

Conversion and Apostasy: The Political Odysseys of Granville Hicks and Irving Howe

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INTRODUCTION

The 1930s saw the widespread enthusiasm for political radicalism among American intellectuals. A considerable number of writers and artists joined the Communist Party or became its sympathizers between 1929 and 1939. Yet, a sense of disillusionment and an even stronger sense of betrayal soon followed their initial enthusiasm. One by one they left the party and tried to pick up the old patterns of life, both private and professional.

Intellectual historians have often asked why so many American intellectuals were attracted to communism in the 1930s.¹ In Malcolm Cowley's view, a number of literary-minded intellectuals, in retrospect, felt that their conversion to communism was rooted in their psychological need to overcome a sense of alienation and guilt they felt as intellectuals remote from the lives of the masses. Cowley, in *The Dream of the Golden Mountain*, emphasized the moral, personal and religious aspects of their conversion experiences: "They wanted to bury the corrupt past and be reborn into a new life. After all, that is one of the oldest dreams, expressed in the rituals of great religions."²

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Although Cowley's psychological insight into his own past and other like-minded intellectuals' is important, the objective circumstances that prompted their conversion to communism should not be underestimated.

The radicalization of intellectuals between the two world wars was an almost universal phenomenon. The post-war confusion, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the Great Depression, and the rise of fascism forced intellectuals to find a new intellectual framework which would help them understand the world in crisis. Not only in Europe and America, but also in Asia intellectuals turned left and they were eager to join the Communist Party of their respective countries. If they were willing to follow the iron law of the Kremlin, it was usually because the international communist movement gave them the assurance that they are doing the right thing in solidarity with the proletariat of the world. In spite of its marginality and ineffectiveness in national politics, the Communist Party, in many countries, inspired awe and fear precisely because it was a part of a larger movement.

It is not too surprising, therefore, that American intellectuals were also drawn to the communist movement that affected other parts of the world. However, the American Left of the 1930s was by no means a monolithic group. Although the Communist Party was the strongest force on the Left, there were many other organizations and groups that stood in opposition to the "Stalinist" control of the Communist Party and the Communist International. By the middle of the 1930s the Trotskyist movement attracted quite a few intellectuals who were disillusioned by what they considered the narrow dogmatism of the "Stalinist" party. Even the Communist Party itself, especially during the Popular Front period, was a diversified group consisting of party functionaries, union organizers, and intellectuals.

Among leftist-intellectuals either affiliated with one of the political organizations or completely independent, there were many differences of opinion in their ideological stances and moral attitudes. Such external issues as the Moscow trials, the Spanish Civil War, the Soviet-German Pact often led intellectuals to a total renunciation of their political faith or partial revisions of thought. Very few intellectuals stood still in one position for a long time. Amid this intellectual diversity and fluidity participants in the radical movement of the 1930s drifted in different directions after their alleged apostasies.

When the fluidity and diversity of the 1930s was gone and ideological

polarization started by the end of the 1940s, American intellectuals had to move in an increasingly stifling atmosphere with an ever narrowing range of ideological choices available to them; if one was not anti-communist, one was more likely to be regarded as anti-democratic and anti-American. In this new intellectual climate intellectuals had to re-examine on what terms they had left or were about to leave the movement to which they once committed themselves.

In what follows, I will focus on two intellectuals who participated in the radical movement of the 1930s. Granville Hicks (1901–1982) joined the Communist Party in 1935, when it adopted the Popular Front policy. He, however, broke away from the party when it defended the Soviet-German Pact of 1939. Irving Howe (1920–), starting out as a socialist, came under the influence of the Trotskyist movement. Eventually he resigned from the Independent Socialist League (renamed from the Workers Party) in 1952, virtually repudiating his earlier Marxist outlook.

Both wrote extensively about their radical experiences in their autobiographies. By the time they took stock of their earlier radicalism by writing these autobiographies, both had left the formal political parties and backed down from extreme positions. Each tried to make his radical phase fit into his life as a whole. Yet, their rationales for discarding a set of ideas in which they once firmly believed were colored by ambivalence and the desire to be logically and morally consistent. Looking back on their radical past from the present vantage point, both seem to have felt alternately nostalgic and apologetic, and personal apologetics mingled with their desire to be intellectually honest.

A fresh look at the political odysseys of these two intellectuals, I believe, will shed some light on the interaction between the process of each intellectual's ideological change and the intellectual climate surrounding them. Each individual's unique experience was both a precursor to, and a product of a larger change in the intellectual milieu. Their conversions to radicalism and subsequent apostasies, whatever subtle forms they took, should be reexamined by tracing their respective careers and exploring their writings during the radical and non-radical phases.

GRANVILLE HICKS— "COMMUNISM IS GOOD NEWS."

By literary historians, Granville Hicks will be remembered as the

author of *The Great Tradition*. By intellectual historians he will be remembered as a one-time Communist Party member, the literary editor of *The New Masses*, a signer of various political statements and for the rather curious role he played during the Popular Front era as the spokesman of the slogan: "Communism is twentieth century Americanism." Hicks was interested in building "a sound American radical movement" that is "firmly rooted in national traditions, free from reliance on doctrinal orthodoxy."³ A native-born American of New England stock, Hicks tried to Americanize Marxism by grafting the European philosophy into American native traditions. To him communism was an ultimate extension of such ideals as freedom, equality and fraternity, on which the American republic was supposed to be built. He thought it was his moral obligation to build a just and free society for the benefit of his fellow men.⁴

Hicks' autobiography *Part of the Truth* (1965) begins with his assertion: "I was a good boy."⁵ His insistence on goodness and his equally strong inclination to self-righteousness are to be repeated in many different phases of his life; he was a good Christian; he was a good communist; he was and is a good American; he has been always a good neighbor. Hicks' firm belief in his own goodness permeates the narrative of his life, making his communist phase just one episode of a man of good will who felt betrayed only because he believed that good would have more chance in this world.

Hicks was born in Exeter, New Hampshire in 1901. He had a reason to feel that he was firmly rooted in New England because most of his ancestors came from the British Isles in the early sixteen-hundreds to settle in the New World. His ancestors, he tells us, were not privileged people but "pretty average Americans"—"just ordinary workmen and farmers" who were the backbone of the new republic. His boyhood and youth spent in suburbs of Boston was "pretty frugal." The factory, where his father was a superintendent, was closed when the depression came shortly after Hicks was born, and Hicks' mother had to manage her household with a meager salary her husband brought back as an underpaid clerk. Later Hicks writes that he learned from his father's diligent but unrewarded career "something about insecurity in the life of a white-collar worker." His later assertion that the middle class is a "disappearing" class which shares "the same fundamental interests" with the working class might have its roots in the sense of economic insecurity Hicks felt as a child.⁶

In 1919 Hicks went to Harvard since the Hicks' "were convinced that education was the only path to a good life." Although he was a poor commuter student who "could have no part in the life of the college," he had an active life outside the Yard as a Christian youth leader in his neighborhood. He also became the editor of *Onward*, the organ of the national Young People's Christian Union affiliated with the Universalist Church. It was through his involvement in liberal Protestantism that Hicks encountered mildly eccentric radicals and pacifists. Although he was enthusiastic for Allied victory as a high school student, he was now more attracted to pacifism.⁷

When he graduated from Harvard *summa cum laude* and with highest honors in English in 1923, he decided to attend the Harvard Theological School. Brought up in Unitarian and Universalist churches, Hicks was in full sympathy with the liberal and rationalistic creeds of these churches: "the brotherhood of man, the leadership of Jesus, salvation by character, the progress of mankind onward and upward forever." What motivated Hicks to pursue his graduate work at the Theological School was his belief in "the church as an instrument of world betterment." In 1924 he became the literary editor of the *Universalist Leader*, as well as the president of the Student Federation of Religious Liberals which "tended towards pacifism, was friendly to labor, and advocated racial equality."⁸

