

What Howard Fast Fails to See

By A. B. MAGIL

(This is the second of two articles)

HOWARD FAST left the Communist Party not because of anything the party did or didn't do, but because of the shocking revelations from the Soviet Union. This is evident in his article in the March issue of the Marxist cultural monthly, *Mainstream*, and may also be read between the lines of his interview with this writer in *The Worker* of March 10.

Fast writes in *Mainstream* of his nine long months of "mental anguish and torment." That anguish and torment racked other American Communists and friends of the Soviet Union. Who among us was at peace? But most have not followed Howard Fast's example in leaving the party in the midst of its deepest crisis. Ironically, he left precisely at the moment when the party was making changes designed to break away from rigid dogmatism and undemocratic practices and to develop a more independent, more critical attitude toward the views of other Marxist parties and toward the socialist countries—all within the framework of the basic principles of scientific socialism.

There are at least three respects in which Communists part company with Fast: his exaggeration of negative aspects of Soviet life today; his refusal to see any change from the past in the first land of socialism, and his conclusion that the American Communist Party is all washed up because of what happened and is happening in the USSR.

IN ONE respect Fast's *Mainstream* article reveals him as unchanged. In the past his praise of the Soviet Union, as was the case with many Communists, often went to extremes. Today, while the American Party has moved to a more independent position, Fast continues to be Soviet-oriented—but in reverse. What was formerly beacon has become bugaboo. What was previously the source of all good is now the major source of evil—certainly of evil in the socialist world and the Communist movement, and of much of the evil everywhere else.

It seems to me that Howard Fast has become confused about who is the enemy of mankind. His confusion is most glaring in his comments on the Middle Eastern crisis. From the *Mainstream* article a visitor from Mars might get the impression that what happened in the Middle East was Soviet aggression against Israel. Fast speaks of Khrushchev's "diplomacy by insult and vulgarity," but he has no criticism of Eden's and Mollet's and Ben Gurion's diplomacy by bombs and tanks—no word to condemn the brutal aggression against Egypt aimed at seizing the Suez Canal, overthrowing the legal Egyptian government, and shoring up British and French colonial power in the Middle East and North Africa.

How far Fast has gone in standing everything on its head is evident from his reference to "the new brink-of-war tactics of Soviet foreign affairs." How swiftly events have refuted him! The issue of *Mainstream* was hardly off the



press when an admiring biography of John Foster Dulles informed the world who it was that pursued brink-of-war tactics in the Middle East, as he had elsewhere.

The fact is of course the Soviet Union played a decisive role in ending the major threat to peace that the aggression against Egypt represented.

FAST states that while economically Russia is socialist, it is "socialism without democracy." Isn't "socialism without democracy" a contradiction in terms? When all the means of production are taken away from a small group of private big capitalists and landowners and converted into public property, when the labor of the workers ceases to be a source of private gain for non-workers—isn't this in itself an enormous democratic transformation?

And when Fast in *The Worker* interview speaks of "thousands of engineers, of a whole literate population, of books published by the millions," and characterizes the very existence of so many students as "a miracle" in what was 40 years ago one of the most backward and oppressed countries on earth—doesn't this too indicate that democracy is inherent in the socialist economic system?

The mistake most of us made was in assuming that the fulfillment of the socialist democratic potential was automatic and would necessarily proceed without aberrations and distortions. The revelations of Khrushchev and others blasted these illusions and showed that socialist democracy, under the enormously difficult conditions that an encircled Soviet Union faced, was not only restricted but in some respects horribly deformed. But is not Fast going to the opposite extreme when he now denies any democratic content in Soviet socialism?

FAST'S position tends to obscure the real problem: the struggle to expand socialist democracy in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. It is through this peaceful struggle now unfolding that the contradiction between the democratic socialist economic foundation and various anti-democratic political and social practices, including criminal acts, can be resolved.

Personally, I'd like to see this process advance more rapidly and deeply than it has until now in the Soviet Union and most of the people's democracies as well as Yugoslavia. But Howard Fast sees nothing at all—not even what the commercial press admits. In his eagerness to justify his break with the Communist movement he paints a blacker picture than do the enemies of socialism: in the Soviet Union he sees only a continuation of past evils.

It is surprising too that in discussing civil liberties the man who built his reputation as a historical novelist adopts a completely unhistorical approach. "We have had news recently," he writes, "that guilt by confession alone would no longer be part of the Soviet legal system; but this is a far cry from the meaning of our Fifth Amendment, which guarantees that no accused can be forced to give evidence against himself in any form."

And he caps this with a blanket indictment:

"In Russia we have socialism without democracy . . . without trial by jury, habeas corpus, or the right against self-incrimination . . . without civil liberty . . ." etc, etc.

THE FIFTH Amendment, habeas corpus, trial by jury, etc. are not universal procedures adopted in all democratic countries. They are specific products of the history of the English and American peoples—of the British and American bourgeois revolutions. The different historical experience of the French, Russian, Swedish, Mexican, Indonesian and other peoples produced different legal systems with different methods of guaranteeing individual rights.

This is apart from the question of how the precious rights the American people have won are enforced, to what extent they are violated or limited as, for example, by the new law that can deprive a person of the protection of the Fifth Amendment. (Incidentally, guilt by confession alone is for all practical purposes part of our legal system.)

