

in suspense. But they are good questions. The French government has itself recently put out a document on "the future of French identity," drafted by a committee headed by the historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. The subject has been in the air for some time, at least since the late 70's, when it became increasingly impossible to avoid the issues of demographic mutation (declining birthrates, aging population, rising immigration), of European integration, of the blurring of political ideologies.

Bernstein shows how these questions have been transforming the French people's attitude toward themselves and their country and, gradually, the perception which the rest of the world has of them. He senses that, all things considered, the French are changing gracefully: becoming better allies, less obsessed with making it clear to everyone how gloriously different they are. At the same time, Bernstein knows well that the world will lose something if the French change too much. Concerning that eventuality he is, rightly, not overly worried.

### Anti-Anti-Communism

THE CAUSE THAT FAILED: COMMUNISM IN AMERICAN POLITICAL LIFE. By GUENTER LEWY. Oxford University Press. 359 pp. 24.95.

Reviewed by SAM TANENHAUS

THE romance of Communism peaked in the 1930's, when there seemed legitimate reason to believe that democratic capitalism might not survive the Depression. It did survive, but so did the romance, through successive generations. More than a million Americans, at one time or another, enjoyed a fling with the Communist party, and even if, as of 1988, the total number of card-carrying (or -concealing) members did not exceed 20,000, it hardly mattered.

SAM TANENHAUS, whose article, "What the Anti-Communists Knew," appeared in our July 1990 issue, is working on a biography of Whittaker Chambers.

For Communist objectives, says Guenter Lewy in *The Cause That Failed*, had already "become the goals of the more numerous and more influential free-floating Left," a domain that includes "churches and church-related social-action organizations" as well as "tenured professors and journalists." Not to mention the roomy class of literary intellectuals who are, as Lewy puts it, "especially vulnerable to the totalitarian temptation."

Old-time leftists tended to be idealists—rational, humane, often courageous, sometimes saintly. Many had formidable gifts. This makes their folly sad, strange—and complex, most of all during the first two decades of the American Communist movement (1919-39), when the likes of Edmund Wilson and Bertram D. Wolfe drank the elixir of social revolution. The story of these years has been handled deftly by Theodore Draper (*The Roots of American Communism*, 1957), Irving Howe and Lewis Coser (*The American Communist Party*, 1962), and Harvey Klehr (*The Heyday of American Communism*, 1984). Lewy is, if anything, too familiar with these books; his first chapters sag under an accumulation of borrowings and rehashings. It must also be said that he has no feel for the Old Left or for the seductions of Communism. The title of his study adverts to *The God That Failed*, the famous anthology of confessions by literary ex-Communists published in 1950, yet Lewy is indifferent to that book's testimonial spirit. He gives no inkling of just what the "cause" was—or was meant to be. Lewy is so appalled by Marxism-Leninism that he cannot help us see how others might be drawn to it.

So much for the weakness in Lewy's survey. More important is its strength, which emerges at about the 100-page mark, with the beginnings of the cold war and of born-again radicalism. One reads with a kind of marveling dread as pro-Sovietism creeps back into fashion in the United States—despite the Hiss case, despite Russia's invasion of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, despite Khrushchev's denun-

ciation of Stalin. Much of the blame accrues to Senator Joseph McCarthy, "a raven of disaster" (in Whittaker Chambers's phrase) whose scattershot style, with its frequent misses, put intelligent anti-Communists on the run and gave unwitting comfort to "anti-anti-Communists."

Anti-anti-Communism is, in fact, Lewy's true subject, and it brings out the best in him as a historian. He has examined an array of primary sources—newsletters, policy circulars, the minutes of clamorous board meetings—and from them has pieced together a picture of the American liberal community at odds with itself in the 1950's, under siege by the Left in the 60's and 70's, *in extremis* in the 80's.

The decline was catalyzed by Vietnam, more specifically by the antiwar movement, which began as an expression of orderly dissent but soon degenerated into street theater, less organized than orchestrated, and not always even that. A motley cast tumbled onstage: hippies and yuppies alongside "grass-roots" revolutionaries spottily educated in the dogma of Mao, of Castro, of Che Guevara. The mix included those, says Lewy, whose "contribution to the process of radicalization consisted in providing the movement with the vocabulary of Marxism-Leninism. The war in Vietnam, they argued, was not a mistake but the logical result of America's imperialist drive for world domination."

This was the polemical language of the old Popular Front, barely disguised, and liberal anti-Communists knew it. They remembered all too well the infiltrations of the 1930's, when apparatchiks had "bored from within" and turned labor unions, peace groups, literary congresses into front groups for the Communist party. It could happen again. One possible check was "exclusionism"—the practice of barring Communist-party members and sympathizers from the ranks of nonideological organizations. But the opponents of exclusionism argued—plausibly at first—that it was a mistake to draw conclusions about individuals on the basis of

their affiliations. A man might call himself a Communist but not bow to Soviet dictates. And what if he had a record of honorable service in, say, the civil-rights movement? Should he be barred because he was theoretically in fealty to the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism?

The exclusionists held their own until the debate became a free-for-all. In the antic 60's, exclusionism seemed a grim relic of the 50's; its proponents lost the initiative and then the fight, and organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) paid the price. By the early 1970's, Lewy writes, the ACLU "had not only repealed the exclusion of Communists from its governing organs and changed its stated position on the nature of the Communist party, but it had come to accept the services of individuals such as the radical lawyer William Kunstler, an avowed defender of violence."

So too with SANE. It had been formed in 1957 with the intention of lobbying for a halt to H-bomb testing. Its charter members wanted no truck with Communists. In 1963, Lewy writes, SANE's newsletter "criticized apologists for the Soviet Union who were 'passionately eager to picket the White House during the Cuba crisis, but who refused to picket the Soviet embassy although the crisis was triggered by the introduction of Soviet missiles into Cuba.'" Four years later, with the antiwar movement at full throttle, SANE's California board, says Lewy, was commandeered by "individuals and groups [who], while purporting to speak for peace, saw America as the single villain in Vietnam, charged that America was engaged in the deliberate and systematic extermination of colored people in a racist war, and found American actions indistinguishable from Nazi genocide."

The Old Left and the New Left had now found common cause and,

Lewy argues, "this pattern of cooperation has continued to the present day." The present day: Lewy's study ends, for all practical purposes, in 1988, before Communist governments were swept from power in Eastern Europe. He squeezes in some judicious remarks about this development, but his emphasis is odd. He says too much about the ritual apologetics of America's tiny cadre of Kremlin loyalists and too little about the wider crisis of the Left, bankrupted at last by its investment in the "cause that failed."

At this moment the American romance with revolution survives in the *Gestalt* of "the free-floating Left" with its programmatic insistence that racism, sexism, imperialism, and materialism somehow originate in democratic capitalism and are perpetuated by normative bourgeois culture. This fresh assault awaits the attentions of a future scholar. May he be as scrupulous as Guenter Lewy.

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We mourn the death of  
**Lucy S. Dawidowicz**

1915-1990

A cherished contributor for forty years,  
 and a most beloved friend.

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