Eventually he gave up his plan of entering the ministry because he had come to believe that "the churches, including so-called liberal churches, were making an insignificant contribution to the causes [he] regarded as important" such as the abolition of war. Interestingly Hicks' attitude toward the church was both pragmatic and idealistic. He was disappointed by the church because it failed as "a way of serving mankind." He gave up his initial plan of becoming a minister not as a theological matter, but as a pragmatic matter. What justified his pragmatic argument in his own eyes was his continued commitment to the task of world betterment, and he was prepared to find a more secular outlet for his moral idealism.⁹

The interim period between his religious phase and political phase was spent in academia. In 1925 Hicks began teaching at Smith College where he became acquainted with Newton Arvin, a literary critic and "a socialist of an intransigent sort."¹⁰ They spent many hours together discussing the Sacco-Vanzetti case and other issues at home and abroad. They remained close friends even after Hicks moved to Troy in

1929 to take up assistant professorship at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Although “a lot of talk about Communism was going on among the intellectuals” after the stock market crash and the onset of the severe depression, Hicks, in the fall of 1931, still resisted the persistent voice of “Why not Communism?” repeated by Newton Arvin. Hicks tells us that he “did not want to be involved in politics of any kind,” literature being the center of his life. Equally important was his “commitment to pacifism.” He felt that he “could not condone class war more easily than [he] could war between nations.” Yet, with his characteristic seriousness and diligence, Hicks decided to “learn something about Marxism” and the revolutionary movement. He initiated a Marxist study group at Rensselaer and made contact with other leftward-moving intellectuals.¹¹

In the fall of 1932, Hicks signed a statement supporting Foster and Ford, the Communist candidates for President and Vice-President, along with 42 other writers and artists including Dreiser, Anderson, Dos Passos, Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley and Newton Arvin. However, Hicks “had no thought of joining the Communist Party at that time” partly because “the Party was still in a rigidly sectarian phase and its leaders did not have a high opinion of bourgeois intellectuals.”¹² If “the party regarded [writers] in 1932 as a bohemian and wholly undependable element,”¹³ a number of intellectuals apparently disapproved of the Communist International’s Third Period policy of attacking social democrats as an enemy worse than the fascists.¹⁴ Hicks’ decision not to join the party then may have been partly due to his disagreement with the Third Period policy and his instinctive dislike of its fanatic and irrational fervor.

In 1973 Hicks, looking back on his past, explained that his “embracing of Marxism” was not a “conversion” experience in the religious sense. He added, however, that “in the end the result was pretty much the same,” for he “acquired an exhilarating sense of certainty” after having “studied the basic Marxist texts for a while.”¹⁵ By the time he finished writing *The Great Tradition* (1933), he was convinced that “capitalism could not and did not deserve to survive.” In the book’s concluding chapter he went as far to state that the Communist Party, “whatever its weaknesses, has raised the standard of revolution on American soil.”¹⁶ As his fame as a Marxist literary critic began to rise, the party came to regard Hicks as one of the leaders of the cultural

front: the speaker at the Writer's Congress, the editor of *The New Masses* and a lecturer. Feeling that it is foolish "not to go a step further,"¹⁷ he officially joined the Communist Party in the early spring of 1935. Shortly afterwards he was dismissed from Rensselaer ostensibly because his three-year appointment ended. His academic interlude thus coming to a sudden end, Hicks threw himself enthusiastically into the immediate task of making a better society.

Later Hicks wrote that "[m]y decision to join the Party was much the same as my decision to become a minister."¹⁸ Now the party, instead of the church, was an instrument of world betterment. He believed that good would emerge from the communist movement. He thought that the Communist Party would be instrumental in stopping the worldwide march of fascism and building a sound American radical movement. Hicks' pragmatic cast of mind imbued with moral idealism led him to communism as it had previously led him to liberal Protestantism. Clearly Hicks was not a blind man drawn to the communist movement by a sinister organization which tried to make a prey of gullible intellectuals. He joined the party with his eyes wide open, believing the party will serve him while he might serve the party.

It is also characteristic of Hicks that he decided to become a "card-carrying Communist" while most other intellectuals remained Communist sympathizers or secret members. For him to be a communist was an open commitment to the cause he always believed in. He felt that "if [he] was going to be a Communist, [he] wanted to take part in routine Party activities" and he "took some satisfaction in being part of a group that was committed even though largely ineffectual." Clearly his sense of community as a basic unit for various human activities and his sense of politics as something inseparable from daily life rooted in one specific locale were closely related to his image of communism. Although he was called a "Stalinist" by his political opponents because of his close association with the party, his impulse was probably closer to the Populists and almost antithetical to the centralized structure of the party. By 1935 Hicks and his family had settled on a farm in the rural community of Grafton, New York. Since then he came to identify himself more with his neighbors, simple country folks. His emotional attachment to ordinary people may have made him particularly susceptible to the appeal of the Popular (or People's) Front policy.¹⁹

By the time Hicks joined the party, the sectarianism of the Third

Period had gone out of fashion although the Popular Front policy was not officially adopted until the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International in August 1935. "The aims of the Popular Front," Hicks thought, "were primarily resistance to fascism, at home and abroad, the organization of labor unions, and support of New Deal measures." Although he was also in agreement with "the socialization of the means of production," he neither "desired the overthrow of the government of the United States" nor "a violent revolution."²⁰ Apparently Hicks found in the official party line of the Popular Front era nothing that would upset the values and ideals he had previously believed in. That was why *I Like America* published in 1938 often sounds like the mouthpiece of one of the party slogans: "Communism is twentieth century Americanism."

In this mildly evangelical tract Hicks tried to argue that "we could have a country of peace and plenty if the working class and the middle class united in support of a planned economy."²¹ Yet, his idea of a planned economy is so vague that it is clear that his true interest was elsewhere. His repeated insistence that human beings should be fed and clothed and housed decently no matter to what class or race they belong reflects his basically humanitarian impulse. However, his sometimes condescending attitude toward industrial workers and slum dwellers and his occasional confession of guilt as a member of "the comfortable middle class" reveal his ambivalence toward the working class whom he calls "our natural ally." Hicks' basic allegiance was to the middle class whose values such as hard work and self-reliance he cherished as the moral core of American life. He seems to have believed that these important American values were threatened when the middle class was being squeezed by excessive wealth on the top and dehumanizing poverty on the bottom. His following statement expresses both his anxieties as a member of the middle class and his new hope for the future:

Much of what you and I cherish in American life today we owe to the struggles of our middle-class ancestors. Today the middle class is vanishing, but its ideals are not lost. We can fight for them still, and fight for them all the better because we are part of the working class.²²

Here, he was proposing to preserve the "American" ideals not for the interest of the middle class but for the "people," which he regarded as the main beneficiaries of any good brought by communism.

