

claimed to be, to wonder why an opportunity was forfeited to object to the limits of corporate accountability, or to the philistine excesses of a medium using public airwaves, or to the disparities of wealth that Tisch has exemplified—though he even *looks* like Daddy Warbucks. What aroused Hook to write was the glum suspicion that Dan Rather had disseminated KGB-planted disinformation on the evening news, and Hook wanted penalties invoked. Perhaps an admirable consistency can be found in Hook's tendency to make letter-writing into a branch of the martial arts. But in so crabby a finale, in so unworthy a target, there is something ignoble about the uses to which Hook's keen intelligence had been put. A lustrous career devoted to clarifying the relation between means and ends had inspired authors as diverse as Daniel Bell and Robert Penn Warren to dedicate books to him. Yet the legacy that these letters disclose includes some betrayal of the promise of pragmatism's most energetic advocate.

A Vigil against Totalitarianism

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Particularly since the Vietnam War, often blamed on America's obsession with communism, anticommunism has rarely been fashionable in American intellectual circles. And few intellectuals were as obsessed with communism as Sidney Hook. It is, therefore, not surprising that he has not fared well in recent historical or autobiographical accounts of American life in the 1900s. In his autobiography Irving Howe complained that on the communist issue "within that first-rate mind there had formed a deposit of sterility, like rust on a beautiful machine."¹ Alan Wald has charged that Hook was the model for those intellectuals who "became fanatical adherents" of the anticommunist ideology that marked America's transition from isolationism to imperialism.² Judy Kutulas chided such "extreme anticommunists" as Sidney Hook, who kept badgering "progressives" like Corliss Lamont about the political positions they had taken in the 1930s.³

Unlike many of his academic critics, Sidney Hook's knowledge of and hostility toward communism grew out of his own experience with the Communist Party. His long life intertwined with the issue of communism, from his early infatuation to disillusionment and his final deep hostility. At every stage of his professional life, he confronted communism and communists—as friends and allies, as subjects of study and friendly criticism, as intellectual rivals, and, finally, as relentless enemies. Hook was a passionate and fearsome polemicist

who skewered communists and their allies for many years over many issues. While he gave no quarter, he was spared none either. At various times he was called a "Fascist and ally of Fascists," "a dirty, four-letter word," a "baboon of imperialism," an "American National Socialist," a "hook-worm," and a "counterrevolutionary reptile."

The recently published *Letters of Sidney Hook* provides, with two exceptions, a representative sample of Hook's initial flirtations and later confrontations with communism. The first letter in the anthology is dated 1929 and was written to his parents from Moscow, where Hook was working at the Marx-Engels Institute on a Guggenheim Fellowship. He praises the Soviet Union for nurturing the "seeds of the future."

By this time, Hook had already accumulated a decade of procommunist activity, not illustrated in this volume. As a student at City College of New York he was a founder of the Social Problems Club, where young communists and socialists adulated the new Soviet state. Although he never joined the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA), Hook collaborated with it during the 1920s. Not only was his first wife a Party member, but Hook himself translated Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio Criticism* for International Publishers, the CPUSA's publishing arm, when he was still a graduate student. (The first edition, released in 1927, acknowledged Hook's contribution. Later editions, prepared when he had become persona non grata in the communist world, deleted his name, although sloppy editing left it in the book's index.)

In his autobiography, *Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the 20th Century*, Hook admitted that in 1929 he was blind to the repression already a part of Soviet life. His faith in socialism and the USSR and his support for Soviet policies and educational theories persuaded him that whatever problems existed were the result of a society in transition, one that was overcoming the legacies of the past. When he returned to America, he continued to collaborate with the Communist Party, without sharing its ultrarevolutionary views.

Beginning in 1929, communist parties around the world, under orders from Moscow, had inaugurated the so-called "Third Period," during which they expected revolutionary upheavals in the capitalist countries. In addition to setting up separate, dual unions to compete with the AF of L, the CPUSA denounced socialists as social fascists and insisted that they were far more dangerous than were fascists themselves.

In spite of his scorn for these fatuous ideas, Hook joined with fifty-three other distinguished American intellectuals in 1932 to endorse the communist presidential ticket of William Z. Foster and James Ford. In his autobiography, Hook notes that, when he got around to reading Foster's campaign statement, *Toward Soviet America*, he was appalled at its antidemocratic tone. If so, he must have been curiously and uncharacteristically inattentive to communist rhetoric in the preceding three years. Unfortunately, the *Letters* are silent about this episode and Hook's close collaboration with the CPUSA.

