

**"We were volunteer members of a militarized civil service, pledged to carry out the decisions of our supreme rulers resident at Moscow anywhere in the world but particularly in the land we were colonizing for communism: the United States." -Former senior Communist Party USA Leader Benjamin Gitlow**

# The Red Decade

*The Classic Work on Communism in America During the Thirties*

**By Eugene Lyons**

One of the foremost journalists of our century, Eugene Lyons saw Stalinism firsthand as a news bureau chief in Moscow, 1928-34. Upon his return to America, Mr. Lyons wrote a series of major anti-Communist works: *Moscow Carrousel* (1935), *Assignment in Utopia* (1937), *Stalin: Czar of All the Russias* (1941) and *Our Secret Allies: The Peoples of Russia* (1953). His recent books include biographies of Herbert Hoover and David Sarnoff, and *Workers' Paradise Lost: Fifty Years of Soviet Communism*. A native of Russia, Eugene Lyons came to America as a small boy and served in World War I. He was editor of *The American Mercury* from 1939 to 1944 and editor of *Pageant* in 1944-45. For the past 25 years he has served on the editorial staff of *Reader's Digest*, first as a roving editor, then as a senior editor.

## **From the inside flap:**

The Red Decade was the book that gave the Thirties its name. Surprisingly, it was allowed to go out of print soon after publication in 1941, and for years has been a rarity. This 1971 reissue, with a new Preface by Eugene Lyons, is long overdue.

Looking back, Mr. Lyons observes that **"Never before – or since – had all areas of American society been so deeply penetrated by a foreign nation and a foreign ideology.** Never before had the country's thinking, official policies, education, arts, and moral attitudes been so profoundly affected by the agents, sympathizers and unwitting puppets of a distant dictatorship."

"Literally millions of Americans," the author continues, "allowed themselves to be manipulated by a small group under tight control from Kremlin headquarters. They chanted in unison slogans devised in Moscow; abandoned them for diametrically opposite slogans on signal from Moscow; lustily crusaded for prescribed causes through organizations formed for the purpose by Communists or infiltrated and captured by Communists. Professing themselves 'liberals,' they meekly followed totalitarian leadership into the most illiberal movements."

The Red Decade is the only book that unfolds the story of that Communist penetration during the Thirties. Lyons covers the field: Hollywood celebrities around their swimming pools posturing as proletarian wage slaves. Flocks of professors and scientists guaranteeing, sight unseen, the fairness of the Moscow blood-purge trials. Young Republicans and Young Democrats making united fronts with Young Communists in the name of peace and freedom. Cabinet members and New Deal stalwarts addressing or "greeting" Communist-run conferences. Trade unions calling strikes in American defense industries at

Stalin's instigation for his temporary ally Hitler. Men of wealth paying the bills for efforts to hasten their own liquidation as a class. Student rebels, guests of the First Lady, booing the President on the White House grounds. Books and authors judged or ignored in top-shelf publications strictly by Party-line standards. Lifelong pacifists lending themselves to drives for the defense of the Soviet Union. Government-financed theatre and art projects agitating for the overthrow of the government.

Does some of this sound familiar? The Red Decade, writes Mr. Lyons, holds lessons for today and "is uniquely pertinent to the so-called youth rebellion. I am constantly astonished, in talking to young people, that the generation without direct memory of the Red Decade assumes that youth dissent, including 'anti-war' crusades, is something new in America. A reading of this book should, at any rate, apprise them that a vast and raucous youth movement under Communist management was shaking the country long before they were born."

#### **AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION**

The term "Red Decade" to characterize American political and "intellectual life in the 1930's has entered the national language. Not all who use it are aware that it derives from the title of a book published in the fall of 1941 that has been out of print since the initial year or two, and hard to obtain even through second-hand book channels.

The appearance of a new unabridged edition nearly thirty years after its original publication is naturally agreeable to the author who is a bit astonished to be still around to witness the event. My private gratification aside, however, I believe readers today, especially in the generations without personal recollection of this extraordinary period, will find the account fascinating simply as a piece of nearly forgotten history. Moreover, I believe that they will recognize its pertinence to the explosions of radicalism in the present time.

There have been a great many books about the Depression, the New Deal and other aspects of the crowded Thirties. Necessarily they touch upon the rebellious, utopia-oriented moods and movements of that disturbed time. **But the press, then massively "colonized" by communists and fellow-travelers, had tactical reasons for playing down the communist role in public affairs, and historians thereafter tamely followed their lead.** Some of them do allude, briefly and superficially, to the communist upsurge in the United States under Soviet management; but The Red Decade, as far as I can ascertain, is the only full record of that phenomenon.

**Never before – or since – had all areas of American society been so deeply penetrated by a foreign nation and a foreign ideology.** Never before had the country's thinking, official policies, education, arts and moral attitudes been so profoundly affected by the agents, sympathizers and unwitting puppets of a distant dictatorship. America lived through what I called "a grotesque and incredible revolution," largely run by "a swarming, disciplined, obedient and fanatically self-righteous army of Muscovite agents."

**Literally millions of Americans, some knowingly and most innocently, allowed themselves to be manipulated by a small group under tight control from Kremlin headquarters.** They chanted in unison slogans devised in Moscow; abandoned them for diametrically opposite slogans on signal from Moscow; lustily crusaded for prescribed causes through organizations formed for the purpose by communists or

infiltrated and captured by communists. Professing themselves “liberals,” they meekly followed totalitarian leadership into the most illiberal movements.

Apart from its social and political significance, the spectacle had dimensions of irony and absurdity, hilarious for the string-pullers. Hollywood celebrities around their swimming pools posturing as proletarian wage slaves. Flocks of professors and scientists guaranteeing, sight unseen, the fairness of Moscow blood-purge trials. Young Republicans and Young Democrats making united fronts with Young Communists in the name of “peace” and “freedom.” Cabinet members and New Deal stalwarts addressing or “greeting” communist-run conferences. Trade unions calling strikes in American defense industries at Stalin’s instigation for his temporary ally Hitler. Men of wealth paying the bills for efforts to hasten their own “liquidation as a class.” Student rebels, guests of the First Lady, booing the President on the White House grounds. Books and authors judged or ignored in top-shelf publications strictly by Party-line standards. Lifelong pacifists lending themselves to drives for “defense of the Soviet Union.” Government-financed theatre and art projects agitating for the overthrow of the government.