In his article "Those who quibble, bicker, nag, and deny" written for the September 28, 1937 issue of *The New Masses*, Hicks reiterated his conviction that "Communism is good news." Reviewing the works of younger writers collected in *New Letters in America*, Hicks was a bit troubled by the fact that "our young writers were distressed by the American present and quite without hope for the future." His point was that left-wing literature ought to be able to reflect and to communicate "the essential hopefulness of Communism."²³

If few intellectuals challenged his assumption that communism was good news in the fall of 1937, most of them, Hicks included, came to doubt that assumption by the end of 1939. On the morning of August 22, 1939 Hicks heard a radio announcer say that Germany and Russia had agreed to sign a non-aggression pact and knew almost immediately that he would get out of the party. In his autobiography he wrote: "What confronted me at the moment was the simple fact that Russia was no longer in the anti-Fascist camp and therefore was not on my side."²⁴ Once he made up his mind to leave the party, he prepared a statement of his reasons for resigning from the party. In the statement that appeared in the *The New Republic* for October 4, his criticism was directed at not so much the Soviet Union and the pact itself as the American Communist Party.²⁵

What prompted him to "suspend judgment" about Soviet foreign policy was probably his continued sense of commitment to the "essential hopefulness" personified by the Soviet Union: "a socialist commonwealth." Yet, if he felt "no impulse to denounce the Soviet Union," he was ready to denounce the American Communist Party which "insisted that the Soviet-German non-aggression pact was the greatest possible contribution to peace and democracy" and "rushed into print with apologetics completely devoid of clarity and logic." What seems to have bothered Hicks most was the party's blind adherence to Moscow's orders and its willingness to be dictated to by "the exigencies of Soviet foreign policy." He also felt that the democratic front which he regarded as important for their fight against fascism was doomed to a collapse because nobody was "likely to be influenced by a Communist's recommendations," "when the party reverses itself overnight, and offers nothing but nonsense in explanation."²⁶

Although Hicks did not express any bitterness against the party and even emphasized his determination to defend "the full legal rights of

the Communist Party,”²⁷ the party leaders did not condone his “apostasy.” In the October 3, 1939 issue of *The New Masses* the editors commented on Hicks’ resignation from the editorial board of *The New Masses* as well as the party: “people who have incompletely grasped the implications of their philosophy, or who are susceptible to the current of demoralization with which the enemy seeks to divide progressives in crucial periods, are compelled to abandon their previous positions.” And they ruefully added: “It is regrettable that Mr. Hicks should be among this group.”²⁸ Hicks, once a leader of the cultural front, fell from grace along with other “demoralized” intellectuals who defected as a result of the Soviet-German Pact.

Hicks’ state of mind after his resignation from the party is, to some extent, reflected in two books he wrote during the period of transition and psychological adjustment. *The First to Awaken* published in 1940 is a utopian novel in which the protagonist George Swain finds himself in the year 2040 after having been put into sleep for one century by Dr. Carr. It is in 1940, shortly after the Soviet-German Pact and England’s declaration of war, the strike’s defeat and his wife’s death, that George, feeling sick of everything, thinks that he “would be perfectly happy if [he] could sleep through . . . the period of transition and wake up on the other side.” George’s psychological state immediately before the experiment is described thus: “What I felt was the simple longing one has to go to bed after an exhausting day. . . . What [Dr. Carr] offered me had all the advantages of suicide, with the blessed possibility of another chance.” It is not hard to see Hick’s inner turmoil reflected in this protagonist’s desire for rest and temporary escape from reality.²⁹

Predictably, what George sees in the new world of 2040 is not the nightmarish world of Orwell’s 1984 but a socialist paradise. Private ownership was abolished, the basic industries were nationalized, and all community affairs are controlled by the cooperative. Not only had technological advancement minimized waste and maximized efficiency but also such problems as war, overpopulation, prejudice had been solved. When George is invited to give a speech, he tells his audience: “There’s both good and evil in man, and you have the kind of society in which the good has a chance.”³⁰ In his autobiography Hicks told that in this novel he “tried to envisage a society that was both just and free, if a lot better than ours, somewhat short of perfection.” In a way it is amazing that Hicks could still believe in the possibility of building

a just and free society and man's innate goodness after his disillusionment over the Soviet-German Pact. Yet, writing this utopian novel seems to have been mostly therapeutic. Many years later Hicks still remembered how he "felt lost without the Party, and a year passed, perhaps two, before [he] recovered [his] equilibrium."³¹ Hicks, like the protagonist, wanted to spend the period of transition in amnesia and to dream for a hopeful future until he was ready to face reality again.

If *The First to Awaken* is basically an escapist novel, *Only One Storm* published in 1942 is more like a *Bildungsroman* in which the protagonist comes to realize his true calling in life. Hicks tried to "make use of the two kinds of experience [he] had had in recent years—political and small-town, with the emphasis on the latter." Although it is not "in any precise sense an autobiographical novel,"³² the hero Canby Kittredge resembles Hicks in many ways; in his dogged assurance and self-righteousness, above all. The small town of Pendleton is again very much like Grafton and the portrait of Canby's "intellectual" friends are drawn from Hicks' own friends. By writing this novel Hicks clearly tried to come to terms with his communist experience and further to bid farewell to this phase of his career.

The story begins with a storm which came at the time of the 1938 hurricane that was hitting the eastern part of Massachusetts. There was also another storm abroad—a catastrophic development in Munich. Yet, no dramatic event foreshadowed by these two storms takes place in the story. The only crucial moment comes when Canby, a printer sympathetic to the Communist cause, decides not to join the Communist Party after he hears the news of the Soviet-German Pact. Wallace Burgin, a novelist and a devoted Communist whom Canby deeply respects and cares for, can not make up his mind as to whether he should break away from the party or continue to work for the democratic front within the party. After a brief period in which their friendship suffers, the moment of understanding and reconciliation comes when Wallace finally decides to leave the party.

Wallace, who feels utterly lost without the party that was the center of his life, tells Canby: "Once you've held a belief like communism and given it up, there's no hope for you. If you were right before, people say, you must be wrong now. And if you were wrong before, they say, the chances are you're wrong again." Moved by his friend's deep despair, Canby tries to encourage him: "I envy you your years in the party. . . . You ought not to be ashamed of having hoped for

something and having had the courage to work for it." This conversation between Wallace and Canby almost sounds like an internal and endless debate between Hicks, an ex-Communist pessimistic about his future and another Hicks who was recovering from his mental turmoil and ready to begin a new life.³³

Canby, realizing that he should work hard to "rebuild democracy from the bottom up," feels happy and satisfied when he gets elected selectman. At the end of the story Canby realizes that "good will and good deeds, practical intelligence, loyalty" are his virtues. He now knows that his true calling in life is not to fulfill a grand scheme of world betterment but to do a good job for the people who accepted him by electing him. Although Hicks seems to identify himself with Canby emotionally, he is not totally uncritical of the hero's complacency and self-congratulatory mood, for he makes Dank, a German ex-Socialist and a cynic, say "Canby learns nothing."³⁴

Apparently Hicks was intellectually honest enough to be objective about Canby's vulnerability, gullibility and smugness behind his optimism and hopefulness. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Hicks chose Canby's belief in good will and good deeds and his determination to be part of his community over Wallace's tragic despair and isolation. Hicks implies that Wallace's tragedy derives partly from his rootlessness as an intellectual who has no home to return to but his abstract ideas. Canby's city friends are all deformed somehow because of their excessive intellectualism. Hicks seems to suggest that Canby is a saner individual because he, rooted firmly in his community, can work for something concrete and tangible. And Hicks himself was to follow Canby's path shortly.

In *Where We Came Out* which was written during the McCarthy period of 1954, Hicks tried to explore and evaluate his involvement with the communist movement in the 1930s. The fact that this earlier autobiography is more bitter and emotional than *Part of the Truth* is probably due to his anxiety and insecurity during the era of red-hunting. Ex-Communists had to defend themselves for what they did for the cause they believed in and at the same time had to admit that they were wrong-headed if well-intentioned. On February 25, 1953, Hicks, subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee, had to testify about his own association with the Communist Party and the party's influence on education. He seems to have written *Where We Came Out*, trying to make his past record straight and to clar-

ify his current position in order to convince his neighbors that he is as good an American as his next-door neighbor.