The League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford produced a widely read manifesto, *Culture and the Crisis*, but began to splinter apart soon after the election. The CPUSA tried, after a fashion, to entice Hook, whose writings on the Hegelian foundations of Marxism and efforts to reconcile Marxism with pragmatism had already established him as a talented Marxist thinker. He discussed his critique of orthodox Marxism with Earl Browder and other communist leaders and tells in his autobiography of a remarkable meeting in which Browder urged him to go to work for the CPUSA setting up an espionage network of scientists. In January 1933 the CPUSA's intellectual commissar, V.J. Jerome, launched an attack on Hook titled "Unmasking an American Revisionist of Marxism." But in March, Browder, while continuing to attack Hook, also printed his rejoinder to Jerome, the only time the Party dignified the views of an "enemy" in its theoretical journal.

Party orthodoxy could not, however, abide Hook or such other League heretics as Lewis Corey and James Rorty for long. And Hook finally concluded that the doctrine of social fascism was both stupid and dangerous, its having already contributed significantly to the triumph of Nazism in Germany. He joined with A.J. Muste in 1933 to form the American Workers Party (AWP), a Marxist revolutionary group whose unstated goal was to take communism away from the communists. For the next several years, Hook actively tried to build an alternative to the CPUSA, an effort doomed to failure. His unhappy experience in helping to broker the merger of the AWP with the Trotskyists (the Workers Party, created in late 1935) convinced him that revolutionary politics was a dead end. Hook also briefly became a public figure in this period; an article he wrote in 1934, originally titled "Communism Without Dogmas," was changed by the editor to "Why I Am a Communist." Eschewing subtle distinctions, the Hearst press in New York led a campaign to oust Hook from his teaching post at New York University. The dean at NYU defended his controversial philosopher on the grounds that Hook was only a "half-baked Communist."

Despite all the criticisms he had made of both communism and the CPUSA, Hook did not focus his attention or his critique on the Soviet Union until the Moscow purge trials led to his involvement, along with John Dewey, in attempting, first, to secure asylum for Leon Trotsky and then to investigate the charges made by the Soviet regime that Trotsky was a spy and traitor who had plotted to kill Stalin. To defend Trotsky's right to a hearing was to declare oneself an enemy of the Soviet Union and, in the view of many American intellectuals, most of whom were not communists, to ally oneself with fascism. Hook's old friend Corliss Lamont fervently defended the trials and all other manifestations of Soviet power. He signed manifestos denouncing Hook and John Dewey as fascists and became a cheerleader for the GPU, the Soviet secret police, praising the quality of Soviet justice. Hook's "extremism" in reminding Lamont and other fellow travelers of their enthusiasms earned lifelong enmity.

From the mid-1930s through the end of the 1940s Hook was prominently identified with a string of organizations dedicated to combating Stalinism in American intellectual life. The League of Professional Groups had been only one of the first communist efforts, and by no means the most successful, to attract intellectuals, writers, and artists to its orbit. When the Communist International finally abandoned the Third Period in 1935 and inaugurated a Popular Front, a number of new and seemingly more moderate organizations sprang up. The League of American Writers, the American Artists Congress, the American Committee for Intellectual Freedom and Democracy, and the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, among others, enlisted hundreds of prominent figures who supported worthy causes, relentlessly and unconditionally defended the Soviet Union as a bulwark of democracy, and slandered its critics.

Sidney Hook took the lead in response. He devoted himself to exposing the lies and evasions of these groups and their supporters. He wrote to prominent people on their letterheads and asked if they really agreed with the statements being issued in their names. He badgered the "innocents" who lent their good names to questionable causes. He organized like-minded intellectuals to combat communist propaganda about the United States or the Soviet Union.

Tangling with Sidney Hook in argument was a sobering experience. In one series of letters to Jerome Davis, a Yale academic whose firing because of his political views had led to protest by the American Association of University Professors, Hook noted that he himself had worked to overturn Yale's decision. When Davis not only refused to help the Trotsky Defense Committee but also signed a letter prepared by the Communist Party denouncing it, Hook refused to accept his rationalizations, which included Davis's denial that the statement said what it said and went on to doubt that the Soviet Union persecuted anyone who was innocent. With impeccable logic and barely concealed scorn, Hook noted that his "first guess that either your name had been forged or that you had signed in carelessness" must have been in error and concluded that Davis had repudiated the very ideals he had once defended. When the Trotsky Defense Committee was attacked on the grounds that it constituted interference in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union, Hook responded that American liberals did not hesitate to interfere similarly in the internal affairs of Nazi Germany or other rightwing violators of democracy.