Random samples, these, out of the bookful in your hands. Myriad Americans were corralled into hundreds of local and nationwide Trojan-horse committees, leagues, mobilizations, councils, all controlled and maneuvered by their communist staffs. In retrospect, probably the most befuddled and gulled were the writers, academics, actors, etc., who rushed to the defense of the blood purges in Russia in the late 1930’s. The full measure of their fatuity did not become apparent until 1956, when Nikita Khrushchev turned on his deceased master. Most of those executed, he confessed in his “secret speech,” were innocent victims of Stalin’s paranoia, and the murder of Kirov, which touched off the holocaust, had been arranged by Stalin himself.

The American apologists for the great blood-letting were thus left holding the bag, humiliated by the belated proof of their idiocy as long-distance experts on Soviet jurisprudence. On a later occasion, in 1961, Khrushchev, returning to the attack on Stalin, said that some day a monument would be erected in the Kremlin to the communist victims of the purges. That seemed a good idea and I proposed to the foremost of the American apologists that he initiate a fund-raising campaign for the monument, to atone for his egregious error. For some reason the proposal only made him volubly angry.

Reviewing the book in the *New York Times*, Max Eastman said that the Red Decade “combines the charms of the South Sea Bubble and the insane pathos of the Children’s Crusade,” and complained that in recounting it I “erred slightly ... on the side of moderation.” He was the only one who charged me with sins of moderation; in the perspective of time I should admit to some immoderate verbal exuberance.

On the political Left, in the intervening years, some objections have been raised—notably in a magazine article by Granville Hicks—that the decade was not as Red as Lyons painted it; that the name I imposed on the time-period was excessive. These strictures, however, belabored a straw man. I did not imply that those years were all Red, any more than the Nineties were all “gay” or the Twenties all “flaming.”

My intention was to describe and document the magnitude of the communist influence, its amazing successes and the methods used to achieve them. “It is easy, of course, to exaggerate the strength of the phenomenon,” I cautioned in the Introduction, but added: “It is even easier to brush aside the whole thing as a negligible and rather amusing aberration. **The fact is that the complex United Front tintured every department of American life while it lasted and has left its color indelibly on the mind and moral attitudes of the country.**”

That summation has stood the test of time. Since the book was written, its accuracy has been overwhelmingly corroborated by postwar Congressional investigations and by defectors from the communist and crypto-communist enterprises. Even Earl Browder, the sagging Kansas bookkeeper who was Stalin's chief impresario of the political extravaganza, writing after his expulsion from the Communist Party, credited it with the initiative or complete control of activities and organizations in which communist primacy, when alleged, was vociferously denounced as "red-baiting."

Re-reading the book after twenty-nine years, I find nothing that calls for change. If anything, in the light of information available later, it could be charged with under-rather than over-statement. **The Red penetration and pollution of the New Deal government, for instance, was more pervasive and mischievous than we could know at the time.** Infiltration of the churches, as later revealed by Dr. J. B. Matthews and others, was more extensive than the book conveyed.

And one vital phase of the Red Decade was hardly covered at all – namely, **the massive Soviet espionage conducted by American citizens.** I was quite aware of the existence of spy networks and there are allusions to them throughout the volume. Most of the operations subsequently uncovered had been planted before the war. By its nature, however, espionage did not lend itself to the kind of examination and documentation I was able to bring to other aspects of the story. A full picture of the affliction did not emerge until after the war, through years-long hearings in Congress and the revelations of repentant agents like Elizabeth Bentley and Whittaker Chambers.

The Red Decade, of course, did not end with the advent of the 1940's; history does not conform so neatly to the calendar. Communist organization and influence would not again attain the leverage they exerted in that bizarre decade, but they were in large measure carried over and have persisted, in varying degrees, to this day.

The Communist Party, U.S.A. and most of its appendages (some under refurbished names) survived the body-blow of the Moscow-Berlin pact in August, 1939. Overnight they turned militantly "pacifist" and neutralist on the Axis side-worldwide and especially American support against the Allies was for Hitler a valuable part of his bargain with Stalin. The years of shrill anti-Nazi and anti-fascist fervor quite forgotten, the comrades now assumed a substantial role in the debate between advocates of isolationism and interventionism, covering the liberal and Left flanks of public opinion not so accessible to the America First Committee. Their strong position in the labor movement enabled them to sabotage defense production and slow up arms shipments to Britain.

The next dramatic somersault came in June, 1941, when the Germans invaded Soviet Russia. The main slogan for twenty-two months had been, "The Yanks are not coming!" Now it was slightly amended to read, "The Yanks are not coming too late!" With Pearl Harbor and American entry into the war, both official and popular opinion in the United States generously forgot and forgave their zigzagging past and American communists were accepted at face value as patriotic allies. Not only were they again in good odor but they were so respectable that **anyone who dared mention their endemic duplicity and subservience to Moscow, or doubted that Stalin would be a trustworthy partner for a peaceable world, risked denunciation as a traitor.**

The effulgence of Red respectability faded fast at the war's end and the unfoldment of Moscow's designs to gobble up as much of Europe and Asia as it could. Browder, hapless symbol of four years of native patriotism, was ousted and his Party once more became rabidly revolutionary and anti-American. Again

fake-pacifist, the communist apparatus was well to the front in the successful neo-isolationist campaign to “bring the boys home” and dismantle American military power. Stalin’s aggressive hostility, particularly after the Soviet seizure of Czechoslovakia, turned public opinion sharply against communism, domestic and foreign. **The Cold War – the old contest since 1917 now under a new title –** intensified. That, plus the exposure of false-front operations in the preceding decade, narrowed the scope for new Innocent Clubs and transmission belts.