Hicks argues that those who became interested in communism were not wholly wrong because “it was not wrong to act when millions of people were jobless and hungry.” He had been right, too, “in [his] outspoken opposition to fascism.” He then tells us that he was “dead wrong in believing that [great evils and injustices in American life] could be remedied through the agency of the Communist Party.” He also suggests that he was wrong to assume that the Soviet Union and the Communist Party were leading the fight against fascism, for “the party liquidated the whole anti-fascist front, which we had worked so hard to create, after the communist-Nazi nonaggression pact.” Why was he wrong in his judgment while he was right in his intention? He stated as follows:

I had been betrayed, in part at any rate, by impulses that I can only regard as essentially generous.

To say this sounds self-righteous, as if I thought of myself as an innocent victim. Perhaps I do, but I know very well that I had no business being either innocent or a victim. Mistakes of judgment are exactly the kind of mistake for which an intellectual cannot be forgiven. Yet, on my own behalf and on behalf of many other ex-Communists, I must insist that a mistake of judgment is not the same thing as a deliberate act of treason. There were many people in the thirties for whom Communism and a love of America did not seem incompatible.

Hicks now believes that “the intellectuals who swallowed Communism, including myself, were to a great extent suckers,” although he admits that “it is no defense whatever for an intellectual to say that he was duped, since that is what, as an intellectual, he should never allow to happen to him.” Although Hicks does not wholly abandon his own intellectual responsibility, his desire to convince his reader that he is a clean-handed man of good will duped by a sinister guy like Stalin and the party’s trickery often overweighs his sense of responsibility as an intellectual.³⁵

Hicks’ excessive desire to be good and his instinctive flinching from moral evil, his sense of loyalty to his neighbors, his adherence to American values, and his suspicion of abstract ideas all made him particularly vulnerable to the emotional, and anti-intellectual pressures of the McCarthy era. Being a righteous man, he did not approve of a demagogue, but he had to protect his image as a good man by succumb-

ing to the anti-intellectual argument of the hearings.

Ironically, it was his commitment to be and do good that led him to liberal Protestantism and communism. However, when he left both the church and the party, he did it on pragmatic grounds; neither worked as a way of serving mankind. He came to regard “with skepticism all dogmas—religious, social, political or economic.” As both liberal Protestantism and communism failed as the intellectual framework for his basic need to be good, Hicks seems to have become suspicious of any intellectual posturing. Like Canby, he decided that he “would be better occupied with jobs that lay close at hand than with grandiose programs for remaking society.” This was why he had “applied [himself] to the problems” of his town such as “fire protection, schools, and library” ever since he left the party. Hicks’ renewed sense of commitment and loyalty to his community was in a way a continuation of his moral zeal for world betterment. Hicks decided to work in his little town for “a revolution more significant than the revolution I dreamed of when I was a Communist.” His sense of moral obligation to his fellow men was so strong that he simply decided to act out his good will on his own terms without relying on an ideological framework.³⁶

When the reactionary mood of the McCarthy era set in, however, Hicks was put on the defensive. He was so concerned with his sound reputation and standing in his local community that he could not help resorting to the anti-intellectual argument of portraying himself as a victim of a sinister communist scheme to deceive innocent people. Even his attachment to his community, his sense of loyalty to his neighbors, which was a part of his radical impulse, evaporated into conservative Americanism. Hicks’ journey into communism that was rooted in his moral zeal for world betterment came full circle with his return to a small town where his good will and good deeds are more likely to have concrete results. Yet, under the conformist pressure of the early 1950s, Hicks, put on the defensive, unwittingly participated in the anti-intellectualism of the era.

IRVING HOWE—“THE MOVEMENT WAS MY HOME AND PASSION.”

To anti-Stalinist radicals who were appalled at the Stalinist dogmatism by the middle of the 1930s, intellectuals such as Hicks who worked with the Communist Party during its Popular Front era seemed to be far from “innocent.” They felt that the party members and sym-

pathizers chose to be “duped” by giving up their intellectual independence and will, and accepting without any serious intellectual scrutiny the party propaganda and party line. Irving Howe was one of those who was engaged in a double-edged war against capitalism and Stalinism through the various left-wing, anti-Communist groups.³⁷

“At the age of fourteen I wandered into the ranks of the socialist youth and from then on, all through my teens and twenties, the Movement was my home and passion,”³⁸ writes Howe in an autobiographical piece included in *Steady Work* (1966). This short sketch conveys a mood of nostalgia mingled with a certain amount of uneasiness. He is nostalgic not so much about his radicalism *per se* as about his youth and its pure and innocent aspirations. However, the Movement of his youth, which ideally should have been full of hope and aspirations, was already tainted by a crucial disintegration of the socialist movement. The sense that his generation was from the beginning deprived of its rightful share of hopefulness, of its birthright as impressionable youth starting new and remaking the world, is reflected in the following passage in *A Margin of Hope*, his autobiography published in 1982: “The children of the thirties were latecomers. We had never been able to enjoy the early enchantments or delusions of the socialist hope; we adhered to it mostly through violent negations of its traducers.”³⁹ Howe’s political odyssey thus became an endless crusade against those who deflowered the original purity of the idea of socialism, as well as a pilgrimage seeking to retrieve the moral core of that idea. His journey was therefore violently polemical, naively idealistic and innately complex.

“The world I never made, made me.”⁴⁰ Coming from Howe’s mouth, it both sounds mournful and positive. The world was the chaotic world of the Great Depression, the rise of fascism and Stalinism, and the war. But at the same time, it was also the “World of Our Fathers,” — the world of Jewish immigrant families in New York. Irving Howe, born Irving Horenstein in 1920, grew up in the Jewish slums of the East Bronx. After his father’s grocery store in the West Bronx went bankrupt in 1930, the family dropped “from the lower middle class to the proletarian—the most painful of all social descents.” His parents became common laborers in the dress trade, his mother, an operator, his father a presser. The great strike of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union of 1933 excited Howe as much as his parents who joined the picket line. Interestingly Howe was not aware

of his family's poverty until he read "Sherwood Anderson's quavering report about North Carolina textile workers." He later recalled that "family trouble and intellectual stirring joined to create a political consciousness,"⁴¹ thus preparing him for the movement. Like other youth of his generation, he needed "a coherent perspective upon everything that was happening to [him],"⁴² ranging from the ailing capitalism to the rise of Hitler.

The short walk from his home to the Yiddish school on Wilkins Avenue marked the beginning of his radical odyssey. There he joined the Young Peoples Socialist League, a youth organization of the Socialist Party. Looking back, Howe comments that the main reason he became a Socialist rather than a Communist was more accidental than premeditated.⁴³ At the age of fourteen, he was not yet aware of "the outrages of Stalinism." But there was something else that might explain his choice as his later self-analysis suggests:

Perhaps I would have been afraid to become a Communist, since that involved a higher ratio of risk, severe battles with parents, fear of ostracism in school. Perhaps I sensed that I could not adapt to the stringent demands of the Communists, for while I had a sharp hunger for the coherence of disciplined thought, I also felt strong resistance to the discipline of coherent organization.

