

Reviews

The Uses of McCarthyism

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOE MCCARTHY: A BIOGRAPHY. By Thomas C. Reeves. (Stein and Day, New York, 1982) \$19.95.
NAMING NAMES. By Victor Navasky (Viking Press, New York, 1980) \$17.95.

Thirty years after his meteoric rise to fame and power as the nation's most conspicuous anticommunist political leader, Joe McCarthy continues to possess a morbid fascination for students of American politics. Though he has been dead for a quarter of a century, and though in his lifetime he was the founder of no organized political movement, McCarthy in a sense still influences our public life. This is perhaps most evident in the fact that since the 1950s there has been no more malign epithet in our political vocabulary than the term "McCarthyism." It has been used with effect to describe political groups from the far right in the early 1960s, to the far left in the late sixties and early seventies.

Most of the time, McCarthyism as a symbol of irresponsible political action has been employed in regard to domestic issues unrelated to the question of national security that provided the context for the emergence of McCarthyism in the early 1950s. Of late, however, the charge of McCarthyism has been made in circumstances that suggest a parallel to the situation that existed in the postwar period. The symbol of McCarthyism has acquired renewed currency on the noncommunist left as an instrument for discrediting proposals for dealing with the problem of terrorism. This revival of the McCarthyism symbol takes place against the background of, and is informed by a theory of, Cold War political history, advanced in recent years by New Left historians, which has redefined the historical meaning of McCarthyism in accordance with the political and ideological needs of the left. In order to understand and evaluate the meaning of McCarthyism as it is used by the left in the 1980s, it is pertinent first to consider this body of revisionist historical writing.

A brief review of McCarthy's changing historical image since the 1950s provides a necessary perspective in which to consider the New Left view of McCarthyism. The earliest critical accounts regarded McCarthy as a coarse demagogue, and McCarthyism as demagoguery trading on exaggerated charges of communist subversion in the government. McCarthy used the "big lie" technique, relied on anonymous informers, and generally attempted to govern by slander and denunciation protected by the congressional immunity he enjoyed. Moreover McCarthy's use of the communist issue was seen as cynical and opportunistic; his real purpose, critics said, was to destroy liberalism and suppress political dissent. Thus McCarthy did not appear to be a committed anti-communist, and McCarthyism was defined narrowly with reference to

the tactics of political intimidation that the Wisconsin senator employed so effectively.¹

Comparable in its directness and simplicity was the conservative defense of McCarthy. According to William F. Buckley, Jr., and L. Brent Bozell, Joe McCarthy was a dedicated if occasionally overzealous enemy of communism, who performed a vital and constructive work as a kind of national "prosecutor" of subversives and brought a new skepticism to the internal security field. Denying that McCarthy's investigations interfered with constitutional liberties, conservatives viewed McCarthyism as the quest for a national orthodoxy that excluded communism from the range of acceptable political action and association. "In a Communist-haunted age," wrote a conservative supporter, McCarthy satisfied "the deep national hunger for an affirmative man."²

In the mid-1950s a number of liberal scholars offered a socio-cultural explanation of McCarthyism that had a persuasive appeal for many intellectuals. According to Daniel Bell, Richard Hofstadter, and the other authors of *The New American Right* (1955), the McCarthy movement was based on the support of ethno-religious groups, new rich businessmen, discontented elements of the upper class, and assorted antiliberal intellectuals. Motivated by status anxiety, these groups were said to have satisfied their desire for political influence, social acceptance, or recognition as full-status Americans by identifying with Senator McCarthy's attacks on the eastern liberal governing establishment.

This interpretation of McCarthyism contained two salient political points. First, it defined the McCarthy phenomenon as a form of mass politics rooted in native American populism which encouraged destructive antipluralist tendencies and was potentially totalitarian in nature. McCarthy's willingness to attack all who opposed him, his disregard for constitutional procedures, and his irresponsible use of power marked him as a pseudo-conservative who posed a threat to the rule of law. Second, pluralist critics concluded that McCarthy's anticommunism reflected no genuine ideological commitment, but was a pretext for the pursuit of other purposes. In fact, argued James Rorty and Moshe Decter, McCarthy caused serious internal conflict among anticommunists, obscuring the real issue of formulating an effective and responsible policy for fighting communism.³

Several years after McCarthy's descent into political oblivion and untimely death, a third analysis of McCarthyism commanded attention. It had been apparent all along that McCarthy was a godsend for the Republican Party, defeated once again in the presidential election of 1948.