Yet even in these lean years, amazingly, the communists directly and indirectly played a lead role in shaping disastrous American policies in China. Well entrenched in the prestigious Institute of Pacific Relations, which had its claws deep in the flesh of government, and still **strategically deployed in the press, universities and book publishing**, the communists and their minions succeeded in persuading Americans that the Chinese communists were merely “agrarian reformers.” **The resulting misdirection of Washington diplomacy helped put Mao Tse-tung in power: an epoch-making calamity for which we paid and are still paying in Asia, from Korea to Vietnam and Cambodia.**

What needs underlining is that the **Kremlin’s fifth column in the United States**, even after its decline in numbers and strength by Red Decade standards, helped bring about the two most fateful setbacks for the world of freedom: **the eviscerating of American military stamina in the critical post-war years, thereby giving unimpeded right of way to Soviet expansionism, and the surrender of China to communism.**

A new lease of public tolerance came to the American communists and their camp-followers with the death of Stalin. Khrushchev revived Stalin’s trick-slogan of “peaceful coexistence.” Eager faith in supposed “mellowing” trends inside Soviet Russia and its empire was industriously nurtured in the West. **Americans, fatigued and bored by the protracted conflict, now had the excuses they craved for relaxing into complacency. Those who maintained that the Cold War and the Red menace were still grim realities seemed disturbers of peaceful slumber –** doctors blamed for unpleasant diagnoses.

**And so in time “anti-communist” became a more disparaging epithet than “communist.”** Forgetting how well anti-Nazism and anti-fascism served as rallying cries for counteraction, it was now argued, even by some conservatives, that anti-communism was a “negative” approach, and anti-anti-communism, though doubly negative, prevailed.

For the Party and its teeming entourage this was a major semantic triumph. **Their success in turning anti-communism into a dirty word (chiefly the handiwork of liberals) should rate with the loss of Eastern Europe and China among the great defeats for freedom since the World War.** In the United States it cancelled out the thrust of anticommunist sentiment and organization which had acquired great vigor in the late Forties and early Fifties. **It conferred upon communists a large measure of the immunity in public opinion which they still enjoy and exploit.**

To bring the thumbnail sketch of Red history down to the present, known and self-identified communists today, just as in the Red Decade, are acceptable and openly active in non-communist and even professedly anti-communist student, youth, Negro, consumer, women’s liberation, anti-pollution and other current movements. Their opponents, if too vocal and ardent, are dismissed as reactionaries “stuck in the swamps of primitive anti-communism.” [Today’s word: “Islamaphobes” “anti-Islam”]

Such is the atmosphere that again opens to communists of all denominations glowing opportunities in critical areas of national life and policy. Anyone who follows their press can attest that they are excited by

the prospects and gearing to make the most of them. That, in turn, **makes an understanding of the Thirties indispensable, if only for the light it sheds on communist techniques and allegiances.** The Red Decade seems to me relevant, to use the code word of contemporary radicalism, to our present condition.

The Communist Party is no longer the potent apparatus it was in the Red Decade, when it claimed 100,000 members at the peak and did have about 75,000. Now it claims 13,000 and presumably does have some 8,000—approximately its size in the early 1930's. Its periphery, those concentric circles of non-dues-paying communists, witting fellow-travelers and collaborators in varying stages of innocence, which thirty-odd years ago could be safely estimated in many millions, has shrunk sharply. But Gus Hall, the American Gauleiter at this writing, has boasted that **for every real communist there are ten "state of mind communists."** Now as always, **Party pressures radiate outward from the hard core of zealots to affect the minds of some millions, especially among the young and in the so-called Liberal Establishment.**

From the beginning it has been Leninist dogma that numbers are less important than disciplined organization. When we regard communism in America—as we decidedly should—as extensions of power centers abroad, branch offices of established regimes, the numerical decline ceases to be decisive. With Chinese and Cuban forces added to the Soviet apparatus, the world communist enterprise is vastly larger and more powerful than at any time in the past. Its American agencies are therefore correspondingly more dangerous to our institutions and domestic peace.

More important than numbers, in appraising the movement today, is the fact that it is no longer subject to manipulation by a single High Command. There are communists loyal to the Soviets, others to Peking and Havana, and an assortment of Marxist-Leninists without specific foreign alliances. Moreover, other varieties of radicalism such as anarchism, nihilism, Blanquism (not new, as the more ignorant adherents proclaim, but throwbacks to nineteenth-century philosophies) are in ferment. These are surrounded and inter-penetrated by newly fashionable "life styles" of the hippies, yippies, crazies, essentially devoid of political purpose or commitment, all soaked through with drug addiction, sex pathologies, mystic cults, sheer destructive urges.

The radical milieu of the Sixties and Seventies is thus strikingly unlike what it was in the years covered by this book. What was then a near-monolithic movement is now unstable, fragmented, kaleidoscopic pluralism.

Ironically, the role played by pervasive poverty in the Depression years has nowadays been taken over to a large extent by **pervasive affluence—its guilt-ridden beneficiaries acting in the name of the poor.** As John W. Aldridge put it in his stimulating recent book, *In the Country of the Young*, "the underprivileged once again occupy the center of our attention" and "their interests dominate our view of American society far more completely than they did even in the Thirties." That perhaps is what J. Edgar Hoover meant when he wrote (*New York Daily News*, May 24, 1970): "Not since the Depression has the Communist Party found more fertile fields of agitation," and went on to say that the Party sees ready weapons for its war on America in "New Leftism, Black Power and civil disobedience."

The function of the communists today is defined by the very confusions of the radical scene: it is to penetrate and exploit the shifting mass, prodding it closer and closer to Old Left positions. Whether of the Muscovite persuasion, or the Peking-oriented Progressive Labor Party and its splinters, or Trotskyist formations like the Socialist Workers Party and its affiliated Young Socialist Alliance, **only the older**

**communists have historic training in revolutionary strategy and the anchorage of fixed beliefs. They alone can offer programs, ideology, roadmaps to bogus utopias to the herds of protesters, dissenters, compulsive vandals and other rebels without a rational cause.**

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the New Left consistently tends to move closer to the Old Left. "During 1969," the F.B.I. Director recently testified before a Congressional committee, "leading proponents of the New Left movement in the U.S. more clearly established themselves as Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries dedicated to the destruction of our society and the principles of free government. ... Hard core communist elements are intensifying their efforts in the New Left movement."

