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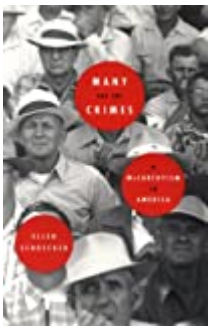

Ellen Schrecker. *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998. xviii + 573 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-316-77470-3.

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Ellen Schrecker takes the title of her study from a dissenting opinion by Robert Jackson in 1950: "Security is like liberty in that many are the crimes committed in its name." Her subtitle, "McCarthyism in America," suggests a more restricted range than is the fact. As Schrecker notes early on, what is now generally called McCarthyism actually predated the prominence of the man who eventually give it his name. By McCarthyism, she encompasses "the most widespread and longest lasting wave of political repression in American history" (p. x), the anticommunist crusade that can be traced to the early twentieth century but was at its zenith between 1946 and 1956. Though Schrecker identifies the years 1946-56 as the period when McCarthyism was most prominent, she devotes four of her ten chapters to events before 1946. The book is, therefore, actually a study of anticommunism from 1919 to the late 1950s. It concludes with an analysis of the continuing impact of anticommunism on American life.

Schrecker's book makes important contributions to our understanding of American communism and anticommunism. She presents the two in relation to each other, and she takes a complex view of both. She is effective in indicating why and how the Communist Party (CP) was vulnerable to attack, though she probably overstates the impact of anticommunism on American life.

Part One, "Antecedents," consists of three chapters, one dealing with the CP, one with the anticommunist network that had emerged by the late 1930s, and one with the role of the federal government during the 1930s. Chapter One, "We Were Sitting Ducks," broadly explores the world of American communism during the 1920s and 1930s, especially those aspects of it that eventually made it particularly vulnerable to prosecution–its secrecy, discipline, internationalism, commitment to revolutionary socialism, and ties to the Soviet Union. All these characteristics were central to the party's identity, and all became central in the attack on the CP.

In this context, Schrecker raises the question posed by a number of recent historians of the CP: "Was the party a progressive reform movement or a revolutionary Soviet-led conspiracy?" She answers, as many recent scholars have done, "it was both," but she adds "and more" (p. 4). The "more," Schrecker notes, included the CP's depression-bred coalition with American liberals, its members' roles in a number of CIO unions, the CP's staunch opposition to racial segregation, its sponsorship of a wide range of groups devoted to particular causes, and its central place in a left culture. All these, Schrecker specifies, McCarthyism targeted and largely eradicated from American life. And, she specifies, "the party, through both its own failings and its successes, fa-

cilitated the process" (p. 41).

Chapter Two, "Red Baiters, Inc.," provides a comparably broad survey of the organizations and individuals that defined anticommunism in the 1920s and 1930s and that had evolved into a loose network by the mid-1930s. Some of the groups originated in World War I or the postwar Red Scare, notably the American Legion and the FBI. Though giving due attention to patriotic and conservative opposition to the CP, Schrecker makes clear that important opposition to the CP also came from left of the political center. Members of the left-leaning Catholic Worker movement, for example, created the American Catholic Trade Unionists organization in 1937, and the ACTU and the Catholic church emerged as major foes of the CP, speaking to and for large numbers of Catholics, perhaps especially Irish Catholics, in the union movement.

Opposition to the CP from the left, including Marxists, stemmed in part from the CP's intense hostility toward other groups on the left during the late 1920s and early 1930s, a time when the CP repeatedly launched verbal and occasionally physical assaults on socialists, trade union leaders, and others whom they characterized as "social fascists." The same era saw the expulsion of a number of CP leaders who later emerged as important anticommunists, among them Jay Lovestone and several who surfaced again and again as government witnesses. Not surprisingly, many who had been viciously attacked by the CP found the party's about-face during the Popular Front era to be unconvincing. Furthermore, the CP's version of the Popular Front–even in the midst of World War II–sometimes failed to include Socialists, Trotskyists, or such CP apostates as Lovestonites.

Schrecker indicates that these left-wingers and former CP members were especially important in focusing attention on the authoritarian and manipulative aspects of the CP and in associating the CP with the malignancies of Stalin. They were also important, she notes, in influencing important left-leaning New York intellectuals. (Schrecker tends to classify as anticommunists all those who were anti-CP, though some of them tried to define themselves as both anti-Stalinists and communists.)