1. See, for example, Jack Anderson and Ronald W. May, *McCarthy: The Man, the Senator, the "Ism"* (Boston, 1952); Richard H. Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy* (New York, 1959).

2. William F. Buckley, Jr., and L. Brent Bozell, *McCarthy and His Enemies, The Record and Its Meaning* (Chicago, 1954); Harold Lord Varney, "What Has Joe McCarthy Accomplished?" *American Mercury*, May 1954, quoted in Earl Latham, ed., *The Meaning of McCarthyism* (Boston, 1965), p. 116.

3. Daniel Bell, ed., *The New American Right* (New York, 1955); James Rorty and Moshe Decter, *McCarthy and the Communists* (Boston, 1954).

In the 1960s political scientists such as Nelson Polsby and Earl Latham formulated an appealingly simple explanation of McCarthyism based on this fact. According to this political interpretation, the Republican Party, desperate after two decades of Democratic rule, used McCarthy as an instrument for regaining power. It was professional politicians, in other words, who created McCarthyism. Dismissing the ethnic and status-anxiety theory of the pluralist critics, the political scientists examined voting records to show that McCarthy received his principal support from traditional Republican constituencies. So far from being a neo-populist or quasi-totalitarian aberration, McCarthyism reflected the conventional operation of the American political system.⁴

Even a cursory examination of the historical record showed, however, that the storm of controversy that surrounded McCarthy was most emphatically not "politics as usual." On the contrary the McCarthy era, at least for a large number of Americans, was more like a time of civil war, so intense were the hostilities that McCarthyism engendered. Yet the source of this profound hostility was at bottom not so much McCarthy's personality and political methods, exceptional as these were, but rather differing perceptions and evaluations of the communist problem.

With the exception of communists, fellow travellers, and militant noncommunist liberals, explanations of McCarthyism in the 1950s and early 1960s recognized that after World War II the United States faced a genuine threat in the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, in the presence of Soviet espionage agents in the Western democracies, and in the Communist Party USA and its adherents, supporters, and sympathizers. In most studies of McCarthyism appearing after 1966, however, this fundamental fact was denied, disregarded, or minimized into insignificance. It was, of course, the emergence of the New Left and its antidemocratic, anti-capitalist ideology—and the swift acceptance of this ideology among American intellectuals—that explains this remarkable revision of history. What New Left revisionism produced on the one hand was a picture of the Cold War without Stalinism and the communist problem, and on the other hand an explanation of Cold War domestic politics that virtually ignored McCarthy and equated McCarthyism with liberal anticommunism.

The central premise of the New Left view of the McCarthy era was the assumption that the United States—not the Soviet Union and the U.S. equally, and most certainly not the Soviet Union alone—bore principal responsibility for starting the Cold War. According to New Left revisionists, President Truman, rejecting Franklin D. Roosevelt's "progressive" attitude of toleration for the Soviet Union, inaugurated abroad and at home a belligerent anticommunist policy the purpose of which was to win political backing for U.S. economic imperialism. In this view neither the Soviet Union and its espionage agents, nor the Communist Party and its sympathizers and supporters, posed a threat to American security. The

4. Nelson Polsby, "Towards an Explanation of McCarthyism," *Political Studies*, Vol. 8 (Oct. 1960), 250-271; Earl Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington* (Cambridge, 1966); Michael Paul Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge, 1967).

truth was, rather, that the very existence of the Soviet Union as a socialist state and world power challenged U.S. imperialism. It was against this challenge, argued the New Left historians, a challenge that was not militaristic but economic and political, that America's anticommunist foreign policy was directed.