The present-day Party-line for the West, in both the Kremlin and Maoist camps, prescribes cooperation with any radical aggregation (except with each other), even unto formerly outlawed anarchist tendencies. For one thing, **these represent opportunity for recruitment: subversion of a few leaders or potential leaders usually suffices to give disciplined communists a stranglehold on an organization.**

More important, all the groupings merit communist support because they serve **the fundamental objective, which is to weaken the United States as the main obstacle to communist ambitions. Anything that erodes the nation's traditional values, rips into its social fabric, emasculates natural patriotism, is obviously grist for the communist mills.**

This applies in particular to activities calculated to cut down American military vitality, from attacks on ROTC and the draft to violence against defense research projects and plants making weapons. There is a pattern in the concentration of radical leaders on selected universities of second or even lesser rank. What such institutions have in common is the fact that they harbor scientific undertakings related to national security.

For several years before the tragic events of 1970, for instance, Kent State University of Ohio was favored by the energetic attention of outsiders. The reason, I suggest, is that it has been engaged in apparently vital research projects for the Institute of Defense Analysis, a civilian enterprise funded by the government. Relatively unimportant schools without such military significance may develop protest measles locally, but they rarely rate the intervention of top-echelon national leaders.

**The main and most successful communist activity in the Red Decade was the fabrication of endless Innocent Clubs, false-fronts, transmission belts.** The technique has not been jettisoned but it no longer holds top priority.

Only a handful of the fronts created in the Thirties have survived: the National Lawyers Guild, the American Committee for Protection of Foreign Born, the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, for example. Others, while not direct progeny, have similar assignments. Thus a Citizens Committee for Constitutional Liberties carries on in the area once occupied by the International Labor Defense; the current National Emergency Civil Liberties Committee is remarkably like the defunct National Emergency Conference for Civil Liberties of the 1930's. Although communists have taken a licking in organized labor, they still dominate several unions and exert influence in a few others.

On a far more restricted scale than in the past, new fronts are being set up, each with its facade of innocents. New organizations are constantly being announced, on and off campus; it is not always clear, however, which of them are of communist inspiration. In some cases communist participation is overt.

This is true of the S.D.S. (Students for a Democratic Society), which includes warring anarchist and Maoist sections. Communists were identifiable in the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, which staged the big demonstrations in 1969, and in the steering committee of its successor group, the so-called New Mobe, which includes people, as reported by Hoover, "who are or have been affiliated with old-line communist groups" and "are coordinating their activities with international communist elements." The Young Communist League on the campuses of the Thirties has had a series of reincarnations, from the W .E .B. Dubois Clubs to the recently announced Young (Communist) Workers Liberation League.

But for the most part the communist involvement, if any, in an array of new outfits is carefully concealed. Newspaper advertisements by Veterans for Peace were financed by at least one prominent fellow-traveler, but that does not necessarily prove communist origins. The Freedom and Peace Party launched in New York, a Medical Committee for Human Rights, a G.I. Civil Alliance for Peace, **the rash of "G.I. Coffeeshouses" planted near military installations to lure and "politicalize" soldiers** – to what extent are communists connected with such enterprises? One coffeehouse organizer said publicly that it represented a coalition "ranging from orthodox Communist Party to New Left types."

In any case, the false-front technique of the 1930's has not been abandoned. More to the point, **the nature of communism – its utter immorality; its genius for conspiracy, deceit and double-talk; its subservience to foreign masters and dedication to foreign purposes** – has remained unchanged. The **contempt for truth, the skills in manipulating the discontented and guilt-ridden and unwary idealists**, have remained unchanged. Adapted to the new situation, the strategy and morality on view in The Red Decade, almost as in laboratory demonstrations, are being applied here and now.

**The experience of that time has left scars on intellectual life and moral attitudes.** The brain damage and ethical trauma have been **passed along to the succeeding generations.** It was a period when, for large segments of the intellectual community, **thinking and value judgments became "relativist," blurring the frontiers between good and evil, truth and falsehood.** Expediency, justified in the name of self-righteous ends, blotted out for them what Russell Kirk calls "the permanent things." The scythe of time having done its work, only a few of those whose minds were shaped by the "incredible revolution" are still teaching in our schools, writing in avant-garde periodicals, preaching from our pulpits. But **thousands of others in the following decades who were conditioned mentally and morally by such men and women of the Thirties today hold influential posts in education, journalism, government, the arts and professions.** In this sense, at least, the Red Decade has been carried over into our time. It was then that the breed of **totalitarian liberals swept the nation, occupying academia, the press, book publishing; and it has been with us ever since in the Liberal Establishment.**

The book, I suggest, is uniquely pertinent to the so-called youth rebellion. I am constantly astonished, in talking to young people, that **the generation without direct memory of the Red Decade assumes that youth dissent, including "anti-war" crusades, is something new in America.** A reading of this book should, at any rate, apprise them that a vast and raucous youth movement under communist management was shaking the country long before they were born.

In sheer dimensions, though without the extremes of violence and vandalism and pornography of the present period, that youth agitation was much larger than its manifestations today. Today's youth will learn, for instance, that an American Youth Congress was able to assemble young people, as individuals and through other organizations, **literally by the millions to implement secret Kremlin directives;** that

campus strikes, “peace mobilizations,” revolutionary rhetoric against the power structures are not recent inventions; that then, as now, **confused or cynical grown-ups and political demagogues proved their piety as liberals by flattering and cheering on the young militants.**

Perspective is needed even more urgently for the larger picture. **The Cold War does not date from the end of the Second World War, as is so widely assumed. Only the label is new – the struggle it connotes has been under way ever since the Bolsheviks hijacked the Russian Revolution and made the country a staging ground for world revolution.** And wishful thinking to the contrary notwithstanding, that epochal confrontation between communism and freedom has not been resolved. It takes new forms, throws up new slogans and diversions on both sides, but the Cold War remains the overarching reality of the world we live in.

**For more than fifty years the ambitions and pretensions of communism have kept the world in a state of turmoil, violence and uncertainty.** The obsessive drive for One Communist World has sowed chaos on all continents, inspired declared and undeclared wars, imposed back-breaking burdens of armaments on our country. From the Middle East to Southeast Asia, in Latin America and in the riotous streets of the United States, the struggle continues unabated. It is primarily for control of the world communist movement that Red Russia and Red China are contending. Why would they seek dominance over fifth columns in eighty-odd countries if the Cold War were ended?