His spontaneous withdrawing from risky action may have had something to do with his sense of fear, the feeling of being "on the edge of foreseen catastrophe," which he later describes as a unique component of immigrant Jewish life. His instinctive repulsion from organizational rigidity, together with his fear of danger involved in activism, foreshadows his later development as primarily an observer-thinker rather than as a man of action.⁴⁴

Once Howe became a member of the Young Peoples Socialist League, he gravitated into the militant wing of the Socialist Party. The militant group of young intellectuals criticized the New Deal's piecemeal reform measures and denounced Stalinism while the Old Guard consisting mostly of unionists supported Roosevelt enthusiastically and criticized Stalinism only nominally. By 1936 the inner struggle in the Party led to a split between these two groups. As many of the practical unionists dropped out, the Socialist Party kept shrinking. Later Howe writes rather ironically: "If we needed one last push toward annihilation, it came from the several hundred Trots-

kyists who entered the Socialist Party in 1936 and remained there fourteen months, until August 1937.” When the Trotskyists, finally expelled from the Socialist Party in 1937, founded a new organization named the Socialist Workers Party, Howe was “one of a tiny group who at the last minute went along with the Trotskyists, enchanted captives heading straight into the hermetic box of a left-wing sect.”⁴⁵

Howe later explains that the “hermeticism of the movement” with its “esoteric discourse” and “fratricidal bickering” was an inevitable fate of a small political group isolated from the center of American life and hopelessly ineffectual in organizing the Working Class whose vanguard it is supposed to be. He writes that “[w]hat could not be vented on the world, we vented on one another. We cast about for new theories, new feats of comprehension, as if the act of knowing could make up for the reality of helplessness.” After Howe distanced himself from the Trotskyist movement, he obviously became increasingly aware of its limitations and narrowness.⁴⁶

Yet, Howe was attracted to the Trotskyist movement in the first place precisely because of its leaders’ fascinated preoccupation with “words.” To Howe Trotsky was perhaps more important as “an intellectual who believed in the power and purity of the word” than as “a man of heroic mold, entirely committed to the life of action.”⁴⁷ In the late 1930s Trotsky found his final exile in Mexico and communicated frequently with the American Trotskyists concerning policies and tactics. Trotsky’s presence was, however, more symbolic than real to the American Trotskyists who “carried with them the tragic aura of the great fallen leader whose word they passed on through print and whisper.”⁴⁸

Trotsky, in the imagination of young radicals such as Howe, was the quintessential Jewish intellectual with international perspective, verbal dexterity and a sad fate as a wandering, persecuted exile. In his perceptive article published in 1946, Howe explores what he considers the particular burden of the American Jewish intellectual who suffers from “a feeling that can be described as one of total loneliness, of complete rootlessness.” He remarked, “The word has become his final retreat; it alone has ultimate substantiality for him. The word becomes a substitute for experience rather than an aspect of it.” This may suggest a possible link between Howe’s self-consciousness as a Jewish intellectual and his foray into the Trotskyist movement. Incapacitated to act by “his own complexity of vision,”⁴⁹ Howe nevertheless kept discuss-

ing and debating, believing that “a correct formulation could create a desired reality.”⁵⁰

Once in the movement Howe seems to have lived intensely, if not too dangerously, as a ferociously argumentative Trotskyist youth. Howe, now a student at City College, became one of the leaders of the youth organization of the Socialist Workers Party. As a leader of the Trotskyist and Socialist students, Howe criticized the Young Communist League, a youth organization of the Communist Party, for “retreating to social democratic ‘class collaboration’ ” in its Popular Front phase, for “endorsing the Moscow trials” in the student paper, and for abandoning “the principles of internationalism.” With a rueful sense of irony Howe later commented that the Trotskyists’ strength rested on its brilliant performance in “‘the labor of the negative.’ ” The Trotskyists could advance Trotsky’s critique of Stalinism, exposing the Moscow trials and attacking some intellectuals who “praised Stalin’s dictatorship as a ‘higher form of democracy.’ ” But when it came to their own politics, especially their “effort to combine Leninist and democratic modes of criticism,” they were trapped in “an excess of complexity and confusion.” Predictably, confused and mostly ineffectual revolutionaries had to fight among themselves.⁵¹

The dispute over the “Russian question” that flared up in 1939 within the Socialist Workers Party finally led to the Trotskyist split in the spring of 1940, which resulted in the founding of the Workers Party. It was this newly formed organization led by Max Shachtman that Howe joined and stayed in until 1952. The 1939–40 debate centered on the political role and sociological nature of Stalinist Russia. Some of American Trotskyists including Shachtman challenged Trotsky’s view that “Russia merited ‘critical support’ in the war because it remained a ‘degenerated workers’ state’ ” which “‘preserved the nationalized property forms that were a ‘conquest’ of the Russian Revolution.” Trotsky’s critics argued that Stalinism created the powerful bureaucracy which “‘had become a new ruling class, with interests of its own in opposition to both capitalism and socialism.” Cannon and other opponents of Shachtman denounced the dissident minority who rejected Trotsky’s theory. Trotsky was assassinated in August, 1940, leaving this theoretical issue unresolved. Howe, who supported Shachtman’s position in this dispute, increasingly became preoccupied with the problem of Stalinism as a historically new phenomenon deserving serious intellectual analysis.⁵²

In the spring of 1940 Howe graduated from City College. Having "shown a flair for journalism," he soon became the editor of the Workers Party's weekly paper, *Labor Action*, and a frequent contributor to *The New Internationalist*, the party's monthly theoretical magazine. Howe, a prolific writer, felt as if he "had a key to understanding the world."⁵³ His position on the war naturally reflected the Workers Party's "third camp" policy. In the statement "Our Program Against the War" which appeared in the editorial page of the June 9, 1941 issue of *Labor Action*, one of its slogans was: "Against both imperialist war camps. For the third Camp of World Labor and the Colonial Peoples."⁵⁴ In principle, the Workers Party was opposed to democratic capitalist imperialism (the Allies), fascist capitalist imperialism (the Axis) and Stalinist imperialism (Stalinist Russia). Even after Pearl Harbor, the Workers Party did not change its anti-Imperialist War stand. *Labor Action*, in its December 15, 1941 issue, editorially declared: "This is a war of finance capital; this is a war for oil and steel and coal; . . . The Workers Party, . . . , as the uncompromising foe of capitalism and capitalist war, cannot and does not give any political support to the government, in its war, or in its conduct of the war."⁵⁵

In his signed article titled "Liberals State Their Program of Bankruptcy," which appeared on December 29, 1941, Howe sharply attacked the "undiluted chauvinism" and "two-penny jingoism" of such supposedly liberal magazines as *The Nation* and *The New Republic* which have "no mention of that most embarrassing of topics: the character of the post-war world for which the war is already being fought." "Where is the brave new world for which millions are to die?" exclaimed Howe who seems to have felt indignant with liberals' "uncritical attitude toward the imperialist war."⁵⁶

Howe also accused the editors of *Partisan Review* of their lack of clarity in the war issue in his article that appeared in *The New Internationalist* in February, 1942. "For or Against the Imperialist War—that is the issue," declared Howe in his polemical moment. Yet, trying to analyze the roots of *Partisan Review*'s "equivocal" attitude after the outbreak of war, Howe makes an illuminating observation that unconsciously anticipates his own slow change which will come later.