Though Schrecker notes the diverse nature of the anticommunist network by the late 1930s, she also specifies that it did not yet include most liberals. Chapter Three traces the attitude of Franklin D. Roosevelt, members of his administration, and liberals more generally toward the CP during the 1930s. FDR himself, Schrecker concludes, took a "nonideological approach" (p. 87), sometimes ignoring the CP and other times endorsing repression. In 1936, he secretly authorized the FBI to investigate CP activities. That decision came in response to initiatives from J. Edgar Hoover, who had emphasized to FDR what Schrecker notes was "the basic agenda for McCarthyism" over the next twenty-five years–the argument that Communists in trade unions and in the federal government posed a threat to national security (p. 89).

Other anticommunist activities by FDR and his administration developed in reaction to politicians on the right who charged the New Deal with communist sympathies. It was the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, however, that provided the most important stimulus to liberal anticommunism and the most important impetus for new federal action. Here Schrecker might also have cited Robert Jackson's unpublished memoirs, in which he depicted FDR and most of his advisors as disgusted by the Communist Party and sympathizers' about-face opinions toward Nazi Germany–concluding that American communists were controlled by the Soviets. She does note that CP opposition to FDR's policy of aid to Britain and the Allies also helped to convince FDR that the CP could pose a threat to the national security. Though FDR and most members of his administration were clearly anticommunist after 1939, the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union moderated this commitment.

Where the first three chapters provide crucial background on the CP, the anticommunist network, and developments within the federal government through the late 1930s, the next two chapters are grouped as "Representations." They focus on the creation of "a new, more demonized image of Communists" (p. 120). Schrecker argues that most previous historians have overlooked this crucial phase and have assumed that it was the Cold War itself that automatically produced repression. Schrecker also specifies that "the CP's demonized image was persuasive in large part because it was based on reality... The stereotypes that emerged during the early Cold War ... reflected, albeit in an often highly distorted manner, real party practices and policies" (p. 121).

Chapter Four develops several important elements in the creation of this demonized image, beginning with governmental and extragovernmental publicity for the view that the CP was run from the Soviet Union and that all CP members had to follow the party's line–i.e., that the CP in the United States was a monolithic tool of Moscow. In fact, the sometimes tortured twistings and turnings in the party's line from the late 1920s through 1941 significantly helped to make this notion "thor-

oughly believable" (p. 131). Schrecker argues, however, that there was, at the time, little solid evidence for direct control from Moscow. What evidence there was could not be used in the public arena, including the VENONA project (for which, see http://www.nsa.gov:8080/docs/venona/venona.html), which was being kept top secret, and, perhaps, some FBI documentation that could not be introduced because it had been obtained illegally (for which, see http://www.fbi.gov/foipa/venona/venona.pdf). Other elements in the demonization portrayed CP members as part of a worldwide conspiracy, advocates of violent revolution, inherently dishonest for concealing their party membership, and insensitive for sacrificing everything, even family relationships, for the party–and there was at least some evidence for all of these characterizations. Finally, the demonization process focused on a psychological explanation for individuals' attraction to the CP, one that emphasized that the most committed members were misfits or neurotics.

Chapter Five enlarges on this portrait of individual Communists to indicate why Americans came to perceive Communism as a danger to the nation through subversion, espionage, and sabotage. It was the *plausibility* of such a danger, rather than its reality, Schrecker argues, that brought the repressions of the years 1946-56. Central to the plausibility was the Cold War. Schrecker reviews recent evidence on the reality of espionage, including the role of Julius Rosenberg as a Soviet agent. "But," Schrecker asks, "were the activities ... such a serious threat to the nation's security that it required the development of a politically repressive internal security system?" (p. 178). By implication, her answer is no. She notes, however, that Communists "did not subscribe to traditional forms of patriotism" and that they were "internationalists" who considered themselves to be building a better world rather than betraying their country (p. 181).

Schrecker also points out that, where there is documented evidence of espionage, nearly all of it occurred during World War II, when the United States and the Soviet Union were allies. She points out too that no known espionage by Communists took place after the Cold War heated up and federal programs removed most if not all Communists from federal programs. (Of course, one might respond, by then there was little or no opportunity for Communists to engage in espionage, because they'd all been removed.) Sabotage was also a concern, but, Schrecker maintains, no evidence has ever appeared of actual or planned sabotage by Communists during the Cold War. In rendering plausible the danger of sabotage, anticommunists focused on communist-led unions and presented as their central evidence a few strikes against defense plants during the Nazi-Soviet pact era and allegations of Soviet sympathies by leaders of a few post-World War II strikes.