The fact is that not one responsible spokesman for any communist power center has renounced or retreated from the goal of global dominion. Not one of them has conceded even the possibility of an enduring compromise or detente. All the **consoling talk of the convergence of the two systems of life**, of “bridges” of cooperation, has come from **our side**, not theirs. It is only in **our** world that such formulas as “peaceful coexistence” are taken seriously.

Those whose job it is to monitor Soviet propaganda know that there has been not even a marginal diminution of anti Western and particularly anti-American invective. During the Lenin Centennial in 1970, as in the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Bolshevik power in 1967, Soviet oratorical and editorial emphasis was on the supreme communist mission to “liberate” humanity from its capitalist chains.

On April 14, 1969, a congress of the Chinese Communist Party explicitly pledged its support of “the ‘justice struggle’ of the proletariat, youths and students in the United States.” Cuba, entrenched in the inviolable sanctuary we awarded to communism as part of the price for removing Moscow’s nuclear missiles, inflames hostility to the United States throughout the Western Hemisphere. Attorney General John Mitchell, whose sources of information are surely adequate, told the American people on May 12, 1970 (on the CBS program, “Sixty Minutes”), that **not only ideology but funds for extremists in our country are flowing in from foreign countries**; he didn’t name them but that was hardly necessary.

**To evade or minimize the continuing challenge of communism calls for exceptional powers of self-deception.** I dare to hope that the re-publication of this book, nearly thirty years after it was written, will help some Americans meet the challenge more intelligently and effectively.

In open societies like ours the turnover in the ranks of communists, their camp-followers and their dupes has always been large and rapid. The great majority of those whose names figure in this account of communist-led enterprises in the 1930’s, especially in the non-Party periphery to its most gullible reaches,

long ago abandoned the movement. Many, of course, have died. The survivors will understand, I trust, that history cannot be erased or amended, and that the record of those years does not necessarily reflect on their subsequent and present views and associations.

**Disillusioned communists and fellow-travelers have often become the most knowledgeable and effective opponents of communism.** A courageous few of the men and women mentioned in *The Red Decade* belong in that category, while others continue at the same old stands of subversion. The rest, perhaps embarrassed by the realization that they served as stooges, have faded into political anonymity. In any case, the new edition of the book is presented purely as history.

EUGENE LYONS

November, 1970

## 1941 INTRODUCTION

# IN DEFENSE OF RED-BAITING

On the day when this book was ready for the press, Nazi Germany invaded Russia. The attack, as Vice-Premier Viacheslav Molotov charged, was wholly unprovoked. Stalin had appeased Hitler and supported Hitler's cause with unflagging and demonstrative energy. For twenty-two months the Communist International and its endless open and clandestine extensions had preached defeatism to the French, immediate negotiated peace to the British, anti-Yankee sentiments to the Latin Americans, rigid isolationism to the people of the United States. The communist 'line' for America had been indistinguishable from the Nazi line: non-intervention in European affairs, promotion of strikes in defense industries, class and group hatreds and the rest.

That line was hastily and clumsily reversed within a few hours after the blitzkrieg was unloosed against Stalin's country. **Yesterday's "imperialist" and "plutocratic" war was magically transmuted into a people's war for freedom and justice.** Conscription, national armaments, aid to Britain were mysteriously sanctified in a flash for all American Stalinists, whether acknowledged or disguised.

Through an act of Hitler's, the despised "pluto-democracies" were instantly converted into crusaders against evil in the eyes of all good comrades. Two notoriously Stalinoid organizations, the American Youth Congress and the National Maritime Union, happened to be holding conventions soon after the Nazi ingrates double-crossed their Soviet associates; both had been conspicuously active in fighting any sort of aid to Britain; both now came out for unstinted and undelayed American help to the British. The national organization especially created to promote the strictest isolationism and non-intervention, the American Peace Mobilization, called off its "peace vigil" at the White House and announced its support of aid to Britain. The whole communist "peace front" – until the night of June 22 so loud and busy and crowded – was soon silent and deserted, except for the faint wailing of honest pacifists trampled in the ignominious retreat of the comrades from fake-isolationism.

By the time this volume is in print, it is certainly not impossible that this somersault of late June may have turned into a double somersault. I can give no assurances that the democratic crusade against Hitlerite

aggression will not have turned once more into an imperialist crime. The only way to keep up with the permutations of communist policy is on a loose-leaf basis.

**The crux of the matter, however, is not in the character of communist propaganda at any given moment, but in the fact that such propaganda, always and unswervingly, is determined by the Kremlin's needs and the Kremlin's instructions. *It has not the remotest relation to American affairs.*** Whether the "line," in its zigzag course paralleling Stalin's whims or desperations, coincides with American national interests or contradicts them is sheer accident. **Stalin's Fifth Column in America, as in all other nations, has only one set of "principles": blind obedience to the will of Moscow. It has only one "ideal": allegiance to a foreign dictator.**

The reversal of June 22 came as a dramatic demonstration of the truth of the main thesis of this volume. **An allegedly American political movement had made two major turns in its "policies" in less than two years – both based exclusively on the altered position of a foreign nation.** Each of the turns took in a full 180 degrees, completing a circle which encloses the most sinister case of political cynicism and subservience to a foreign overlord in American history.

The circumstance that Soviet interests for any period happen to run close to American interests must not obscure the underlying danger represented by **the presence of a swarming, disciplined, obedient and fanatically self-righteous army of Muscovite agents in our midst.** It is a gun pointed at the heart and mind of America – not to become placently mistaken for a toy pistol merely because it is not, at a given moment, being fired.

## 2

A great many books and a multitude of articles have been published in recent years exposing the native and foreign purveyors of fascism and Nazism in America. But we have yet to hear their authors denounced as brown-baiters, black-baiters or silver-baiters. The charges are assayed on the basis of their truth or falsity. They are not arbitrarily dismissed with a hackneyed epithet. There is as yet among us, it happens, no taboo against examining and if necessary condemning the operation of Mussolini, Hitler and their direct or indirect agents.