McCarthyism was the domestic component of this anticommunist global policy. But according to New Left revisionists, McCarthyism began long before the Wisconsin senator began to make headlines, with his wild charges about communists in the State Department. Its starting point was the loyalty-security program of 1947. In the revisionist view, liberal Democrats fashioned the communist problem virtually out of whole cloth as a propaganda tool for frightening the American people into an attitude of hostility toward the Soviet Union. A sweeping internal security program was the means chosen to manipulate public opinion, and the attorney general's list of subversive organizations was the linchpin of the system. Through this device, which was said to have sanctioned the doctrine of guilt by association, the Truman administration attempted to stifle political dissent and curtail civil liberties. New Left historians concluded: "The practices of McCarthyism were Truman's practices in cruder hands, just as the language of McCarthyism was Truman's language in less well-meaning voices."⁵

Politically the New Left view of McCarthyism was an answer to the liberal pluralist argument that the McCarthy phenomenon illustrated the dangers of mass politics. From the revisionist standpoint, McCarthy himself was relatively unimportant, for he merely carried to their logical conclusion the assumptions and methods of liberal anticommunism. Nor was McCarthyism an expression of illiberal tendencies in mass politics. On the contrary, in the New Left perspective McCarthyism was the creation of America's political elites—initially in the Democratic and after 1950 in the Republican Party—who at any point could have halted the irrational and repressive search for communists that dominated American politics in these years. Only when McCarthy turned the anti-communist weapon against the establishment itself did the elites move to stop him.⁶

Although conservatism has provided the active element in American politics in recent years, American historians still generally adhere to the New Left perspective.⁷ This is true of Cold War political history, and,

5. Richard M. Freeland, *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism: Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and Internal Security 1946-1948* (New York, 1972), p. 360.

6. Representative works are Freeland, *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism*; Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (Lexington, Ky., 1970); Athan G. Theoharis, *Seeds of Repression: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of McCarthyism* (Chicago, 1971); Robert Griffith and Athan G. Theoharis, *The Specter: Original Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism* (New York, 1974).

7. See Michael Kammen, ed., *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, 1980), and Georg P. Iggers, ed., *International Handbook of Historical Studies: Contemporary Research and Theory* (Westport, Conn., 1979).

surprisingly, it applies as well to accounts of the political career of Senator McCarthy, which by their very choice of subject matter would seem to contradict the revisionist contention that McCarthy played a secondary role in the anticommunist movement. The continuing appeal of the New Left historical schema for American intellectuals can be seen in *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy*, the major new work on McCarthy, by liberal historian Thomas C. Reeves.

Mr. Reeves's account, a thoroughly researched, well-written, and exhaustively detailed narrative, in a literary and dramatic sense places McCarthy squarely in the center of the domestic controversy over communism in the 1950s. To this extent it differs from the revisionist orthodoxy. Mr. Reeves's book, moreover, is admirably objective and fair-minded, as evidenced by the favorable reception it has been accorded on both the left and the right.⁸ On critical points of interpretation, however, he sticks closely to the New Left point of view.

His biographical portrait of McCarthy is surprisingly sympathetic. McCarthy appears as a charming, good-natured, likable, self-confident, and magnetic person possessed of brilliant political instincts and a genuinely popular manner. Yet from early in his career McCarthy was often ruthless, intolerant of opposition, and willing to use lying, trickery, and slander to gain his ends. Plainly from Mr. Reeves's perspective the latter traits stood out more prominently than the former in McCarthy's public life, especially after the fateful speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, in February 1950. Yet, in an attitude that tends distinctly towards exoneration, Mr. Reeves explains McCarthy's reckless and irresponsible attacks on suspected communists as the actions of an innocent, uneducated, unsophisticated man whose essentially romantic view of life made him "a natural prey" of right-wing extremists preaching militant anticommunism. He asserts that McCarthy, taking up the communist question for expedient political reasons, became a "true believer" obsessed with hunting out subversives and alerting the American people to the communist menace.⁹

Although Mr. Reeves's personal estimate of McCarthy is far more generous and understanding than previous liberal and radical accounts, his analysis of Cold War domestic politics comports with the New Left revisionist orthodoxy. To begin with, he discounts, if he does not entirely dismiss, the communist problem as the decisive factor in shaping the political climate of the postwar era. To be sure, he makes obligatory references to Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe, the Berlin blockade, the Chinese communist revolution of 1949. But he places little credence in the notion that communist espionage and subversion were realistically to be feared in these years, and he gives short shrift to any suggestion that the CPUSA was a potential threat to American security. All the commotion aroused in Congress and the White House over communists in government, Mr. Reeves notes, failed to result in a single conviction