. . . the intellectual in modern society cannot stand still; either he moves forward to a consistent and clear socialist doctrine and stands on the side of the revolutionary proletariat, or, he must necessarily retrogress, willingly or

not, into one form or another of support of or, what amounts to the same, toleration of the status quo. Their failure, both as a group and as individuals, to move leftward resulted in an abrupt turn toward the right.⁵⁷

Dwight Macdonald, one of *Partisan Review* editors and Howe's ex-comrade, responded to his article, writing a letter in which he pointed out that "Trotskyists as political purists" can function only as "critical bystanders purely, commentators on the struggle looking down from the lofty heights of Marxistical illumination."⁵⁸ Howe, however, at this point, felt that he should stand firm in his socialist belief as he optimistically and enthusiastically declared in his *Labor Action* article of May 18, 1942: "Not the ceaseless wars, the chaotic post-war disintegration, the dictatorial brutality which capitalism promise; but the peace, the freedom, the human brotherhood which socialism alone can bring. That is our road."⁵⁹

In contrast with Howe's overflowing revolutionary idealism in *Labor Action*, his immediate personal response toward Pearl Harbor and the conscription was surprisingly calm, matter-of-fact and detached. He recalled his state of mind at that time in his autobiography:

I heard the news of Pearl Harbor while walking along Fourteenth Street: a large crowd had gathered in front of a radio store, the news of the Japanese attack came in the neutral tone of a professional announcer, and a strange hush fell upon the crowd, as if there were nothing to say—all was fatality. For several months longer I continued to put out our paper, until one morning a long-expected notice arrived in the mail. A few weeks later I was on the way to Camp Upton on Long Island.⁶⁰

Howe's detachment in face of the crisis might be due to his "biting sense of irony," what he saw as another component of Jewish cultural tradition. He later analyzes that "it forces [the Jewish intellectual] to observe his own ridiculousness, his own posturing, his objective insignificance in relation to his preoccupation."⁶¹ It is as if he knew all along that what he wrote in the pages of *Labor Action* had meant absolutely nothing to the crumbling world of which he was only a small part.

At twenty-two, Howe became one of those anonymous servicemen. Even in the Army, he was forced to be what Macdonald called a "critical bystander," for he was sent to "places where there was no active fighting." He spent his last two years at Fort Richardson, a post near Anchorage, Alaska. He had nothing to do but read and think and

accept his assigned job of processing hundreds of boxes of records left behind by combat units. Looking back, Howe suggests that his army "experience" which was actually a prolonged non-action, was imperceptibly preparing him for a career other than a professional revolutionary:

Enclosed isolation and steady reading, together, brought about a slow intellectual change. I remained passionately caught up with politics, but increasingly it became an abstract passion, like a remembered love, and it was crossed by a multitude of new interests leading to that taste for complication which is necessarily a threat to the political mind. It was not my ideas that changed so much, it was my cast of thought. The results would not fully show up until seven or eight years later, but it was here in Alaska that I lost the singleness of mind that had inspired the politics of my youth.

Acquiring the "taste for complication," he felt that he was moving toward an intellectual maturity and at the same time losing something precious. Howe always associated the "singleness of mind" with his "youth." For him it came to have a nostalgic and romantic value as his youthful passion for a socialist dream that was waning.⁶²

When Howe was discharged from the Army in 1945, he nevertheless went back to his old home: the movement. If he was "already heading down the slopes of apostasy,"⁶³ in the late 1940s as he recalls later, its evidence was not immediately visible in the pages of *Labor Action* and *The New Internationalist*. In his article titled "Terror—The Barbaric Master of Europe" that appeared in the August 5, 1946 issue of *Labor Action*, Howe paints a bleak picture of post-war Europe. In Eastern Europe "the Stalinist imperialism shifts people as if they were mere puppets." The future of peoples is "decided in secret conferences among the big powers in Paris." In short there is no hope either in capitalism or Stalinism. Thus he concludes in an almost evangelical tone: "If men would gain a sense of dignity and purpose, a feeling that their lives are more than tribulation and suffering, they must fight for socialism. That is the path out of the desert."⁶⁴

In his "World Politics" column of the January 27, 1947 issue of *Labor Action*, he severely attacked the French Communist Party for failing to raise "the slogan of independence for Indo-China."⁶⁵ In his review essay entitled "A New Theoretician for American Imperialism" which appeared on April 21, 1947, Howe criticized James Burnham who "bluntly calls for the creation of a World Empire dominated by the United States."⁶⁶ All the articles show that Howe, at least for a few

years after the war, held fast to the third camp policy: "Neither Moscow nor Washington." In his 1947 *The New International* article entitled "How Partisan Review Goes to War," Howe tried to reiterate his commitment to the road of socialism untainted by either capitalism or Stalinism by criticizing *Partisan Review's* alleged loss of faith: "PR no longer believes that 'the masses are at present capable of overthrowing both capitalism and Stalinism,' which leads it therefore, logically enough, to support U.S. imperialism in its 'resistance to Stalinism.'" ⁶⁷

In another article he set out to analyze the phenomenon of "intellectuals' flight from politics." He suggested many post-war intellectuals turned to religion, the quest for absolute morality, psychology and existentialism as a substitute for politics, because "the intellectuals feels themselves trapped in a dead end: the bifurcation between knowledge and action. They feel that nothing matters any more; that no matter what one does, one cannot challenge the political power of omnipotent bureaucracies." As one of the revolutionists who "continue to resist reaction" and "have maintained their conviction of the necessity of political activity," Howe was criticizing those intellectuals who lost "rebelliousness." Ironically, by denouncing those who were drifting away from socialism and arranging a secret pact with the status-quo, Howe was almost predicting the course he was heading for. It might be that he was trying to exorcise his own demon—his weakening spirit—by attacking his ex-comrades and the demoralized intellectuals as a group. ⁶⁸

Howe's gradual retreat from the movement can be examined in terms of both a personal choice and an ideological choice. By 1950 he was no longer a sad American-Jewish intellectual he portrayed in his 1946 *Commentary* article: "the unattached intellectual who can function neither as creator nor politician because he is either frustrated and barren in his cultural pursuits or disillusioned with politics." ⁶⁹ Actually he was so afraid of becoming such a "marginal man" that he consciously tried to get out of the confining milieu of the Workers Party (renamed the Independent Socialist League in 1948). In the late 1940s he started publishing in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, and *Politics*. In 1948 he took another step by agreeing to work as a *Time* reviewer. By 1950 he "had been accepted, with a restrained though sufficient warmth, into the milieu of the New York intellectuals." Although he did not officially resign from Independent Socialist League until 1952, he began to keep a distance by going to meetings only occasionally and

publishing less and less for the party paper. In his autobiography he recalls the sense of guilt and uneasiness he felt at that time: "Drifting away from a movement that has held one's deepest feelings entails far more than abstract decision. It means a wrench of faith. It means to abandon, perhaps betray, those who remain loyal." But many of his friends, as much "shaken by old doubts and new thought"⁷⁰ as Howe himself, seem to have had little to say to their old comrade.

Howe's personal choice of "going to spend the rest of his life as a writer"⁷¹ rather than as a professional revolutionary coincided with his rise in social status. In his 1947 article, he himself wrote that "[b]y and large [intellectuals] have become, at least in a physical-economic sense, comfortable citizens of the community. Most of them have settled down during recent years to the security of the good life, even if that good life is occasionally conscience-torn."⁷² If intellectuals as a group became less rebellious and a bit more accommodating to the status-quo in the post-war America as their sense of belonging and security increased, Howe was also part of that very sociological phenomenon which he so aptly analyzed.