**Books and articles attacking native and foreign purveyors of Stalin's special brand of totalitarianism, however, are condemned automatically by a portion of the American public as "red-baiting." Their authors are branded without further ado as "red-baiters."** Their charges and their reasoning are not measured by the ordinary yardsticks of veracity or good sense, but swept aside angrily without measuring.

The American public, especially in its Left and so-called liberal reaches, is the victim of an irrational and indefensible taboo against criticizing the Great Experiment in Stalin's Russia or its extensions and machinations in our own country. There is no use reasoning or arguing against this fact. We can merely note the phobia, in a scientific spirit, and observe its fantastic effects. And we can merely warn the great mass of Americans which has escaped the phobia that **the taboo is no innocent and accidental gadget. It is a neatly contrived device for heading off free and uninhibited discussion of such little things as manmade famines, horrifying blood purges, forced labor on a gigantic scale – if they happen to occur in Russia.** It is no less useful in preventing or discrediting in advance all exposures of Stalinist activities directed against the institutions or even against the life of non-Soviet nations.

The self-righteous outcries about red-baiting with which this book, for instance, will be greeted in certain predictable quarters will have little or nothing to do with the specific contents of the volume. They will be simply **a conditioned reflex on the part of those in the grip of the taboo**—and they include, unluckily, a good many literary critics, book reviewers and political commentators. These people cannot be blamed. They shriek “red-baiter!” at the first contact with sharp criticism of communists as automatically as they cry “ouch!” at the first contact with a hot stove. [Today’s words: “racists” “Islamaphobes”, etc]

There are some exceedingly curious ingredients in the taboo. The most curious of all is that it is primarily, often exclusively, attack on a particular brand of red ideology or practice which causes a blackout of logic in the victim, namely the brand approved by Moscow at any given moment. Attacks on anarchism, syndicalism, single tax, social credit or any other non-Stalinist radical movement leave these folk cold and collected. Only criticism aimed directly at communism and its preachers touches off their specialized indignations.

Nay, not even communism as such. One may expose Trotsky’s variety or de Leon’s, or Jacques Doriot’s version of communism without being ostracized from decent “liberal” and “intellectual” society. It is specifically attack against Stalin’s blessed and subsidized communism—and particularly the demonstration that it isn’t communism at all but an approximation of the fascist ideologies—which throws the afflicted liberals into a panic of violent, know-nothing resistance.

**Because the Communist Party and its great array of subsidiaries have had the resources and the prestige of a big nation behind them, they have succeeded in imposing that prohibition on American liberals and even a good many conservatives.**

They have succeeded so well, in fact, that **thousands who do not hesitate to speak their minds vigorously about other social philosophies or political regimes stop short, panic-stricken, when it comes to speaking their mind on communism and its ways.** It takes money and power and psychological leverage to condition great numbers of people in this fashion. Among the radicals, only Stalin’s subjects and employees have possessed these things in ample measure.

When the New York *PM*, a few days after General Walter Krivitsky’s death, attacked the dead man in vulgar and vicious style, did it occur to anyone to charge it with red-baiting? Did the liberal magazines raise the red-baiting clamor when liberals and radicals were pounced upon in an Open Letter in August, 1939? Of course not. But let the same daily insult a live or dead stooge of Stalin, let some Open Letter “smear” Browder or Marcantonio or the communist leader of an outlaw strike—and instantly the fumes of red-baiting charges will fill the air and becloud the issue. When the government took sadly belated steps looking toward the deportation of one Harry Bridges, an Australian communist, the cry of red-baiting echoed through the pseudo-liberal press. No such outcry met the deportation proceedings against Jan Valtin, anti-communist radical. Indeed, the aforementioned *PM* ran an editorial protesting the Bridges affair in the same week when it virtually demanded the deportation of Valtin.

Incidentally, there is a portion of the press in America which is devoted almost exclusively to vilifying “reds.” Its pages run over with bilious invective against social-democrats, anarchists, syndicalists, communists of other than Muscovite persuasion and, in open season, also against the liberals. I refer, of course, to the Stalinist press here. Every issue of the *Daily Worker*, for instance, is hectic with insults in words and cartoons directed against those “reds” whom Moscow disapproves. It occurs to no one,

notwithstanding, to call the *Daily Worker* a red-baiting rag. Yet the social-democratic *New Leader* or Norman Thomas' *Socialist Call*, when they unmask Stalinist agents, are instantly accused of red-baiting.

**The communist achievement in obtaining a monopoly of protection under the taboo has been one of the Kremlin's most effective forces in undermining American life and thought.** The dread of being labeled a red-baiter has kept droves of disillusioned communists and their fellow-travelers from announcing and explaining their change of heart and mind. **The epithet has been a mark of Cain to outlaw critics of the Russian terror or the Stalinist infiltration of American life.** Whenever the communists are under fire, **it has served to divert attention from the subject matter to futile discussion of personal motives, the critic's private life** and other deliberate tricks of befuddlement.

When someone belabors the Nazis or the Silver Shirts, the Townsendites or the Technocrats, it is not assumed or implied that he has been "bought" by some nation or bank or publisher, even though that may be the case. Let the same person attack Russia or its creatures abroad, and instantly it is assumed by the muddled and inhibited among the liberals that he has "sold out" to somebody or other. In the old days Hitler, Mussolini and the Mikado were regarded as natural purchasers; after the Kremlin had made friends with these three, the market was presumably cornered by Hearst. Which may explain why he was selling his art treasures—he couldn't have everything. After the Nazi invasion of Russia, Hearst presumably again faced competition in that market.

Certain of my colleagues, having lived in Nazi Germany and learned to recognize Hitler's methods, have written books exposing the Nazi regime and its intrigues on American soil. As far as I am aware they have not been reprimanded for not saving the Southern sharecroppers instead. No book reviewer or liberal commentator has sneered at them, "Why must you carry on about concentration camps and political murder in Germany? What about Sacco and Vanzetti and Negro lynchings?" It is assumed, sensibly, that they happen to know more about Germany. [Today: "What about the crusades?"]

But this gracious leeway is denied to writers hostile to Stalinist Russia and its foreign conspiratorial empire. When they mention millions of corpses in a Ukrainian famine, they are told off neatly with a scathing reference to the Okies in California. Should they allude to the Soviet purges, they are hit over the head with Mooney and Billings. Until the Soviet-Nazi Pact made the procedure a bit awkward, their indictment of terror in Soviet Russia was instantly canceled out by reference to Nazi terror in Germany.