The real test is whether the Soviet legal system, which was fashioned in bitter struggle against external and internal class enemies, contains counterparts of these individual guarantees, and whether, if those counterparts have proved inadequate, efforts are being made to strengthen them. I submit that by this test Howard Fast's indictment of the Soviet Union falls to the ground.

A LEADING American authority on the Soviet Union, Prof. Julian Towster, in his book, "Political Power in the USSR," published in 1948, wrote:

"Many of the basic ideas of the British Magna Carta (1215), the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and Bill of Rights (1789), and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789, 1791) are to be found in the Bill of Rights of the Soviet Constitution . . ."

"Although it does not provide for a writ of habeas corpus, the equivalent of 'due process of law' in the constitutional bills of rights of the Western states is to be found in its articles on 'inviolability of the person,' 'inviolability of the homes of citizens and privacy of correspondence,' trial of cases in all courts 'with the participation of public assessors,' and the guarantee to the accused of 'the right to be defended by counsel.' Likewise, the equivalent of 'equal protection of the laws' is contained in the articles of the Soviet Constitution that provide for complete equality of all citizens regardless of race, nationality or creed, and for equal rights for women."

In addition, the Soviet Constitution provides important rights, such as the right to work, that is, a guarantee of the right of employment, not contained in the constitutions of most capitalist countries.

IT IS TRUE that some of these individual rights were grossly, inhumanly violated. That's why changes are now being made. Howard Fast either refuses to see these changes or dismisses them as of no account. But an American expert who is by no means friendly to the Soviet Union thinks differently. A Moscow dispatch in the *New York Times* of Sept. 13, 1955—five months before the Khrushchev report—quoted Prof. Harold J. Berman of Harvard Law School, described as "a leading United States authority on Soviet law," as saying that a "tremendous law reform movement" was under way in Russia.

And recently, in the *Daily Worker* of April 4, Sam Russell reported from Moscow that a new law on court procedure is being prepared that will include: extending the number and powers of



"WOULD YOU MIND FACING ANOTHER DIRECTION... I'M BEGINNING TO GET BORED..."

the people's assessors, who in some respects are similar to jury-men in the United States and Britain; the principle that a man is innocent until proved guilty; no guilt by confession alone, and the right against self-incrimination.

All this is evidence that despite difficulties and shortcomings, despite the failure of Soviet leaders to make that searching analysis of the past which the general secretary of the Italian Communists, Palmiro Togliatti, and others have urged, socialist democracy is moving forward. To be blind to this is to be blind to history.

The *Mainstream* article discloses what is not clear in *The Worker* interview: that Fast has tossed away the compass of scientific socialist principles and is steering by

intuition. Let me earnestly plead with him to recognize he is heading toward dangerous shoals from which neither good intuition nor good intentions can rescue him.

Let's hope Howard Fast, who has been a valiant fighter for peace and progress, begins to see world forces and relationships in the focus, including the massive Soviet contribution to the cause of peace and anti-imperialist national liberation. Let's hope he directs his fire against the real enemy of the American people and all other peoples—the enemy at home. Regardless of differences on the Soviet Union, let's hope he lends a hand in building the movement for socialism here. If he does, he'll find American Communists standing shoulder to shoulder with him.

Dear Editor

Letters from Readers

Alan Max's Column Wonderful

Editor, *The Worker*:

Alan Max's column about Little Miss Missile was wonderful. But couldn't he tell us something about the nutrition of the Missile family? My own hunch is that they are sustained through the Milky Way. I would like to go to Alan Max's next class on the subject.

—C. B.

The Brave One And Dalton Trumbo

Dear Editor,

I should like to draw your attention a very unusual, beautifully produced and sensitive picture "The Brave One." With the exception of the child, who has the leading part, the entire cast is Mexican. It is located in a rural area of Mexico, and also includes a tour of Mexico City. The story revolves around a little boy's struggle to keep his pet bull out of the bull ring. It is a charming story, presents a dignified portrayal of the Mexican people and is beautifully acted. I would suggest that you list it in the movie guide.

Last night on Channel 2, a reporter on the West Coast interviewed Dalton Trumbo. He said it was rumored that Trumbo had written "The Brave One." Trumbo refused to say yes or no, and commented that he finds in this way he seems to get the credit for many good pictures, but is never blamed for the bad ones. Then he spoke of the Hollywood blacklist and mentioned 200 or more, I believe, as the

number of writers who either no longer are given the opportunity to write for the screen, or if they do, get no credit, and much lower pay. Trumbo explained that his pay is lower because his name was a drawing card and the script without his name is not worth as much. He admitted to having written without credit two or three well known movies in the period since the hearings in 1947. The whole interview was very interesting and must have been an eye-opener for the listeners.

D. B. L.

150 Face Death In Africa Trial

April 9, 1957

Dear Editor:

A few months ago I read a trial account of 150 men and women in South Africa who had been active against that government's racial policy. No further news has appeared in the *Worker*. If found guilty those brave progressives face the penalty of death. Please tell us what happened.

Also on that issue, why not a picket-line demonstration in front of the S. African Consulate or at the U.N. I pledge to join that one and would just love to discuss policy while engaged in activity.

What do you think of the idea of a full page of news in the Spanish language in the week-end paper.

Finally please do not use that picture again of a woman singer adjusting the upper part of her dress.

PAUL