Although the personal and ideological motives for leaving a political organization tend to be intertwined, Howe, apart from his personal reasons, apparently started revising his ideological assumptions around 1948. The most telling evidence of his dilemma can be detected in his response to the coup in Czechoslovakia. In his article entitled "Observations on the Events in Czechoslovakia" that appeared on the March 8, 1948 issue of *Labor Action*, Howe emphasized his awareness of the essential similarity between Stalinism and fascism in "its human consequences and techniques of power." He came to the conclusion that "both are completely totalitarian movements the primary aim of which is to suppress mass initiative—to utilize the deep stirrings of the masses while simultaneously depriving them of all initiative and self-will."⁷³ Howe's discovery of the totalitarian curse of the Right (fascism) and the Left (Stalinism) seems to have led to basic revisions of thought as he later explains in his autobiography: "we are beginning to see that for us the prime value was democracy, and that without it we could not even imagine a desirable socialism." Previously he was opposed to capitalist imperialism whether democratic or fascist. But now he came to wonder whether democratic capitalism, as long as it is democratic, might not be preferable to the totalitarian state. He was therefore to "put aside the worn-out leftist notion that, on a world scale, capitalism

was the sole or even major enemy,” for “there was now a greater enemy by far—the totalitarian state, sometimes of the Right, sometimes of the Left.”⁷⁴

Yet, his conclusion in his 1948 article suggests that he was still in a transitional stage in his rethinking process. He thus proposes: “In this country what is essential is a regroupment of all those—parties and/or individuals—who are ready to work for a democratic socialist future as against both capitalism and Stalinism without supporting either.” His endorsement of the third camp perspective is due to his conviction that the independent democratic socialist movement should take its hands off any evil, either Stalinist or capitalist, since “the evil of this world is indivisible.” He, however, was not at all sure of “a democratic socialist future,” for he asks weakly: “Yet, . . . what are the chances?” At this point what he can believe in is only “that flickering but still beautiful socialist dream.”⁷⁵

The feeling of despair over the future of the socialist movement, his personal sense of futility and weariness after a long political journey, and his new awareness of totalitarianism as something innately inhumane all led to his decision to leave the movement with which he had identified himself for such a long time. In October 1952, Howe and his friend, Stanley Plastrik submitted a statement of resignation to the Independent Socialist League. In the statement they declared that their place, as “democratic socialists,” is not in the third camp that became meaningless but in “the Western World, the democratic world.” They further committed themselves to one side of the cold war rivalry as they elaborate on their position:

The struggle between Stalinism and the West is not merely a struggle for the imperialist division of the world but, also, and in terms of consequences, more fundamentally a struggle between two ways of living: between democracy, however marred, and the most bestial totalitarianism ever known.

Although Howe undoubtedly intended to remain “democratic socialist,” it is not very clear in what terms he could be a socialist when he seems to have substituted such a vague concept as “a struggle between two ways of living” for the Marxian assumption of economic basis of human affairs and class struggle.⁷⁶

If, however, what he meant by “democratic socialism” was something like a commitment to keeping alive the “vision of the good

society,”⁷⁷ then he was not necessarily deluding himself when he told himself that he was leaving the movement because he “wanted to engage freshly with socialist ideas.”⁷⁸ Yet, his decision to defend the West against the threat of Stalinist Russia signalled a major change in his political direction. Devoid of anti-capitalist perspective, Howe’s anti-Stalinism sometimes came dangerously closer to the anti-communism or Russia-phobia of hard-line conservatives. Devoid of anti-Imperialist perspective, his anti-Stalinism led to his “critical” support of American foreign policy which he would have criticized previously.

In his statement concerning the “American Forum” published in *Dis-sent* in 1957, Howe objected to the fact that members of the Communist Party were invited to the forum. Rejecting “the notion that Communists, semi-Communists or even ex-Communists form the best material out of which to build the American socialist movement of tomorrow,” he asserted that “[i]f there is still vitality in the idea of socialism, it will succeed in winning new and young people untainted by the Stalinist past.”⁷⁹ Here one can detect Howe’s continued infatuation with the idea of youthfulness as a synonym of a hopeful new beginning. Even after he abandoned his former purist position of independent socialism and gradually moved into a critical support of democratic capitalism, that elusive and unattainable innocence of the first idea of socialism seems to have remained his first love.

Howe’s political journey was characterized by his endless labor of negating old ideas and his continual failure of finding new ones. His labor of negation led to his shifting allegiance to various political organizations and ideologies, suggesting an intellectual restlessness and psychological ambivalence. Repudiating both capitalism and Stalinism, he moved from socialism to Trotskyism and independent democratic socialism. He became convinced that no existing ideological construct would logically explain what was happening in the world which, becoming increasingly more complex, seemed to defy any human attempt to diagnose its illness. Ironically his journey came full circle when he decided to support democratic capitalism after eliminating other alternatives one by one.

CONCLUSION

In his introduction to *The God That Failed* Richard Crossman por-

trayed Western intellectuals' conversion to communism and the return back to Western democracy as a kind of initiation rite necessary for intellectual maturity. He asserted that "no one who has not wrestled with Communism as a philosophy, and Communists as political opponents can really understand the values of Western Democracy." Using allegorical terms, he concluded: "The Devil once lived in Heaven, and those who have not met him are unlikely to recognize an angel when they see one." Thus Crossman put Communism and Western democracy into the framework of Manichean conflict between darkness and light, evil and good.⁸⁰

Yet, the political odysseys of Western intellectuals were not simple choice of good and evil. The respective careers of Hicks and Howe offer telling evidence of the complexity and anguish involved in their journeys. Each came out of radical experiences, psychologically ambivalent and intellectually uncertain. At the end of their journeys, they were left with so many unanswered questions and unresolved problems. What was evolving under their very eyes was the increasingly complex world of the 20th century. In this world, there was no such clear-cut division between good and evil as Crossman suggested. Each, in his different way, was caught by the sense of helplessness and uselessness as an intellectual whose supposed ability to know, understand, and judge is defied by the constantly changing reality.

By the very token of their being intellectuals, both Hicks and Howe tried to find an interpretative framework for their journeys into radicalism and the return. Each insisted on consistency; Hicks more on moral consistency and Howe more on intellectual consistency. Hicks' self-image as a good man was so strong that he tried to convince the reader that his various activities, whether religious, political, or communal, were motivated by his single aspiration for goodness. He suggests that his communist phase was a part of his continual commitment to bringing more good to this world. His rationale for leaving the party was that it no longer was an institution that would help him reach his personal goal of creating a just and free society.

If Hicks was consistent in the vision of himself as a good man, Howe was consistent in his identification as a radical. Although his allegiance shifted from one organization to another, he always viewed himself as a radical who constantly questions and denies the existing political or ideological system. For him constant revisions of thought were but a necessary process toward a more ideal intellectual coherence. While the

aspiration for goodness was the strongest motivating force of Hicks' life, the unquenchable thirst for knowledge permeated Howe's life.

In spite of their respective assertions of moral or intellectual consistency, both Hicks and Howe seem to have been trapped in their own self-images. Hicks, so sure of his own goodness, constantly shrank from uncomfortable or ugly knowledge in order to avoid a face-to-face confrontation, or, even worse, his complicity with moral evil. By insisting on his innocence, his happy exemption from history which is innately complex and tainted, he partly abandoned his intellectual responsibility. His identification with goodness made him particularly vulnerable when the anti-intellectual argument of seeing communism as moral evil hit him in his weak spot.

If Hicks had his own concrete image of goodness, Howe had a more instinctive grasp of the evilness of things. Having joined the ranks of anti-Stalinist Left by knowing the evils of capitalism and Stalinism, he constantly shifted in his political position through his labor of negation. Although his "apostasy" was a slow and gradual process and he believed that he had never fundamentally given up his "socialist" outlook, he nevertheless backed away from his earlier radicalism and became a critical supporter of the status-quo. In the McCarthy era his anti-Stalinism put him on the side of hard-line anti-communists, in spite of his basic commitment to freedom of speech. Although he always identified himself as a radical, his radicalism in the end seems to have eroded into his nostalgic attachment to the socialist dream.