That, obviously, is just another aspect of the same taboo against testing the rosy illusions about communism à la Stalin. It constrains me to give public notice herewith—as I did in *Assignment In Utopia*—that the horrors of Bolshevism do not, in my view, justify horrors elsewhere, including those apparent under capitalism; that the Soviet invasion of American life does not for a moment justify the Nazi invasion or the totalitarian abominations preached by our native fascists and social nihilists. This book, believe it or not, devotes itself exclusively to the story of the Stalinist attack on our institutions and on our mental integrity for the simple reason that it is a book on that subject. .

The so-called liberals are actually paralyzed by the hobgoblin of red-baiting. If ever they are tempted to question Stalin's paradise, they no doubt have nightmares in which they see themselves surrounded by animate megaphones all hooting, "Red-baiter! Red herring!" The story is told that Austrian Nazis, before the Anschluss, had a standard device for keeping the police at bay when engaged in beating up

adversaries. As soon as the police approached, the Nazis began to sing the national anthem. Automatically the policemen snapped to attention and stood rooted to the spot-long enough for the ringleaders to escape. In the same way, **the cry of red-baiting halts liberals in their tracks when they are tempted to go after communism.**

There can be no clear thinking, no clear examination of the issues raised by the Kremlin's intrusion in American life until the red-baiter taboo has been exorcised. A beginning, at least, can be made if those who expose communist skulduggery walk up boldly to the terrible hobgoblin and, taking their courage in their hands, say "Boo!" right in its face. After that, I can assure them, they will be able to wear the red-baiter tag with a flourish of pride, and their sleep will be as sweet as a healthy infant's.

Here, by way of beginning, I propose to say "Boo!" If an attempt to tell the truth about Russia-at-home and Russia-abroad is red-baiting, then I proclaim myself a red-baiter. I trust that this book, indeed, may merit top ranking as a better-than-average exemplar of honest and effective red-baiting as thus defined.

What is more, I challenge all intellectually honest liberals to break through their inhibitions by saying "Boo!" They will not find it easy at first, of course, and may have to practice it before their mirrors with doors closed and blinds drawn. But after a while they will discover that neither thunder nor lightning will descend on their heads, but only a spatter of harmless sparks unloosed from Thirteenth Street, off Union Square in New York. In the end they will be cured, and will be able to examine the mythology of Stalinism as calmly as the folklore of capitalism or the mythology of Hitlerism.

I invite them, in fact, to test their psychological courage on the pages which follow. If they can read them through without one apoplectic fit or one frenzied yelp of "Red-baiter!" they may consider themselves emancipated at long last.

4

This book does not pretend to be an academic and comprehensive history of communism in America; that remains to be done by someone of more scholarly temper. It is frankly journalistic and polemic; a needed exposure in a moment of national and world-wide crisis. It is intended as an informal account of Bolshevism in our country – the strange Bolshevism that reached a bizarre climax in the amazingly successful People's or Popular Front phase of Muscovite activity outside its Russian homeland.

In the decade before Stalin and Hitler made the infamous bargain that touched off the Second World War-our Red Decade – the United States lived through a grotesque and incredible revolution. The fact that it was neither communist nor revolutionary, in the normal sense of these words, is not an incidental paradox. It is a clue to the essential nature of the event – its Machiavellism.

**The distinguishing mark of the Red Decade was hypocrisy, manifest in false-front societies, secret inner-caucus controls, duplicate and triplicate names, high-minded lying and deceptions.** Its methods are implicit in key words and phrases which it contributed to our political vocabulary: words like fellow-traveler, party line, Innocents' Club, transmission belts, front organizations, social fascists.

We are not dealing with candid revolutionists who have the courage of their convictions, men and women whose moral stature we can respect. We are dealing, for the most part, with people who could not even understand the "inspired frenzy" of honest rebels from Spartacus down to Tom Paine and John Brown, Eugene V. Debs and Emma Goldman. During the Red Decade we are confronted, in the main,

with a horde of part-time pseudo-rebels who have neither courage nor convictions, but only a muddy emotionalism and a mental fog which made them an easy prey for the arbiters of a political racket.

At the core of the incredible revolution was a small group of leaders, some known to the public, others obscure but no less powerful, still others – the official resident agents of the Moscow hierarchy – secret but most powerful of all. Around them was the solid ring of Communist Party members, the mass of them acknowledging their allegiance but an effective minority concealing their membership under fake names and even protesting with outraged vehemence when accused of being members. Beyond them were deployed the more diffuse and vastly more numerous fellow-travelers, consciously working within the movement, though obeying a moral rather than an organizational discipline. And farther out were concentric ring after ring of wholly or partly innocent camp-trailers.

Clearly we can have more human esteem for the open party members, accepting the yoke and facing the music, than for the fellow-travelers and “sympathizers” who played the game without risking any of their own chips.

All of it was more of a conspiracy than a political movement, more a hoax than a social upsurge. The innocence of so many victims, and their eagerness to be taken in, does not detract from the chicanery but makes it more mischievous. And because the whole thing was conspiratorial and vague at its edges, any attempt to measure its magnitude or effects statistically must fail. The burlesque revolution whispered or shouted, as occasion required, now disclaiming any influence, now boasting of direct control of the minds of millions. The same officials, who wailed about red-baiting exaggerations when credited with fomenting certain events or dominating certain organizations, insisted on such credit in reports to the higher-ups in Moscow.

Our own American Popular Front, though never officially in power as it was in France and for a brief period in Spain, **penetrated, in various degrees, the labor movement, education, the churches, college and non-college youth movements, the theatre, movies, the arts, publishing in all its branches; it bored deep into the Federal government and in many communities also into local government;** it obtained a stranglehold on great sectors of national and local relief setups and made-work projects through domination of the Workers Alliance, capture of key jobs and other stratagems.

