

# Freedom Regained

**THE NAKED GOD: The Writer and the Communist Party.** By Howard Fast. 197 pp. New York: Frederick A. Praeger. \$3.50.

By **HARRY SCHWARTZ**

**I**N the current excitement over Soviet sputniks, we run the risk of forgetting that the struggle between Communist serfdom and freedom will be won in the minds of men on earth, not in outer space. This book is important for many reasons, but particularly now because it reminds us of the tremendous assets the cause of human freedom has at its disposal in today's titanic struggle.

It seems not inaccurate to say that one of the biggest propaganda defeats Moscow received in 1957 was Howard Fast's public defection from the Communist party. Mr. Fast's action received relatively scant notice in this country because his public reputation here had long ago been tarnished by his Communist position, and a new generation has forgotten the popularity a decade and more ago of books like "Citizen Tom Paine." But in many areas abroad, the news was a bombshell, for Mr. Fast had been built up by Communist propaganda to the position of the most eminent living American writer. In Eastern Europe and Russia, millions of people who had no chance to know of Hemingway or Faulkner, knew and loved the books and plays of Howard Fast. The extraordinary lengths the Soviet Government went in the effort to hide the news of his defection (the news was not published in Moscow until a half year after the fact became public here) testifies to the discomfiture that development caused their propaganda chiefs.

**I**N this book Mr. Fast explains why he broke with the Communist movement after staying loyal through even the most difficult post-war years of anti-Communist feeling here. It is an emotional book, with both the virtues and the faults that emotion brings to expository writings. If Mr. Fast's patent sincerity and his self-revulsion over his past political blindness come out clearly, it is still true that the disjointed organization of the book will bother some readers. And many readers, no doubt, will find it hard to accept his admiration for many rank and file Communists he knew.

The immediate cause of Mr. Fast's break with the Communist movement was Nikita S. Khrushchev's originally secret speech exposing some of Stalin's crimes. That speech showed to Mr. Fast and many other Communists that many things about the Soviet Union they had denied as slander in the past had actually been true.

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But Mr. Fast waited for more than half a year after that speech became public before making his public break, a period of agonizing rethinking of his political premises and beliefs.

That period of rethinking, this book shows, was a fruitful one. He now understands the nature of Communist bureaucracy and why that bureaucracy must always betray the nominally idealistic goals of Communist ideology. There is both tragedy and humor in his analysis of the American Communist bureaucracy, and his conclusions—reached independently—remind one closely of Milovan Djilas' conclusions based on quite different evidence. His description of how the Communist party here treated him and his writings makes one marvel at the strength of a set of beliefs that can chain a man's mind



Howard Fast.

despite the humiliation by the high priests of the quasi-religion in which these beliefs are central.

Perhaps the most important point is that Mr. Fast discovered the real meaning of freedom. He came to understand how infinitely superior was his position here as a Communist writer, even at the height of public anti-Communist feeling, to the position of any writer or thinker in a Communist-ruled land who dares deviate even slightly from the party line. He now knows that freedom is not an outmoded "bourgeois" concept, but the *sine qua non* for a decent society.

It is clearly too much to hope that Mr. Fast's exposition will save all future intellectuals from suffering the same illusions and eventual disillusionment that he suffered with communism. After all, Arthur Koestler and others did not save Mr. Fast. But in the current era of intellectual revolt against Communist authoritarianism, this book has an important role to play, and its most important repercussions may yet be behind the Iron Curtain where Mr. Fast's largest and most loyal audience was during all the year's of his enslavement to the Communist system.