

Phillip Deery. *Red Apple: Communism and McCarthyism in Cold War New York.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2014. 240 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8232-5368-5.



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Post-1945 New York City was “home to the largest concentration of communists in the United States” and the “sole American city to elect communists to office” (pp. 4, 3). It was also “a bastion ... of left-wing liberalism” (p. 4). These two traits came into conflict, exposing a complexity on the political left that my students often have trouble grasping: liberals could be aggressively anticommunist and communists often viciously attacked liberals. This infighting helped expose all on the political left, making progressives vulnerable to the sweep of McCarthyism. And New York City was the epicenter.

In this slender volume, *Red Apple: Communism and McCarthyism in Cold War New York*, Australian historian Phillip Deery details six case studies in five chapters to explore the personal cost of early Cold War anticommunism and political repression. These cases are actually from the very early years of the Cold War, beginning prior to the Hollywood Ten and the first Smith Act prosecutions, and serving as examples for the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) to

imitate when it became a standing and permanent committee in January 1945. One of the contributions of Deery’s monograph is that it reminds the reader that the often-devastating effects of McCarthyism predated the actions of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

Deery uses an “overlooked organization”—the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee (JAFRC)—as a “platform for examining the Cold War experiences of six people” (p. 2). The JAFRC was founded in 1942 to assist European antifascists, and its board members protected their lists of Spanish refugees when HUAC investigated and demanded the information. As a result, the entire board was persecuted, imprisoned, and blacklisted. HUAC’s attack on the JAFRC established a pattern that is well documented. But this, Deery persuasively contends, is where it began.

Broadly speaking, Deery uses the stories of six individuals to highlight how “anticommunism reshaped daily lives” on the “ground level” (p. 162). He begins with the story of Edward Barsky, a sur-

geon at Beth Israel Hospital and the chair (and one of the founders) of the JAFRC. While Barsky was a communist himself, Deery contends that the JAFRC in its antifascist activities was not a puppet of the American Communist Party (CPUSA). Unsurprisingly, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and HUAC failed to recognize this distinction and investigated Barsky and the JAFRC's entire board. When HUAC investigated board members, the progressives refused to comply and served jail time. It is difficult to not feel sympathy for a doctor who, in refusing to cooperate with HUAC, temporarily lost his freedom and his license to practice medicine.

The novelist and CPUSA member Howard Fast is the subject of chapter 2. Author of sixty-five novels, including *Citizen Tom Paine* (1943) and *Spartacus* (1951), Fast was jailed in 1950 along with Barsky for being on the JAFRC board and defying HUAC. Fast was also brought before McCarthy's committee in 1953. As a result of these actions, the writer was blacklisted from the publishing industry for much of the 1950s, prompting Fast to form his own press, Blue Heron Press, which he struggled to keep afloat from 1952 to 1956. Fast's books were also pulled from U.S. embassy bookshelves during Roy Cohn and David Schine's infamous summer 1953 romp through Europe. Like fellow communist Paul Robeson, State Department officials denied Fast a passport, curtailing the novelist's international travel for much of the 1950s. Fast suffered, as all in this book did, both personally and professionally for his political positions.

The tales of two New York University professors, Lyman Bradley and Edwin Burgum, are the subject of chapter 3. Deery builds on the work of Ellen Schrecker's *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (1986) in relaying these accounts of "the fragility of academic freedom" and "the bureaucracy of political repression" (pp. 75, 76). Though not members of the CPUSA, participation on the board of JAFRC was enough to justify

the firing of these professors, from the German and English Departments, in the early 1950s. "But their stories," Deery implores, "are a powerful testimony to the corrosiveness of Cold War anticommunism, which could not only destroy the most distinguished academic careers but also blemish the most liberal of educational institutions" (p. 111).

Broadening the focus of his attention in chapter 4, Deery explores the Cold War impact on Soviet composer Dimitri Shostakovich. Sent to New York by Joseph Stalin to participate in the 1949 Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace (referred to as the Waldorf conference), Shostakovich reluctantly played the role of "mouthpiece for Soviet foreign policy" (p. 132). Deery captures the tremendous pressure on the composer, who was forced to make pro-Soviet statements to carefully navigate Soviet politics while he "avoided the Gulag, stayed alive, and revived an illustrious professional career" (p. 132). Deery argues that the Waldorf conference, sponsored by JAFRC activists to "reduce Cold War tension," was "a pivotal event" (p. 7, 2). It is a fascinating story of political posturing, and Shostakovich's saga is one of emotional and political abuse, but it feels a bit out of place in this volume about American victims. As one of thousands of Soviets similarly treated (and of course thousands more treated far worse), the composer's story may leave one wanting more tales of the Soviet cost of the Cold War.

