

He Affirms Socialist Beliefs, But Severs Communist Ties

By A. B. MAGIL

HOWARD FAST sat in the cramped office of Blue Heron Press, the now defunct publishing firm he founded to issue his own books, and talked about the political party whose ranks he had left. It was shortly after the New York Times published an inter-

view with Fast in which, as the Times put it, "he has disassociated himself from the American Communist Party and no longer considered himself a Communist."

Tall and balding, the author of "Freedom Road," "The Last Frontier," "Citizen Tom Paine," "Our Glorious Brothers," "Lola Gregg" and other novels, talked earnestly of the Party, the Soviet Union and socialism.

I asked Fast why, in view of the changes being made in the American Communist Party, he had left it.

"I know it will change," he said. "It is changing, and by virtue of the content of the Daily Worker, its worst enemies admit this change. But no matter how much the change, no matter which group wins out, I cannot go back to writing within the censorship of either a local or international movement."

"For the privilege of writing as I please, saying the truth as I see the truth, right or wrong, I have made considerable sacrifice. I don't regret it, but I have come to recognize that the censor that cherishes is as strangulating as the censor that hates. If I am frequently wrong, I nevertheless need the privilege of being wrong. I don't believe that any change in the party will do away with the pervading question of being 'correct.'

"I cannot write in terms of 'correctness.' Whether it stigmatizes me or not, I must write as my heart and my reason and my knowledge directs me. And if it directs me wrongly, then I alone must be responsible. I cannot any longer share that responsibility with a political party which must disown my words when my words appear harmful or contrary to their purpose. In other words, I accept criticism but I cannot accept censorship."

"BUT ISN'T IT TRUE," he was asked, "that you've suffered from censorship imposed on you by the capitalist interests of this country?"

"I think that's apparent," he replied. "For many years now no commercial publisher would publish any book of mine. I have been barred from the magazines and from television—from any real means of earning my own bread in my country, from my chosen profession."

"But I believe I must add this because it is very important: I continued to write books and I continued to publish books—I published them myself. My books were distributed and read—not as widely as had once been the case, but nevertheless distributed and read. "I can't close my eyes to the fact that a Russian writer who

through his writing had attempted to expose the very real abuses of democracy in his own country would have had his work die still-born. He himself, as the record shows, would have either been disgraced, jailed or even put to death. I am not arguing the merits of socialism and capitalism.

"The fact that I was barred from a normal life as a writer in America is a disgrace to American democracy. The fact that Soviet writers suffered so and still do not have the full freedom to express themselves is a disgrace to socialism."

"DIDN'T your years in the Communist Party give you a great deal that was positive?"

Fast leaned back in his chair. "The Communist Party not only gave me a great deal that was positive—and this I firmly believe—it gave America a good deal that was positive. The Communist Party led the way in rediscovering the best and truest traditions of Jeffersonian democracy. The Communist Party taught the American people some of the facts of Negro oppression. Never did the party waver in its defense of the Negro people or the American working class."

"I know full well how many American writers have taken enormous aid to their work and talent



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from the Communist Party. It gave them a sense of closeness with the oppressed, a knowledge of the working class and a sense of history that perhaps they could not have otherwise known.

"There is, of course, another side of this picture. In the course of this history, the Communist Party was never able to escape from its own rigidity, its own monolithic dogmatism. Nevertheless, I think it would be contemptible to forget the record of the party's achievement in terms of American democracy. It is one thing to look at an organization with open eyes and to state that you cannot live within its framework. It is quite another thing to attempt to justify one's action by attacking every moment in the past history of that organization."

IN THE course of our talk Fast recalled with bitterness the execution of leading Jewish writers in

the Soviet Union in the last years of Stalin's rule. He said he had learned on good authority that one famous Soviet writer, when asked to intercede in behalf of a Jewish novelist who had been arrested and was being tortured, refused. The man who asked him to intercede, was, according to Fast, the noted Soviet Yiddish poet, Itzik Feffer, who visited this country during the war. Feffer himself was later executed.

Fast also related a personal experience of meeting another well-known Soviet writer with whom he had developed a warm friendship by correspondence. In the course of the evening the Soviet writer was asked what news he had of the Jewish writer, Kvitko, whose execution had been rumored. He assured Fast and others present that the rumors were false; that Kvitko was living in the same apartment building as himself and was working on new translations. A month later, Fast said, he learned that Kvitko had been dead three years.

Fast sharply criticized the present Soviet leadership in regard to the Jewish question, relations with Poland and policy toward Israel.

But more bitter than anything else was his criticism of what he described as "an almost total lack of functioning democracy in the Soviet Union." Fast said: "What we witness in Russia is not democratic or humanist socialism. It is totalitarian socialism. It is to say exactly this—and to say it as forcefully as I can—that I left the Party. There was no other effective way I saw to protest this terrifying distortion of all that socialism means to so many."

Asked whether he didn't think the Soviet Union had made tremendous positive contributions, Fast replied:

"Of course, that's true, and the whole world bears witness to it. Surely there is no one in America who doesn't remember the overwhelming fact of history that the Red Army destroyed the Wehrmacht and wiped the threat of Hitlerism from this earth forever.

"The very fact that 40 years ago there was in Russia a population of the most oppressed and poverty-stricken and backward human beings on earth bears stunning contrast to what we read every day in the New York Times. We read of thousands of doctors graduating yearly—most of them women. We read of thousands of engineers, of a whole literate population, of books published by the millions, of cities built and rebuilt, ever-increasing production. One no longer hears of famine and plague in the Soviet Union.

"Even when a fact is taken negatively—when we read of the protests of thousands of Soviet students—it behooves us to remember that the very existence of these students is a miracle."