All of this was used to create the legal argument that the Smith Act of 1940 could be interpreted as defining the CP itself as an illegal organization. In 1945, Hoover launched an ambitious project to collect evidence for such a charge. By 1948, FBI efforts had produced a massive legal brief. The first Smith Act case against the CP, Schrecker concludes, was almost entirely the result of Hoover's initiative. Schrecker also concludes that the CP's response to the indictments of their leaders actually facilitated the government's case. When party leaders decided to use the trial as a platform from which to proclaim their political beliefs, "they came across as wooden, doctrinaire ideologues instead of as the victims of government repression that they also were" (p. 197). The decision in that case–affirmed all the way up to the Supreme Court–was against the CP. The party's decision to send its most important leaders underground, including some who were out on bail, seemed to further confirm the criminal nature of the organization. The Smith Act trial, thus, gave judicial validation to the FBI's analysis and, Schrecker argues, helped to mold both public opinion in general and the views of intellectuals and educators in particular.

Part Three is entitled "Instruments," and each of the three chapters develops a separate "instrument" of anticommunism–the FBI in Chapter Six, McCarthy himself in Chapter Seven, and the wide range of sanctions against and dismissals of actual and suspected Communists in Chapter Eight. Chapter Six, "A Job for Professionals," deals centrally with the role of the FBI in the post-WWII era. The FBI, Schrecker concludes, was "the bureaucratic heart of the McCarthy era" (p. 203). Hoover exaggerated the threat of Communism for national security, made the FBI indispensable to dealing with that threat, and thereby greatly increased his own power and that of his agency. The number of FBI agents, for example, nearly doubled between 1946 and 1952. The FBI became even more autonomous than it had been before, developing on its own initiative a Security Index that, in 1954, included more than 26,000 people who were to be placed in "custodial detention" within one hour of an order being given. The FBI became a major factor for federal employment and played a somewhat similar, if less obvious, role for private employment, by quietly inform-

ing employers that they were employing people on the Security Index. Often such information led to termination of the person's employment. In 1956, the FBI created COINTELPRO, a project aimed at disrupting or discrediting left-wing groups. The FBI also coached witnesses, engaged in illegal wiretapping and surveillance, and committed burglaries. All in all, Schrecker concludes, "the FBI was the single most important component of the anticommunist crusade and the institution most responsible for its successes–and its inequities" (p. 239).

In this book on "McCarthyism in America," only Chapter Seven is devoted specifically to the senator who gave his name to the "ism." Schrecker disagrees with those who see McCarthy as aberrant or anomalous, arguing instead that such an interpretation "places McCarthy in a vacuum, ignoring his connections to the broader anticommunist crusade and to the professional anti-Communists who flocked to his side" (p. 241). After a survey of McCarthy's tawdry career, Schrecker notes that McCarthy's "dishonesty, opportunism, and disregard for civil liberties ... were commonplace within the rest of the anticommunist network," and she concludes that McCarthy was more the "creature" than the "creator" of the anticommunist crusade (p. 265).

Chapter Eight presents the third set of "Instruments," economic sanctions and political dismissals. After reviewing federal, state, university, and other programs aimed at denying employment to alleged subversives–the large majority of them without due process–Schrecker concludes the communist threat "diminished even as the security measures ... to counter it increased in severity," making clear that "politics, not security, drove the nation's loyalty programs" (p. 287). Though noting that the federal program had become a virtual dead letter by the early 1960s, she observes that, in the end, "the witch-hunting stopped because there were no more witches" (p. 298).

The concluding section of the book is entitled "Interconnections" and consists of two chapters. Chapter Nine presents a case study of the experiences of Clinton Jencks and the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union, including the filming of *Salt of the Earth* by a group of mostly blacklisted film workers and actual Mine-Mill members. Chapter Ten, "A Good Deal of Trauma," concludes the book by surveying the impact of McCarthyism. The impact was widespread. Schrecker describes the"human wreckage"–broken careers, lost jobs (ten to twelve thousand, she estimates), suicides and fatal heart attacks, incarceration, physical attacks by vigilantes. Beyond this was the fear that was instilled in those in such vulnerable occupations as teaching and the civil service. One survey of college professors in 1955 found that half were scared for their jobs, and many who were scared practiced self-censorship. She also notes the fear that, even today, causes the survivors of that time to be reluctant to put their full stories into the historical record–an experience shared by many researchers who have interviewed those once active in the CP.

And, Schrecker notes, "if nothing else, McCarthyism destroyed the left" (p. 369)–weakened the CP, destroyed many other organizations, reduced the militancy of the CIO, caused people to retreat from politics. Some of this is in the nature of what might have been, and Schrecker ventures onto unstable ground in speculating that, in the absence of McCarthyism, a post-WWII "left-labor coalition ... might have offered an alternative to the rigid pursuit of the Cold War and provided the basis for an expanded welfare state" (p. 369). She also posits that the fear and self-censorship engendered by McCarthyism were responsible for an increasing blandness of American culture, for the banality of television and movies in the 1950s, and even for contributing to art galleries' rejection of realism in favor of abstract expressionism and to the development of the "New Criticism" in literature departments.