Deery concludes with a discussion of the career of New York lawyer O. John Rogge in chapter 5. Considered by historians to be "one of the country's most prominent radical lawyers," Rogge is perhaps best known for his role in the Julius and Ethel Rosenberg conspiracy to commit espionage case, as legal counsel to David Greenglass (p. 135). Rogge also provided counsel for the defense in the Smith Act case of 1949, and defended the JAFRC. He left the Democratic Party in 1947, shifting to the progressive American Labor Party (ALP) and

running on the ALP judicial slate in 1948, but he never joined the CPUSA. Considered a left-wing, radical, fellow traveler, he publicly repudiated communism in 1951 and took on the case of Greenglass. In encouraging his client to be a witness for the prosecution against Greenglass's sister Ethel and brother-in-law Julius, Rogge was seen as betraying the communist cause. Deery includes the lawyer to demonstrate the liberal dilemma of how to remain true to progressive ideals but still denounce communism. Rogge proves an excellent example of the challenge of staying independent of both Moscow and Washington in the early Cold War.

One of the strengths of this monograph is Deery's extensive use and deft handling of archival sources. Specifically, he uses oral histories, journalistic accounts, FBI files, State Department documents, congressional records, Supreme Court cases, papers from (and correspondences with) the subjects of this monograph, and numerous collections from university archives, especially Tamiment Library and the Robert F. Wagner Archives at New York University. Deery succeeds in adding historical perspective, and fresh voices, to this complex story. Through the Freedom of Information Act, Deery secured the release of FBI files on the JAFRC, thus providing a detailed record of the organization and how its members suffered (p. 33).

While Deery explains that his "book focuses on both the persecutors and the persecuted," the reader—perhaps by necessity and design—gets far more of the latter than the former (p. 2). One wonders if there were any reluctant persecutors? Was there dissent among the perpetrators of McCarthyism?

The work's title—*Red Apple: Communism and McCarthyism in Cold War New York*—is a bit broad and potentially misleading for the subject of six case studies. Readers hoping for a comprehensive look at the toll of McCarthyism in New

York City during the Cold War may be disappointed with the narrow focus.

A few minor errors appear in the text. The hydrogen bomb that the Soviets detonated in the summer of 1953 was not "the world's first H-bomb" (p. 103). It was a prototype; the United States had tested a hydrogen bomb the previous November. The index seems a bit slight, and the chapter listing in the introduction mistakes the order of chapters. The book's structure, which places case studies in context, necessitates some tangled chronology, which may confuse readers less familiar with the narrative.

Deery builds on the work of historians of McCarthyism, particularly Schrecker, in his determination to "restore dimensions of personal identity and lived experience to our understanding of the domestic Cold War" (p. 2). He succeeds in this effort. When Deery contends, "the bureaucracy of McCarthyism destroyed a left-wing organization" such as JAFRC, surely few would argue (p. 37). But one wonders what the broader and long-term impact of aggressive anticommunism was on the politics of New York, and the nationwide legacy of a decimated progressive end of the political spectrum.

In her 1998 work *Many Are the Crimes*, Schrecker wrote: "this book is about the United States and not about Russia and, while what happened in the Soviet Union was much worse than anything in this country, within the American context McCarthyism was a disgrace. It may well be a kind of relic of the McCarthy era that requires this kind of statement on the part of someone writing about Communism even after the Cold War has ended." [1] Sixteen years later Deery feels compelled to write a similar sentiment: "the United States in this period was hardly Stalin's Russia, responsible for the largest killing fields of the twentieth century. McCarthyism was not comparable to Stalinism. America was not a totalitarian society. To defy a congressional committee courted unemployment or imprisonment, not

death” (p. 8). Does Deery believe this “kind of relic” still necessary in 2014? If so, why?

Overall, Deery’s work is thoroughly researched, well documented, and detailed. It is a compelling read and a valuable contribution to Cold War historiography.

Note

[1]. Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1998), xviii.

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