NEVERTHELESS, Fast is critical of the way the socialist system has developed in the Soviet Union and compares it unfavorably with what is happening in Poland. "Poland," he said, "is the first nation in the world where the working class is in power; the first to reject the Soviet proposition of socialism without democracy.

"I don't include Yugoslavia, for while Yugoslavia resisted Soviet interference and domination, it never accepted the total fact of democracy." He cited the case of Milovan Djilas, who was imprisoned by the Yugoslav government for an article he wrote in a U. S. anti-Communist magazine, New Leader.

"The Poles have enormous problems," he continued, "and it would be an illusion to imagine they have socialism. But they do have the beginnings of true democracy, and if they can only remain independent and united in purpose, they will achieve a finer and brighter type of socialism than we've yet known."

In the Times interview Fast said he would not repudiate or return the Stalin Peace Prize,

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Nkrumah Speeded the Ouster of Colonial Rule in Ghana

GHANA. The autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah. Nelson. New York. 302 pp. \$5.

By ROBERT FRIEDMAN

GHANA is the world's newest state. As the Gold Coast, it was one of imperial Britain's West African colonies. Now it is a self-governing nation of four and a half million people within the British Commonwealth. Its Prime Minister now and for the last five years is Kwame Nkrumah, whose life story is told by him in this book, "Ghana."

In fact, Kwame Nkrumah offers only wayward fragments of his personal history, the bulk of his book being devoted to an account of the Convention People's Party, the movement formed in 1949 to win self-government for his people, in its struggles with the British. But even the fugitive glimpses of the man himself suggest to the reader that here is a remarkable personality—one who like Nehru, Gandhi, Mao Tse-tung and other Asian leaders has fused the experiences and philosophies of both East and West.

In the United States to be a Communist means to live at best a semi-legal existence; even a former Communist is permitted to live in peace only if he abases himself and denies any validity in his former beliefs.

There is considerable irony, therefore, that Vice-President Nixon whose thoroughly symbolizes this official view of Communists and communism, should have been sent by the President as our country's official representative to the March 6th ceremonies launching the independent state of Ghana.

For Kwame Nkrumah is not only a man who served time in jail as an alleged Communist. He is a statesman who proudly asserts in this autobiography that he is a Marxist Socialist.

He does not merely admit, in the cringing fashion required of Americans by witchhunting Congressmen, that he associated with Communists; he boasts of having learned from Marx and Lenin and from the experiences of American and British Communists. Which



Chemistry class at a secondary school for in Ghana. During the last five years, the number of secondary schools has been increased to 31; enrollment in secondary grades was fewer than 8,000 last year.

then, is the "dark continent"? KWAME NKURUMAH learned about imperialism not only in the Gold Coast colony where he was born and educated, but in the U. S. where he spent 10 years, and in England where he continued the studies begun here at Lincoln University.

In our country, the statesman-to-be shipped out as a member of MNU. He learned not only American trade unionism, but American racism, of which he tells this story:

"I will remember my first experience of active racialism below the Mason-Dixon line. I was traveling by bus on one of my lecture tours from Philadelphia to Washington and the bus stopped en route at Baltimore for the passengers to refresh themselves. I was parched from thirst and I entered the refreshment room at the terminal and asked the first white American

waiter if I could have a drink of water. He frowned and looked down his nose at me as if I was something unclean. 'The place for you, my man, is the spittoon outside,' he declared, as he dismissed me from his sight. I just stood and stared at him for I could not bring myself to believe that anyone could refuse a man a drink of water because his skin happened to be a different color."

Now that one former British colony after another has found its way to freedom, the imperialists and their apologists like to pretend that it was all a smooth and pleasant process planned by the imperialists themselves. But the repeated jailings of Kwame Nkrumah reveal (as did for India, the years in prison for Nehru and others) that the British resisted to the end acceding to the rightful demands of Ghana's people to rule in their own land.

This is not a fully detailed story of conditions in Ghana either before or after independence; the way of life of the people, their standard of living and economy is not elaborated, and there are many gaps in the account of the rise to power of the C.C.P., its techniques and popular appeals, the elements in Ghana society on which it is based, etc.

But one closes this book with the realization that it is no longer possible to speak of the "new Africa" as some distant prospect, just as we have done for many years. Ghana is proof that the old colonial Africa is no more. And Kwame Nkrumah's concluding words, "Our task is not done and our own safety is not assured until the last vestiges of colonialism have been swept from Africa," strongly oppose the prospect that imperialism can long hold out against the people's will to freedom.

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which he won in 1953. Asked to explain this further, he said:

"Because to repudiate or return it would be to reject the whole question of the struggle for peace. Whether or not I was effective, I've devoted the past ten years of my life to this struggle. The Stalin award was given me by an international jury. I didn't anticipate it; I didn't ask for it. Not only was Stalin dead when the prize was given, but I knew nothing of the real Stalin as revealed subsequently in the Khrushchev report."

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CLEARLY Howard Fast is deeply troubled, even bitter about some developments in the socialist countries. To this writer it seems that he tends to magnify serious shortcomings in the Soviet Union and to see them in a one-sided way. To criticize those shortcomings, to urge changes is one thing. But doesn't Fast overlook the fact that the Soviet system made the greatest and most fundamental democratic change in history when it took control of the economic machine from the capitalists and landlords and placed it in the hands of the workers and peasants? It is this change that world imperialism would like to reverse.

Does Fast still believe in Socialism?

"Yes, more deeply than ever," he said. "It's only since the Khrushchev report that I've begun to think more deeply about socialism itself."

As for future plans: "My purpose is to be a writer. If at some future time a broad socialist movement comes into existence in the U. S., I'd like to be part of it. I plan to go on fighting with all my strength against perversions of democracy here, of which there are no small number."