The Committee for Cultural Freedom (CCF), founded in 1939, denounced totalitarianism of both the Left and the Right. Such heresy earned it a concerted attack by some 400 communists and fellow travelers, including Corliss Lamont, I.F. Stone, Dashiel Hammett, Harry Ward, and Lillian Hellman, who called the equation of the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany a "fantastic falsehood" and labeled Hook, Dewey, and other members of the CCF "Fascists and allies of Fascists." Published one week before the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the attack contributed to the discrediting of Stalinism in the American intellectual community, exposing its fatuousness and viciousness.

After World War Two, Hook revived the American Committee for Cultural Freedom to respond to the communist-orchestrated and inspired Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace at New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in 1949. Rebuffed by organizers unwilling to allow him to present a paper defending the autonomy of science and protesting the notion that there existed "party" or "class" truths, Hook determined to expose the communist line dominating the affair. Displaying a talent for publicity, he succeeded in embarrassing astronomer Harlow Shapley of Harvard and a number of other prominent intellectuals who had given the event their support. Shapley retaliated by using his influence to keep Hook out of the American Institute of Arts and Sciences for many years.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Hook's relationship with communism was his position on the employment of communists in American universities. His experiences with the CPUSA had convinced Hook that communists were not free agents, or heretics, but conspirators, obliged to carry out the Party line. Accordingly, he insisted that, while they deserved constitutional protections, they had no right to jobs which required an open mind and commitment to the pursuit of the truth. He believed that there was a *prima facie* case that a member in good standing of the CPUSA was unfit to serve on a university faculty. In contrast to the McCarthyites, Hook insisted that it was the responsibility of college faculties, not congressional committees or public pressure, to judge their colleagues. He also denied that such faculties should actively seek to discover communist affiliations. If a case arose, however, Hook believed that it would be up to the faculty member to demonstrate that he was fit to teach and was not using the classroom as a forum or trimming his teaching and research to fit Party positions.

In an age when using the classroom as a bully pulpit to advance a professor's political opinions is commonplace, when not just courses but entire departments proudly advertise their commitment to one or another oppressed group or ideological perspective, when the idea that academics are engaged in a search for the truth sounds like a quaint pre-postmodernist illusion, Hook's demand that the professoriate take seriously its collective responsibility for the educational enterprise sounds other-worldly and repressive. Hook was right about the nature of the CPUSA. It was a conspiratorial organization. On balance, he was wrong about communist academics. Most were not conspirators, but naive, although a few were dishonest men and women who betrayed their calling. With few exceptions they posed little threat to the academic community, or at least not enough to justify efforts to remove them, although the exposure of their views was entirely appropriate.

Sidney Hook paid a price for his convictions, both when he was a "communist" and when he was an anticommunist. The youthful Hook, a Jew with a reputation as a radical, could never hope to gain an appointment at a prestigious American university. The older Hook, never willing to back down from

a fight—indeed, pugnaciously seeking out conflict—sacrificed professional prestige and put off academic work to combat communism. In the academic world, he was, he wrote to a friend, about as popular as a porcupine. “God knows I’d like to keep my mouth shut and pen quiet for a while, but unfortunately when I do nobody else does (with a few exceptions, of course). The result is that even when my colleagues agree with me, they don’t like me.”

Sidney Hook never stopped arguing. Devoted to discovering the truth and committed to democratic values, he may have done more than any other American intellectual to combat one of the great evils of the twentieth century. Our country and our culture are the better for his confrontations with communism.

Notes

1. Irving Howe, *A Margin of Hope* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982), 210.
2. Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 5.
3. Judy Kutulas, *The Long War* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 200.

Organized Resistance to the Campus Revolution

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Violent revolutionary turmoil engulfed American institutions of higher education in the late 1960s and continued to do so well into the next decade. The beginning of these upheavals roughly coincided with Sidney Hook’s retirement as chairman of New York University’s philosophy department, and when Hook stepped down from that post he took up the intellectual struggle against the countercultural agitators. His pro bono activities of this period are not widely known, but the recently published *Letters of Sidney Hook* reveals that his resistance against domestic totalitarian impulses and aggressive new-left radicalism was as significant for the restoration of campus tranquility and for America’s educational and cultural future as was his earlier fight against external totalitarian enemies. During this later period of his life, I had the almost daily privilege of assisting him in these intra-academic endeavors.

I met Sidney Hook in 1968, a leap year that brought the usual campaign for U.S. presidency and a summer ripe with political rhetoric. One of the candidates was Senator Eugene McCarthy, a man of considerable integrity but ques-