8. See the reviews by Maurice Isserman, *The Nation*, Oct. 2, 1982, and Joseph Sobran, *National Review*, June 11, 1982.

9. Thomas C. Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, pp. 287-88.

for espionage—as though that were the only danger posed by communism and the only measure of an effective anticommunist policy.¹⁰

Furthermore, like New Left historians, Mr. Reeves views McCarthyism as comprehending far more than the political methods of Joe McCarthy. The techniques later known as McCarthyism, he argues, were first developed by the Dies Committee in the 1940s. The Truman administration established the doctrine of guilt by association and violated civil liberties on a wide scale in the loyalty-security program of 1947, and after the Republican defeat in 1948, “cynical and fanatical politicians and interest groups like the American Legion . . . flew into a boiling rage that quickly erupted into the second Red Scare.” McCarthy, Mr. Reeves states, was but the “temporary instrument” of these forces. Entering upon a stage prepared by others, vulnerable because of his “true believer” proclivities, McCarthy began to take the communist problem seriously. He furthermore contends that at any time before 1954, when the Republican establishment began to feel the sting of his attacks, McCarthy could have been stopped by elite politicians who knew he was lying.¹¹

On still another major interpretive issue Mr. Reeves follows the New Left schema in blurring, if not entirely erasing, the distinction between liberal anticommunism and McCarthyism. Finding the key to McCarthy’s behavior in the “true believer” syndrome, he implies that to take the communist problem seriously required the sort of suspension of intellect and reason that characterizes the true believer mentality. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover is the only other figure explicitly described in this way, but fanatical anticommunist extremists abound, and Mr. Reeves notes with perplexed dismay that all of McCarthy’s opponents—liberal as well as conservative—agreed that communism was a genuine threat to the nation. Thus while Adlai Stevenson could speak eloquently about civil liberties, “he left no doubt about his firm belief in an internal Red peril.” And Joseph Welch, the canny New England lawyer who got the upper hand over McCarthy in the televised Army hearings, could call Major Irving Peress “a no-good Communist.”¹² The inference to be drawn, presumably, is that all anticommunists were afflicted with the “true believer” neurosis, and differed from McCarthy only in degree.

While liberal historians like Mr. Reeves reflect the continued acceptance of New Left revisionism in academic historiography,¹³ radicals have adapted and refined their conception of McCarthyism to meet contemporary political needs. In a general sense these needs arise from the spread of conservative attitudes in the public at large, including the growth of neoconservatism as an intellectual movement and its merger with traditional conservatism. It is clear also that the continued expan-

10. Reeves, p. 206.

11. Reeves, pp. 213, 534–35, 675.

12. Reeves, pp. 452, 632.

13. Other recent works on McCarthy that express a revisionist point of view are Michael O’Brien, *McCarthy and McCarthyism in Wisconsin* (Columbia, Mo., 1980), and Edwin R. Bayley, *Joe McCarthy and the Press* (Madison, 1981).

sion of Soviet power by military means has made it difficult for the left to appeal to communist or socialist models of political change. Under the circumstances the New Left resorts to attacks on U.S. "imperialism" abroad and corporate capitalism at home. Moreover, it becomes all the more important for the left to discredit anticommunism, both historically in the McCarthy era and in its present manifestation as the framework for dealing with the problem of terrorism. The manner in which the noncommunist left approaches this twofold task can be seen in Victor Navasky's recent celebrated account of the McCarthy era, and in radical attacks on what is perceived to be a new McCarthyism among those who seek more effective means for dealing with the threat of terrorism.

Mr. Navasky's strategy in *Naming Names*, an account of the McCarthy era organized around the investigations of communists in Hollywood by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, is dictated by several factors. Not only has it become impossible at this late date to explain away the crimes of Stalinism, but it has also become difficult to cling to such long-held articles of radical faith as believing in the innocence of Alger Hiss, or denying the basic accuracy of the accounts of ex-communists such as Whittaker Chambers and Louis Budenz.¹⁴ The New Left response to these obstacles has been to attack liberal anticommunists for starting the Cold War and inaugurating McCarthyism, and Mr. Navasky bases his account on this revisionist foundation. His distinctive contribution is to mount a new campaign of moral condemnation against all those—and especially liberals—who testified about communist activity or, in his words, chose to "crawl through the mud" and engaged in the infamous practice of "informing."¹⁵

As historical setting, Mr. Navasky presents the familiar revisionist picture of the Cold War. He denies that Stalinism provided the main context in which anticommunist policies were adopted; that a genuine communist problem existed in the United States; or that the CPUSA was any different from other American political parties. Concerning the intentions of the Soviet Union in the postwar period, Mr. Navasky is resolutely agnostic. The most he can say about the origins of the Cold War is that it resulted from a conflict of rival imperialisms, both American and Russian.

