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David Everitt. *A Shadow of Red: Communism and the Blacklist in Radio and Television.* Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 2007. 411 pp. $27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-56663-575-2.

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Blacklisting Revisited

In *A Shadow of Red*, freelance writer David Everitt contends that the blacklist of the broadcast industry in the late 1940s and the 1950s was not the morality play with rabid right-wingers persecuting idealistic innocents that many historians describe. To make his point, Everitt details the efforts of five anti-Communist blacklisters. In 1947, three former FBI agents–John G. Keenan, Kenneth M. Bierly, and Theodore C. Kirkpatrick–started *Counterattack*, a four-page newsletter whose purpose was to "'crush the Communist Fifth Column"' (p. 18). In 1950, they also published *Red Channels*, a list in booklet form of 151 alleged Communist sympathizers. Another of the five, Vincent Hartnett, built a business around advising broadcast companies which radio and television employees should be allowed on the airwaves. Finally, Syracuse supermarket owner Laurence Johnson pressured advertising agencies, networks, and radio and television stations to remove Reds and pinkos from broadcasting.

Everitt's greatest strength is the thoroughness of his research, though the book might have benefited from also portraying a sixth anti-Communist crusader, J. B. Matthews, who kept five hundred thousand file cards on suspected citizens and funneled information to prominent media executives and columnists. Evenhandedness is also a strength of the author. He sides with historian Arthur Schlesinger and others "from the vital center" who avoided the political ideologies and caricatures, both left and right, of the time (p. xvi). Everitt applauds "those who acted as a matter of nonsectarian principle, both anti-totalitarian and civil libertarian, people who supported resistance to Soviet aggression abroad and defended fair play at home" (p. xvi). He insists that some of the witnesses who refused to answer the questions of congressional committees investigating broadcast industry subversion often had something to hide. They were not just civil liberties heroes.

Everitt also argues that many of the Communist fronts listed in *Counterattack* and *Red Channels* were far from benign. But he also faults Kennan, Bierly, and Kirkpatrick for "an incendiary form of activism" (p. 29). The three former FBI agents took the position that any Communist sympathizer with access to a broadcast station–even a third violinist in a radio orchestra–posed a threat. "'He is sitting next to the first violinist,"' Bierly said, "'and he is going into the radio station and he is talking to the engineer and he has friends who are news commentators, and so forth and so on"' (p. 29). The efforts of Kennan, Bierly, and Kirkpatrick to purge radio and television of Communists and Communist sympathizers failed to differentiate those subversives from well-meaning liberals. CBS, a favorite target because of its "'liberal news correspondents, led by Edward R. Murrow and its Popular Front dramatists, exemplified by Norman Corwin,"' employed people who "'at the very least are comrades of the comrades,"' *Counterattack* charged (p. 71).

Johnson, an owner of six supermarkets in central New York, pressured CBS to stop employing comedian Jack Gilford and any other "'subversive"' (p. 124). With the war against the Communists in Korea heating up, Johnson sent telegrams to network sponsors, in which he wrote: "'Why are you helping to kill our friends in Korea?"' (p. 124). Small-city radio stations resisted Johnson's strong-arm tactics, but the national networks, advertising agencies, and sponsors often capitulated. Everitt quotes a Syracuse broadcaster: "'I don't know what's the matter with those people in New York. Maybe they're so big they have to be stupid"' (p. 133). To protect itself from being identified as a haven for Communists, CBS introduced a questionnaire that all employees and prospective employees were required to sign. The two other major networks were less docile. NBC demanded the signature only of new employees, while ABC defied the cry for what many broadcast employees called a loyalty oath.

Meanwhile, from inside and out, *Counterattack* and *Red Channels* faced tough questioning. Bierly quit over

the publications' red-baiting ridicule. And, several subjects, including CBS radio personality John Henry Faulk, decided to sue. Faulk was a favorite target of Hartnett, who proudly proclaimed himself a coauthor of *Red Channels*. In 1953, Hartnett started Aware, Inc., an anti-Communist organization with its own bulletin focused on the entertainment industry. The bulletin said that, in the 1940s, Faulk had sponsored a pro-Communist peace rally, entertained at pro-Communist clubs, appeared at Communist front activities, and addressed a "Spotlight on [Henry] Wallace" event in "'the official training school of the Communist conspiracy in New York"' (p. 232). More than one year after Faulk sued the blacklisters, CBS fired him, a move Everitt attributes to the network's "habitual timidity and panic" (p. 246).

In trying to bring to life Faulk's lawsuit against Hartnett and the estate of the late Johnson, Everitt offers a conclusion or two that leave readers wondering whether the author is claiming to know more than he could possibly know. Everitt states, for example, that Faulk's lawyer read a statement from Hartnett's 1956 testimony to the House Un-American Activities Committee that "had a powerful effect on the jury's perception of the defendant" (p. 274). How Everitt knows about the statement's effect on the minds of the jurors is not made clear. The jury's award of $3.5 million in damages prompted a telling cartoon, titled "Nailed," by Herblock, in which a huge hammer labeled "Faulk Case Verdict" bangs a nail through the collar of a black-jacketed burglar called "Blacklisters." Though the damages were later reduced, the 1962 verdict marked, for most, the end of the blacklisting era.

Everitt ends the book with two claims that are not entirely persuasive. He refutes those who say that the blacklist kept talent from the airwaves and concludes that "at the same time the industry's hiring practices became less restrictive, television became less creative and more formulaic" (p. 324). He also argues that previous writers about the blacklist overstated the charge "that the blacklist grew out of a groundless hysteria" (p. 341). Everitt indicates that the writers argued unpersuasively that the blacklist often targeted "dissenters of all kinds" and that the blacklistees themselves were the heroes of the era, "despite the fact that many were Stalinists who had endorsed the Moscow purge trials in 1938 as well as the domestic suppression of Trotskyists in 1941" (pp. 341-342).

Finally, Everitt does acknowledge the impact of the blacklisters' overblown rhetoric: "Their extremism, their eagerness to put people out of work, helped delegitimize anticommunism for many years, prompting people to associate it with vindictiveness and alarmism" (p. 344). Vindictiveness and alarmism sounds about right.

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