to criticize and a feigned objectivity, Cowley's prescriptions sounded more plausible and were therefore more destructive than if he merely recited party slogans.

The Moscow Show Trials offered a crucible for Cowley's crypto-Stalinism. He held that these confessions to Byzantine plots, masterminded by Leon Trotsky, were "undoubtedly sincere." He explicitly denied that the trials were frame-ups. When the Kremlin published a stenographic record of the Show Trials, he termed it "the most exciting book of the year" which vindicated the trials beyond "the possibility of doubt."³ He reasoned that Trotsky had a moral duty to form alliances with foreign governments since Trotsky opposed Stalin by all means necessary. Even if evidence of specific crimes was lacking, Trotsky was guilty of a thought crime. Would Cowley condone charges against communists for arson, murder, and terrorism because they advocated the overthrow of the American government? He attempted to obstruct and discredit efforts by John Dewey's Commission of Inquiry to afford Trotsky a fair hearing. In April 1938, after the third series of Show Trials, Cowley signed a letter, with 150 educators and artists in-

cluding Lillian Hellman and Granville Hicks, which applauded the trials. It called upon liberals to assist efforts of the Soviet Union to cleanse itself of "insidious internal dangers" that were the chief threat to democracy and peace.⁴ His only reference to this incident was that the purges were nebulously reported and that "there would never be unanimity about them, except in respect to the general uneasiness they created in left-wing intellectuals." Cowley's vain cover-up attempt was still too discomfoting to recount, resulting in yet another cover-up.

Cowley did not disclose his running battle with various anti-Stalinist liberals. He feuded with Edmund Wilson when the latter returned from Russia disillusioned. Nothing was mentioned about John Dewey's resignation from the staff of *The New Republic* in 1937 due to his specific indignation at Cowley and the journal's fellow traveling. Cowley's hostility to John Dos Passos and James T. Farrell escaped notice. Dos Passos impugned the sanctity of the Loyalist cause in the Spanish Civil War, undermining the most seductive vehicle of the Popular Front. Cowley berated the *Partisan Review's* attacks on the Soviet Union. He objected to its factional politics while never criticizing the politicized *New Masses*. Urging writers to join the revolution and enlisting as a mouthpiece for the party line himself, Cowley demanded that the *Partisan Review* confine itself to non-partisan literary commentary. By not including those who were skeptical of the "golden dream," Cowley deadens the actual controversy and skirts a far more crucial issue. Why did he remain for so long the captive of an illusion?

He fails to discuss his acerbic vendetta against the New Humanists who were considered a fundamental philosophical threat to the prevailing social radicalism. He joined the communist chorus in castigating them for being closet reactionaries who defended their class prerogatives as ivory tower academics and clergy. The New Humanists cultivated classical civilized standards and articulated a penetrating critique of modernity. They generally

refused to subordinate their vocation as scholars to the revolutionary cause. Cowley ridiculed their belief in Puritanism and tradition, accusing them of snobbery, obscurantism, and even anti-Semitism.⁵ As literary editor, he printed Mike Gold's vicious review of Thornton Wilder which defiled Christian believers and slandered Wilder as an effete homosexual. This invective reduced the level of political discourse to the gutter; its abusive rhetoric mirrored symbolically the savagery of the Stalinist revolution. Elemental honesty and decency are more than merely bourgeois virtues. Cowley reproached Trotsky for his self-serving historical accounts. Hopefully, Cowley will not repeat this same mistake. His readers eagerly await the time when, as a central figure in the literary wars of the thirties, Cowley will reveal the rest of the story.

Reviewed by GARY BULLERT

¹"Fellow Traveler," *The New Republic* (May 1, 1935), p. 346. ²"The Record of a Trial," *The New Republic* (April 7, 1937), p. 270. ³*Ibid.*, pp. 267-8. ⁴"Leading Artists, Educators Support Soviet Trial Verdict," *The Daily Worker* (April 28, 1938), p. 4. ⁵"Angry Professors," *The New Republic* (April 4, 1930), p. 207.

Spooks and Satan

Devil Take Him, by Ralph de Toledano,
New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1979.
283 pp. \$11.95.

THIS NOVEL IS an unusual effort to combine two seemingly disparate themes. The main story line concerns the murder of the anarchist intellectual, Carlo Tresca, in New York in 1943 and the successful effort of the book's protagonist to track down and kill his putative assassin. All this is enveloped with theological musings about guilt, sin, and the Devil by Paul Castelar, the renowned novelist of Sephardic Jewish descent who is the central figure.