Having disposed of the key historical problems, Mr. Navasky turns to his main endeavor—attacking those who testified about communist activity in the United States. He does so on the basis of a new theory of ethics—and of politics—in which "informing" is regarded as a heinous act, to be condemned as severely as murder, lying, treason, theft, and incest. Of course, Mr. Navasky notes that the presumption against informing is not absolute—those who informed against Richard Nixon, he observes, did the right thing—but he treats it as an unpardonable transgression in relation to the communist question. Ignoring well-established ethical

14. On the Hiss case, see Allen Weinstein, *Perjury* (New York, 1978). Concerning the testimony of the former communists, see Herbert L. Packer, *Ex-Communist Witnesses: Four Studies in Fact Finding* (Stanford, 1962).

15. Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names*, p. xiii.

arguments and legal rules approving and requiring citizens to give information concerning criminal matters and to speak truthfully in politics, Mr. Navasky simply denies that the communist problem provided a legitimate context in which to give information about anyone's political associations and activities.

Mr. Navasky attends only briefly to the informing function of ex-communists and covert FBI agents, who have been dealt with in previous works. His chief target rather is the "liberal informer"—writers such as James Wechsler, Elia Kazan, and Budd Schulberg, who testified before the congressional committees, and organizations such as Americans for Democratic Action, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Committee for Cultural Freedom, which imposed sanctions against communists. Mr. Navasky says these liberals were merely trying to save their political skin by demonstrating their anticommunist credentials. They thought they were saving liberalism but actually they were abandoning it. They were, he declares, waging sectarian warfare against the Stalinists by using the Stalinist tactic of betrayal. "The informer's highest claim to virtue is that he told the truth," Mr. Navasky continues, "but we learn that as a class they were involved in a fiction." In general this was the fiction or myth of the communist menace; in particular, "the lie was that they were telling all when they only told some."¹⁶

Whereas other leftist writers have compared the anticommunist policy of the postwar era to the Stalinist purges,¹⁷ Mr. Navasky likens it to Nazism and the concentration camps. It would be excessive, he writes, to say that liberal organizations which placed sanctions on communists or testified about communist activity were " 'playing the Kapo role,' but it would be obtuse to ignore that they were doing the authorities' dirty work."¹⁸ Though conceding that McCarthy was not Hitler and that blacklist victims obviously suffered less than the victims of the camps, Mr. Navasky nevertheless finds the analogy compelling. For "the mechanisms of repression underlying McCarthyism had something in common with the mechanisms of repression of both fascist and Communist bureaucrats—namely, the joining of cultural, corporate, and political forces of domination. . . ."¹⁹

If this means anything more than the trite observation that systems of control depend on the dominant forces in society, if it is intended to mean that Cold War America was a totalitarian society, it is a pernicious falsehood. Yet there can be little doubt that this is the point Mr. Navasky wishes to make. For he is quick to point out, not the differences between the political ideas and practices of the United States and those of the totalitarian states, but rather, as it appears to him, the profound difference between communism and fascism. The values of the two rival powers were diametrically opposed: communists identified with the weak and spoke the language of social justice, while fascists identified

16. Navasky, p. 425.

17. David Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York, 1978).

18. Navasky, p. 408.

19. Navasky, p. 411.

with the elite and spoke the language of racism and violence. Can there be any doubt as to which of these systems Mr. Navasky prefers? The simplistic rhetoric of anticommunism, he sententiously concludes, "should be replaced with a vocabulary that frankly acknowledges that the identification of a totalitarian, like the identification of a pluralist, is but the beginning of a set of presumptions from which one must always struggle toward the truth."²⁰

As is apparent, Mr. Navasky's book serves as a useful guide to the political values of the noncommunist left in the 1980s. In general terms, of course, Mr. Navasky and his fellow liberals and radicals endorse "socialist-humanist" values, which they believe are the only true basis for creating a genuine sense of community. Yet it is not any particular socialist model that provides the focal point of New Left political agitation, however attractive Cuba or China may be for certain purposes. The central and unifying theme, the positive good that they desire, is rather the defense of civil liberties in the United States.