The political odysseys of Hicks and Howe were not necessarily the uplifting image of man fighting against the devil and finding the true angel. At the end of the journey their intellectual and moral positions were equivocal and susceptible to the changing intellectual climate of which they were a part.

¹ For the major studies of radicalism in the 1930s, see Richard Pells, *Radical Vision and American Dreams* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); James Burkhart Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968); John P. Diggins, *Up from Communism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975); Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965); John Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., *Failure of a Dream? Essays in the History of American Socialism*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

² Malcolm Cowley, *The Dream of the Golden Mountain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 41.

³ Granville Hicks, "The Fighting Decade," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 6 July 1940, p. 17.

⁴ There is a treatment of Hicks' in Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁵ Granville Hicks, *Part of the Truth* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), p. 3.

⁶ Granville Hicks, *I Like America* (New York: Modern Age Books, 1938), pp. 208–209, 46, 96, 117, 122. Where all the quotes come from the same text, one note is used at the end of the paragraph.

⁷ Hicks, *Part*, pp. 13, 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44, 44, 49.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 44.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 88, 93, 93–94.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 97.

¹³ Cowley, *Dream*, p. 117.

¹⁴ For the detailed account of the the Communist International's policies, see Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical Study* (New York: Beacon Press, 1957; New York: Da Capo Press, 1974) and Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1960).

¹⁵ Granville Hicks, "Statement," *Granville Hicks in The New Masses*, ed. Jack Alan Robbins (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1974), xv.

¹⁶ Granville Hicks, *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature Since the Civil War* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), pp. 295, 293.

¹⁷ Hicks, *Part*, p. 128.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 128, 134.

²⁰ Granville Hicks, *Where We Came Out* (New York: Viking Press, 1954), pp. 40, 41.

²¹ Hicks, *Part*, p. 150.

²² Hicks, *America*, pp. 118, 122, 123.

²³ Granville Hicks, "Those who quibble, bicker, nag and deny," *Granville Hicks in The New Masses*, pp. 385, 382.

²⁴ Hicks, *Part*, p. 176.

²⁵ The party's official name (renamed in 1929) was Communist Party of the U.S.A. (CPUSA). For the detailed account of the history of the Communist Party, see Howe and Coser, *The American Communist Party*; Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*; John P. Diggins, *The American Left in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973).

²⁶ Granville Hicks, "Letter to the Editor of *The New Republic*," *Granville Hicks in The New Masses*, pp. 429, 431, 430, 431.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 431.

²⁸ "Granville Hicks Resigns," *The New Masses*, 3 October 1939, p. 21.

²⁹ Granville Hicks, *The First to Awaken* (New York: Arno Press & New York Times, 1971; repr., New York: Modern Age Books, 1940), pp. 28, 31.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

³¹ Hicks, *Part*, pp. 189, 185.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 194.

³³ Granville Hicks, *Only One Storm* (New York: Macmillan, 1942), pp. 396, 404.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 397, 413, 348.

³⁵ Hicks, *Where We Came*, pp. 243, 8, 7, 44, 9, 66.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 244, 15.

³⁷ For the critical studies of Howe, see Terry A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: Partisan Review and Its Circle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); William L. O'Neill, *A Better World: The Great Schism: Stalinism and the American Intellectuals* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).

³⁸ Irving Howe, *Steady Work: Essays in the Politics of Democratic Radicalism 1953-1966* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), p. 350.

³⁹ Irving Howe, *A Margin of Hope* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p. 344.

⁴⁰ Howe, *Steady*, p. 354.

⁴¹ Howe, *Margin*, pp. 7, 8, 9.

⁴² Howe, *Steady*, p. 358.

⁴³ Howe's own account in *A Margin of Hope* is as follows: "Perhaps what made me a Socialist rather than a Communist was that the Socialists reached me first, through some students at my high school who were sons of old-time officials in the garment unions" (p. 12).

⁴⁴ Howe, *Margin*, pp. 12, 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 35. The leaders of the Workers Party of the United States, a Trotskyist organization founded in 1934 through a fusion of the Communist League of America and the American Workers Party, made a strategic decision to enter the Socialist Party as a group in the manner of the Trotskyists in France. For more details, see Wald's *The New York Intellectuals*, p. 106.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 76.

⁴⁷ Irving Howe, ed., *The Basic Writings of Trotsky* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1964), p. 3.

⁴⁸ Howe, *Margin*, p. 34.

⁴⁹ Irving Howe, "The Lost Young Intellectual: A Marginal Man, Twice Alienated," *Commentary* 2 (October 1946): p. 366.

⁵⁰ Howe, *Margin*, p. 53.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 67, 41, 71. In spite of its verbal aggressiveness Howe's group apparently remained a tiny minority against the powerful YCL which "must have had about four hundred members at City College, while the quarrelsome anti-Stalinist Left, all groups together, had perhaps fifty" (*Margin*, p. 64).

⁵² Howe, *Writings of Trotsky*, pp. 34, 35.

⁵³ Howe, *Margin*, pp. 83, 85.

⁵⁴ "Our Program Against the War," *Labor Action*, 9 June 1941, p. 4.

⁵⁵ "Workers Party Stand on the War," *Labor Action*, 15 December 1941, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Irving Howe, "Liberals State Their Program of Bankruptcy," *Labor Action*, 29 December 1941, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Irving Howe, "The Dilemma of Partisan Review," *The New Internationalist* 8 (February 1942): pp. 23, 22, 21.

⁵⁸ Dwight Macdonald, "The Partisan Review Controversy," *The New Internationalist* 8 (April 1942): p. 91.

⁵⁹ Irving Howe, "Poison Gas: The Imperialist War Adds a Refinement," *Labor Action*, 18 May 1942, p. 4.

⁶⁰ Howe, *Margin*, pp. 88-89.

⁶¹ Howe, "The Lost Intellectual," p. 366.

⁶² Howe, *Margin*, pp. 90, 95.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁶⁴ Irving Howe, "Terror—The Barbaric Master of Europe," *Labor Action*, 5

August 1946, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Irving Howe, "Paris, Saigon, New York," *Labor Action*, 27 January 1947, p. 4.

⁶⁶ Irving Howe, "A New Theoretician for American Imperialism," rev. of *The Struggle for the World*, by James Burnham, *Labor Action*, 21 April 1947, p. 5.

⁶⁷ Irving Howe, "How Partisan Review Goes to War," *The New Internationalist* 13 (April 1947): p. 110.

⁶⁸ Irving Howe, "Intellectuals' Flight from Politics," *The New Internationalist* 13 (October 1947): pp. 241, 242.

⁶⁹ Howe, "The Lost Intellectual," p. 361.

⁷⁰ Howe, *Margin*, pp. 127, 112, 111.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁷² Howe, "Intellectuals' Flight," p. 242.

⁷³ Irving Howe, "Observation on the Events in Czechoslovakia," *Labor Action*, 8 March 1948, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Howe, *Margin*, pp. 108, 198.

⁷⁵ Howe, "Observations," p. 4.

⁷⁶ Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectual* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 322. According to Wald, "Statement of Resignation of Irving Howe and Henry Judd [Plastrik's penname] from the Independent Socialist League" was published in *Forum* in January 1953. *Forum* was the discussion and information bulletin of the Independent Socialist League.

⁷⁷ Irving Howe, ed., *A Handbook of Socialist Thought* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1972), p. 24.

⁷⁸ Howe, *Margin*, p. 112.

⁷⁹ Irving Howe, "The Choice of 'Comrades'," *Dissent* 4 (Summer 1957): p. 335.

⁸⁰ Richard Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (New York: Bantam Books, 1954), p. 12.