At its highest point-roughly about 1938 – the incredible revolution of the Red Decade had mobilized the conscious or the starry-eyed, innocent collaboration of thousands of **influential American educators, social workers, clergymen, New Deal officials, youth leaders, Negro and other racial spokesmen, Social Registerites, novelists, Hollywood stars, script writers and directors, trade union chiefs, men and women of abnormal wealth.** Its echoes could be heard, muted or strident, in the most unexpected places, including the supposed citadels of conservatism and respectability.

It is easy, of course, to exaggerate the strength of this phenomenon. But it is even easier to brush the whole thing aside as a negligible and rather amusing aberration. **The fact is that the complex communist United Front tintured every department of American life while it lasted and has left its color indelibly on the mind and moral attitudes of the country.** Our labor movement, politics, art, culture and vocabulary still carry its imprint. Even those who are most repentant and shamefaced in the present sour aftermath still carry the scars of the planned hypocrisy on their minds and souls. Something devious clings to their thinking on the affected subjects. In organized labor, where it operates chiefly as the Left Wing of the C.I.O. and at this writing still enjoys the patronage of John L. Lewis, it is even more deeply

entrenched than it was before the Moscow-Berlin partnership was announced, and, until the German invasion of Russia, was consciously sabotaging the national defense effort under trade-union banners. **A generation of college youth has been poisoned by communist amoralism and has carried the disease into manifold post-collegiate activities.**

In exposing the past and current machinations of the Kremlin junta and its multitudes of innocents and stooges, I am decidedly not beating a dead horse. The animal is very much alive and gets its oats regularly from the central international fodder stocks. Because the stakes are particularly important at this time, the Kremlin unquestionably is investing more cash and effort than ever before in the game. American Bolshevism, now – in 1941 – in its twenty-first year, has reached its majority. It has learned a lot from its successive experiences and political incarnations, period after period, and by this time feels as much at home in the open or underground, among maritime workers or bishops, as the pampered favorite of government officials or as their special target of attack. There is no corner of American life where it does not have its outright agents or complacent and dependable “sympathizers.” And behind it – to guide and to chide, to urge and to purge – is **the Communist International, the greatest world-wide agitational, propaganda, espionage and sabotage organization ever built in the whole history of human society.** The arts of propaganda, as practiced by the Comintern, are effectively supplemented by direct action ranging from slander to murder.

That organization is in our midst, for the most part as a secret underground movement in its immediate phase, but functioning above ground in a new array of Innocents’ Clubs and a new set of transmission belts. In the measure that it operates through camouflaged stooge-organizations under disarming names behind respectable show window committees, it is even more reprehensible and more dangerous. **Stalinism in America today represents the most serious single sabotage potential. It is widely diffused, effectively disguised, firmly entrenched in government and other influential spheres.** Beguilingly “packaged” in pseudo-idealistic wrappings, it finds takers among well-meaning Americans who would never succumb to the unsubtle Hitlerite salesmanship.

I am aware that much of this indictment, even after I have set it down in considerable detail, will sound farfetched to the uninitiated. But the reader should recall that the story of social disintegration and totalitarian skulduggery in important sectors of life in France would have sounded farfetched had anyone told it before the collapse of that country made those things only too obvious and too credible. **The complacency of the average American has operated to facilitate the work of the communists as of other foreign agents.** The success or failure of the current Muscovite line for America – a line revised constantly by absentee masters – will depend on the temper of America, on its moral stamina. **It will depend also on its comprehension of the Kremlin’s techniques.** This volume, I hope, may contribute a little to that comprehension.

I wish to acknowledge gratefully the invaluable help of S. L. Solon, who did the spadework for this volume in gathering and organizing basic data and documents. I wish to express my thanks, also, to those who have generously helped with suggestions, corrections and information, especially to Victor Riesel, Benjamin Stolberg, Ben Mandel, Hugo Pollock, Nelson Frank, Sam Baron, William G. Ryan and Suzanne La Follette. In the writing of the initial historical chapters, I found Benjamin Gitlow’s fine autobiography, *I Confess*, particularly valuable as a source book and herewith acknowledge my indebtedness to it.

Many of those whose names appear in the following pages in connection with activities of the Communist Party and its subsidiaries have since broken with Stalinism. Some of them, indeed, have become fervent opponents of the Stalinist penetration. Since this is a history, told as far as convenient chronologically, it has not been possible or always desirable to expunge names from the historical record. I can only proffer apologies in advance for any incidental embarrassment the record may cause to such people.

Fortunately, most of them have the intellectual integrity not to conceal their Stalinist "past." With few exceptions, as I have tried to underline in these pages, they were victims of their own idealistic urges and of a conjuncture of social pressures. The Depression, the moral disintegration of the intelligentsia and the middle classes as the economic debacle developed, these were more potent in shaping the Red Decade than any of the masterminds on New York's Union Square. Those who were sucked into the vortex of that bizarre "revolution" were not always to blame. I have tried to understand the social phenomenon, rather than to lambaste its dupes, and it is possible that I have not always succeeded in this feat of fairness.

#### **Quotes from Book:**

"It is necessary to be able to agree to any and every sacrifice, and even – if need be – to resort to all sorts of devices, maneuvers, and illegal methods, to evasion and subterfuge, in order to penetrate into the trade unions, to remain in them, and to carry on communist work in them at all costs." –Lenin

The American communists in effect become colonial agents of Moscow. The fact that many of them were Americans strengthens the resemblance – many of Britain's civil servants in India or Italy's in Libya are likewise natives. The test is in the basic **allegiance**, not in race or nationality. –Eugene Lyons

*'True' courage according to totalitarian dictator Joseph Stalin:*

"True courage consists in being strong enough to master and overcome one's self and subordinate one's will to the will of the collective, the will of the higher party body" [i.e. Stalin].

*Re the effect of the Depression on the middle and upper classes in America:*

Their sudden misgivings and fears drove them into more-or-less fascist movements at one extreme, into more-or-less communist movements at the other extreme. Having lost their sense of security and self-reliance, they grabbed in panic at the nearest formulas of reassurance or revenge. Planning and collective enterprise...seemed wonder-working gadgets to steady a reeling economic world. . . . In the years that followed the market crash, the Communist Party of the United States became the magnetic center for a large and fast-growing mass of near-communists, sympathizers, fellow-travelers, spare-time insurgents, frightened liberals and masochistic capitalists. –Eugene Lyon