Mr. Navasky identifies himself most conspicuously with the tradition of civil libertarianism, which he regards as the very essence of American nationality. He is fond of pointing out the deep commitment of the liberal left to what old-line Marxists disparagingly describe as "bourgeois liberties." In a political sense, however, left-wing libertarianism since the start of the Cold War has served mainly to deflect criticism of, and obfuscate judgments about, communism. Like most libertarians, Mr. Navasky cannot see the forest for the trees: he cannot see that freedom of speech and of the press and other legal rules specifying particular rights and immunities are not ends in themselves, to be treated as absolutes, but rather are means for the preservation of civil liberty—the condition of political freedom under institutions of republican self-government, which is the defining characteristic of American nationality.

Failing to understand this, or choosing to ignore it, the left argues that in the McCarthy era it was necessary to insist on the defense of communists' constitutional rights. For what was "at stake," Mr. Navasky writes, "was not the well-being of the Communist Party, but rather the rights of all Americans and the well-being of the First Amendment." Mr. Navasky's message seems to be that if we faithfully uphold the First Amendment (in its proper libertarian meaning) and are willing "to tolerate a little subversion" as "the price of freedom, dignity, and experimentation," all will be well with the republic.²¹

More original than this hackneyed libertarianism is his elevation of personal friendship into a preeminent political value. According to Mr. Navasky, the anticommunist witnesses of thirty years ago violated this sacred value, and thereby destroyed social trust and the possibility of true community. Reversing the 1960s slogan that "the personal is political," he seems to reduce the political to the personal. Unwilling or unable on political grounds to defend those who, when asked about their Communist affiliations, invoked the Fifth Amendment, he resorts to specious ethical philosophizing.

20. Navasky, pp. 411–412.

21. Navasky, pp. 306, 333.

Consider Mr. Navasky's explanation of how, had he been a participant in the events of the early 1950s, he would have advised those who were asked to testify before congressional committees. He tells us he would have urged radicals to defend their past political activities, on the ground that they would suffer whether they talked or not, and also because society had something to learn from their account. But to reason thus, Mr. Navasky adds, is merely a post-hoc political judgment, which must yield to the fact that in the time of McCarthyism "resistance became identical with morality."²² In other words, refusal to testify about communism is to be regarded as a moral rather than a political act. The result is an astonishing transvaluation: those who gave information about communist activities are judged to have betrayed both friends and community, while those who kept silent are found to have been virtuous and moral.²³

Prepared to judge individual behavior on the basis of a transpolitical personal ethic, Mr. Navasky nevertheless refrains from ethical evaluation of the Soviet Union. The central issue in the McCarthy era, he asserts, was not whether Stalin's deathlist was worse than the anticommunist blacklist; of course it was. The key question was "whether to fight the deathlist it was necessary to support the blacklist, whether collaboration with the American informer system was the price of fighting the Soviet gulag system."²⁴ Mr. Navasky seems plainly to imply that it was not. Yet one wonders how the libertarian left who so clearly provide inspiration for Mr. Navasky and the noncommunist left today—men such as I. F. Stone, Carey McWilliams, H. H. Wilson, and Thomas I. Emerson—fought against Soviet tyranny. These liberals, Mr. Navasky explains, "refused to advertise their reservations about Communism" because to do so would have been self-serving (again, these are virtuous men!), and because it would have weakened the civil liberties of all Americans.²⁵ We may conclude, then, that the noncommunist left fought Stalin's gulag by opposing any interference with communists' civil liberties and by refusing to talk about communist activities!