Above all, she concludes, "the process of destroying Communism seriously deformed American politics ... every public and private institution that fought Communism resorted to lies and dirty tricks" (p. 413). Schrecker charges that McCarthyism bred a contempt among its perpetrators for constitutional limitations and thus led logically to Watergate and Iran-Contra. "The sleaziness of McCarthyism," she suggests, "constitutes its main legacy" (p. 415).

This is an important contribution to the history of American communism and anticommunism for a number of reasons. Schrecker seeks to understand the two in relation to each other, and this is an important task for historians. She seeks to take an objective view toward communism, recognizing its positive contributions at the same time that she depicts its characteristics that laid it open to the anticommunists' onslaught. Like a number of recent scholars, she acknowledges that the CP was both "a progressive reform movement" and "a revolutionary Soviet-led conspiracy," and it is clearly the "progressive reform movement" that attracts her sympathies and causes her to speculate on what that movement might have become without McCarthyism. She uses the

concept of demonization successfully to show how a reformer could plausibly be tarred by the same brush as a conspirator. She is quite right in fixing on the politics of character assassination, including the elevation of perjury to a major crime, as one of the continuing legacies of McCarthyism. It is clearly not fair to lay the full burden for political sleaze at the feet of McCarthyism, however. The CP itself, after all, was well practiced in rhetorical character assassination and in the infiltration of other groups (e.g., the socialists) for the purpose of disrupting them.

To acknowledge that communism was both a progressive reform movement and a revolutionary, Soviet-led conspiracy, and to acknowledge that CP members did engage in espionage, however, is also to acknowledge that there were legitimate grounds for national security concerns. This makes the historian's task much more difficult. If we are now to understand the CP as "both-and," then we must also understand anticommunist both as resulting from a genuine threat to national security and as resulting from overreaction, bureaucratic self-aggrandizement, and partisan mudslinging. Earlier historians who tended not to confront the "both-and" nature of American communism and to depict it as all one or all the other could more easily avoid this difficult task and to depict anticommunism as all one or all the other. Schrecker, to her credit, has attempted the more difficult task, based on recognizing the complexity of both communism and anticommunism. She may be–and has been–criticized for the conclusions she draws, but she is asking the right questions.

Similarly, though many of Schrecker's points in her final chapter, regarding the impact of McCarthyism, are well taken, some seem overstated. Just how viable were the prospects for a liberal-labor coalition that included the CP? As Schrecker herself notes, "Communists were not good allies. They were secretive, authoritarian, opportunistic, and insulting" (p. 77). Thus, her speculation about a post-war labor-left coalition that included the CP may be based more on wishful thinking than on a realistic assessment of possibilities.

Because Schrecker focuses both on the aspects of American communism that made it vulnerable to McCarthyism and on the role of McCarthyism in destroying American communism, we may also want to know how viable the CP was, McCarthyism aside? The CP files that I examined at the Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Documents of Recent History in Moscow, along with my own interviews with many who had been active in the Communist Party in California, point to an organization that could be as ideologically rigid at the grassroots as at the center, to an organization that sometimes sought to dictate its members' love interests as well as their political views. Though the party could present itself as a vibrant grassroots movement committed to progressive reform, the section control commission was always alert to violations of discipline. The minutes of control commission hearings that I have read and the interviews I've conducted with those who were brought before control commission hearings suggest that the CP had little interest in internal due process and no interest in all in fostering a diversity of opinions. Throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, the party repeatedly used expulsion as a way to maintain uniformity of perspective among its members. The CP's veneration of the Soviet Union could be sustained only so long as Stalin's horrors could be explained or denied. In the end, Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin may have been as potent as McCarthyism in bringing the party's collapse. Some former party officials told me that it was the American party's own behavior that caused them to leave (or, in two cases, to refuse to rejoin when invited to do so after being expelled), even before 1956.

Schrecker has been criticized by some reviewers for being too sympathetic to the CP, and by a few for being too critical of it. This probably inherent in the "both-and" analysis that she has undertaken. This is an important book for everyone interested in labor and the left in the United States in the twentieth century and an important book as well for those interested in American politics. Though, in the final chapter, she sometimes overstates her case or ventures into speculation about what might have been, Schrecker also gets most of it right. McCarthyism was much more than the senator from Wisconsin. Anticommunism did deform important parts of American politics in the mid-twentieth century, and we have not yet seen the last of its legacy. Anticommunists targeted and damaged much more than just the CP. It is not "blaming the victim" to acknowledge that the CP was a deeply flawed organization whose policies and practices contributed to the excesses of McCarthyism.

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