



The Cause That Failed: Communism in American Political Life

Guenter Lewy

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From a height of almost 100,000 members during the Depression, when politicians, workers, and intellectuals were drawn into its orbit, the American Communist Party has descended into irrelevance and isolation, failing even to run a presidential candidate in 1988. Indeed, as Guenter Lewy writes in this critical account of American Communism, despite decades of feverish activity and ferocious discipline, it was a cause doomed to fail from the very beginning.

In *The Cause that Failed*, Lewy offers an incisive narrative of the American Communist Party from the days of John Reed to the advent of glasnost. He traces its origins and development, underscoring how its devotion to Moscow and inflexible Marxist ideology isolated it from the American scene--in fact, most of its first members were Eastern European immigrants. During the left wing tide of the Depression the Communist Party reached the peak of its influence, as it joined labor unions and progressive organizations in a "Popular Front." But Lewy reveals the deceptive, antidemocratic, self-defeating tactics the Communists pursued even then, as they manipulated front organizations, seized control of political parties, peace groups, and labor unions, and enforced political conformity among members and sympathizers. He follows the Party through its inexorable decline in the succeeding decades, up to its current position as one of the last Stalinist parties left in a world of glasnost and perestroika.

Lewy also provides a sharply critical discussion of the encounter between Communism and liberal and mainstream America. He examines such groups as the ACLU and SANE, arguing that the years when these organizations were tolerant toward Communists were also the times when they neglected their original purpose in favor of partisan causes. He shows how Communists have manipulated well-meaning citizens in the peace movement and in Wallace's 1948 Progressive Party presidential campaign. One of the great ills Americans suffer, he writes, is an overreaction to McCarthyism--an atmosphere of anti-anticommunism--which blinds them to the wrongs wrought by international Communism and makes them ignore the deceptive role played by the American Communist Party, which even today still keeps eighty percent of its membership secret.

The Cause that Failed presents an intensively researched and trenchantly argued historical analysis of Communism in America. Guenter Lewy's provocative account provides a new understanding of Communism's machinations in U.S. politics, and how Americans from across the political spectrum have responded to its challenge.

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