Whether the New Left's political and ideological needs influence its historical revisionism or its revisionism shapes its view of contemporary issues, the left today approaches the problem of international terrorism precisely as it dealt with the communist problem in the postwar era. According to this analysis, international terrorism is the new myth, replacing the menace of communist subversion, that is used by the forces of a new McCarthyism to frighten public opinion and weaken American de-

22. Navasky, p. 421.

23. In his introduction to Lillian Hellman's *Scoundrel Time*, Gary Wills anticipated this "ethical" defense of those who refused to testify. The refusal of Miss Hellman and others, Mr. Wills wrote, was based on a personal code rather than on political ideology. It was the Cold War liberals, choosing to cooperate with the congressional investigators, who used ideology as an escape from personal responsibility. *Scoundrel Time* (New York, 1976), p. 26.

24. Navasky, p. 311.

25. Navasky, p. 50.

mocracy. As in the late 1940s, heightened concern for internal security is seen as a pretext behind which America's conservative elites seek to restrict civil liberties and suppress grass roots opposition to their rule.

Although most observers would agree that international terrorism has been a major problem since the late 1960s and that it constitutes a serious threat to domestic peace in the United States, the noncommunist left denies this fact. "A commodity in enormous demand," writes libertarian lawyer Frank J. Donner, the left's acknowledged expert on the subject, "terrorism is in pitifully short supply."²⁶ Bombing incidents may occur in the United States, but these are viewed as isolated events unrelated to international terrorism. We are assured, moreover, that while some protest groups espouse violence, most are ideologically committed to nonviolence and hence pose no potential threat of terrorist activity. In this view there is no connection, no dynamic continuum among protest organizations that might possibly result in the proliferation of terrorist undertakings.²⁷

This analysis seems as willfully purblind as the noncommunist left's perception of the communist problem in the postwar period. It is accompanied, moreover, by equally false descriptions of a new McCarthyism in American politics, said to be evident in the establishment of the Senate Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism, the introduction of antiterrorist training programs by the FBI, the Heritage Foundation proposals for reforming domestic intelligence operations, and so on.²⁸ The renewed concern for internal security measures to deal with terrorism, however, is not a revival of McCarthyism, any more than liberal anticommunism in the 1950s was the equivalent of McCarthyism.

The essence of McCarthyism was not anticommunism, but a recklessness in the choice of means that violated standards of civility and fair play and tended ultimately toward lawlessness. This was the meaning assigned to McCarthyism initially, and the meaning it has retained in ordinary political discourse as applied to a wide variety of political groups and individuals. To define it otherwise requires an utter disregard of the historical record. A serious communist problem existed in the postwar era, and the Truman and Eisenhower administrations dealt with it through programs that respected the requirements of constitutional law. Similarly, those who today propose improved methods of dealing with terrorists are concerned to maintain constitutional safeguards for civil liberties. This fact is apparent to anyone willing to admit that civil liberties concerns are not the exclusive property of the radical and liberal left. Indeed, Mr. Navasky himself, while raising the specter of a new McCarthyism, is forced to concede that the advocates of anti-

26. Frank J. Donner, *The Age of Surveillance: The Aims and Methods of America's Political Intelligence System* (New York, 1980), p. 457.

27. Frank J. Donner, "Rounding Up the Usual Suspects," *The Nation*, August 7-14, 1982.

28. Jay Peterzell, "Unleashing the Dogs of McCarthyism," *The Nation*, Jan. 17, 1981; Victor S. Navasky, "Security and Terrorism," *The Nation*, Feb. 14, 1981.

terrorist measures are sensitive to civil liberties requirements.²⁹ The question, then, is not whether civil liberties guarantees are to be upheld, but whether, in a society that gives scope to every imaginable form of political opinion and association, it is not prudent as well as constitutional to do more than wait for "overt actions" to occur that destroy civic peace? Most Americans would agree that it is.

In 1968, at a time when popular front thinking once again prevailed on the left, Walter Goodman, an anticommunist liberal who was critical of McCarthyism, admonished New Left protesters that the problem raised by Stalinism in the 1930s would not disappear in the post-Stalinist era. He referred to the question of how a liberal democratic society ought to deal with totalitarian groups whose ideology and methods of political action make the destruction of democracy their goal. "Is it becoming for men who champion freedom in its full variety," he asked, "to make common cause, even in the noblest pursuits, with the champions of totalitarianism? Is it moral? Is it practical?"³⁰

These questions persist in an age of international terrorism. Indeed, they become all the more pertinent when it is recognized that terrorism has not superseded the communist problem but has been superadded to it. Terrorist acts are not the natural outgrowth of an irresistible desire for social justice; frequently they are encouraged and supported by the Soviet Union, as even some leftists have conceded.³¹ And yet the non-communist left, invoking the same myopic libertarianism that it has relied on for over thirty years, persists in obscuring the realities of terrorism, even as it avoided coming to grips with the realities of communism.

With a great pretense of ethical rigor and sophistication, Victor Navasky rejects what he calls the "Fallacy of the Greater Evil"—the belief that although testifying about communist affiliations presented

29. Mr. Navasky has acknowledged Senator Jeremiah Denton's awareness of civil liberties requirements, and has further admitted that the issues raised in the Heritage Foundation report on intelligence constitute a genuine legislative agenda, unlike, in his opinion, the anticommunist legislative activities of the 1950s. The danger of the new McCarthyism, Mr. Navasky argues, is not that congressmen and federal officials will use crude smear tactics to defame liberals and radicals, but that they will provide "lateral encouragement" of antiterrorist security consciousness among private, quasi-public, and state agencies. Ultimately what is most to be feared, asserts Mr. Navasky the moralist, is the tendency "to legitimize the illegitimate, to make respectable that which was previously done only under cover because it was fundamentally shameful." Citing as example the FBI counterintelligence program for dealing with communist subversion in the late 1950s, he implies that counterterrorist measures of any sort would be morally indefensible. Navasky, *The Nation*, Feb. 14, 1981. For discussion of constitutional and political aspects of anti-terrorist proposals, see David Martin, "Investigating the FBI," *Policy Review* No. 18 (Fall 1981), pp. 113-132, and Samuel T. Francis, reply to Frank Donner, *The Nation*, Sept. 25, 1982.

30. Walter Goodman, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (New York, 1968), p. 487.

31. Beau Grosscup, "The Neoconservative State and the Politics of Terrorism," *New Political Science*, No. 8 (Spring 1982), p. 49.

certain difficulties, communism was a greater evil which needed to be exposed.³² One assumes that the noncommunist left's approach to the problem of terrorism is not guided by positive approval of either the means or the objectives of terrorist groups. But it is a fair question to ask whether the left, in its ritualistic libertarianism and false cries of McCarthyism, does not in effect adopt the position that tolerance of terrorism, whatever it may bring, is the lesser of two evils when compared to the support of democratic capitalism.

Herman Belz

32. Navasky, p. 285.

In the Belly of the Beast

NOTES OF A REVOLUTIONARY. By Andrei Amalrik. (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1982) \$16.95.

Memoirs are not what one would first read to determine what national policy to formulate. But sometimes the reading of memoirs can be a valuable activity for those persons, inside and outside the government, whose minds are usually preoccupied with policy matters. Indeed, I have occasionally wondered what American policy toward the Soviet Union would be if our policy-makers were steeped in the writings of Soviet dissidents. (There is no question what it would be if those dissidents were accepted as authoritative: there would be no detente.)

Because persons working with foreign policy have very busy schedules, they are likely to find no time for such a seeming luxury as reading memoirs—or novels, for that matter. There is a danger in that attitude. Foreign policy, especially *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union, is a “macro” sort of thing. But it always impinges upon and has (or should have) as its ultimate referent individual persons: “micro” sorts of things. The policy-maker who neglects to think about individual human beings is prone to formulating policy that turns out to be inhumane.

One good way to get a feel for those individuals who comprise the Soviet Union, a goal which can never be attained through the reading of even the most astute scholarly treatises, is to read memoirs by Soviet dissidents. These are legion: Solzhenitsyn, Nadezhda Mandelstam, Panin, Bukovsky, and on and on. They provide the concreteness needed to supplement the abstractions of scholarship. They serve to make human the subject of study—and in a very poignant way.

To this burgeoning literature comes now a new and worthy addition, *Notes of a Revolutionary* by Andrei Amalrik. This nondescript title comes from the one who more than a decade ago gave us the provocative little book *Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?* This new book is much better than its title. It has similarities to his *Involuntary Journey to Siberia*.

Amalrik was one of a goodly number of Soviet intellectuals who, after having spent time in those Soviet concentration camps to which Sol-