

John Earl Haynes
Dissecting Anti-Americanism: The Contribution of Paul Hollander
Philadelphia Society, 14 April 2012

My perspective on Paul Hollander's work on anti-Americanism is shaped by more than four decades of research on communism and Soviet espionage. It was, I think, sometime in the 1980s when I ran across *Americanism: A World Menace*, a 163 page book published in 1922 and written by W.T. Colyer, one of the leading figures in the new Communist Party of Great Britain. Colyer's book had many of the characteristics that Paul Hollander has pointed out to in one strand of radical left anti-Americanism: a self-contradictory and internally incoherent argument and a barely concealed hysteria that bordered on a frothing from the mouth rage.

At the time that vehemence of the book's anti-Americanism seems strange. Bolshevism had seemingly emerged from no-where only to burst upon the world in 1917, overthrown a long-established and powerful empire, won a civil war, drove off foreign intervention, and established its rule over one-sixth of the globe. These were still heady days for newly-born Communists such as Colyer. While there had been some setbacks, in 1922 Communists still expected Red revolution to soon spread out of Russia to bolshevize first all of Europe and then all of the world. Yet here one of those confident new Communists was writing a book describing as a "world menace" an America that had also just emerged on to the world stage in a large way. Moreover, while America's last minute but decisive intervention into World War I had given it in 1919 an unexpected position of world influence, given the exhausted state of the leading European powers, by 1922 the U.S. had again withdrawn across the Atlantic and not only declined to take the leading position in the League of Nations that was its for the asking, but refused even to join. Retreat from the world, not menacing aggression, more characterized America of the 1920s.

At the time Colyer's *Americanism: A World Menace* seemed to me merely puzzling, perhaps an individual hobby-horse of Colyer himself. But as my research on American Communists deepened, I noted other aspects of the attitude of Communists toward America and Americanism.

The Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) oscillated between periods of defiant radicalism accompanied with overt hostility toward America traditions and period of 'Americanization.' In the radical periods, particularly in the 1920s, Communists often overtly adopted Soviet attributes, including a fondness for leather jackets and even wearing Cossack trousers and boots. You also had, for example, the American Communist poet H.H. Lewis, writing such doggerel as:

I'm always thinking of Russia
I can't get her out of my head.
I don't give a damn for Uncle Sham

I'm a left-wing radical red!

And another American Communist poet, Tillie Olsen, versified in 1934 that, Stalin's Soviet Union was "a heaven . . . brought to earth in Russia."

But these overtly pro-Soviet and anti-American periods alternated with periods where the CPUSA wrapped itself in the American flag and proclaimed itself to be the heir of America's democratic and revolutionary traditions. Most famous of the latter periods was the latter half of the 1930s when the CPUSA coined the clever slogan "Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism." And while party conferences still displayed plenty of red banners with the Hammer and Sickle they were mixed with lots of American flags and portraits of Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln hung beside those of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin. Earl Browder, then head of the CPUSA, announced that the American Declaration of Independence should be understood as a foreshadowing of Marx's Communist Manifesto and had "Yankee Doodle" played at party conventions. Similarly, in the 1942-1945 second coming of the Popular Front during the wartime alliance of the US and the USSR, the CPUSA's 1944 convention took place beneath portraits of two non-Communists, Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, and one Communist, Joseph Stalin, and displayed banners hailing the more than nine thousand Communists in service with the American armed forces.

Yet each period of Americanization was followed by a return to defiant radicalism and overt anti-Americanism. Further, I noticed a difference in the reaction of different types of Communists to these shifts in line. The CPUSA had two types of members. Its core consisted of dedicated, even fanatical, militants who spend all or most of their lives in the party. Surrounding this core was a much larger group of members who joined the party but left within two or three years. During the 1930s, its years of most rapid growth, in some years the party might gain 30,000+ new members, but at the same time it lost 20,000 or so existing members, leaving a net gain of only 10,000. While these short-term members were a majority of the party and important to the CPUSA in terms of its influence, they did not really control or run the party. It was the long-term core that directed the party and determined its real character.

The long-term core membership and the softer short-term members reacted differently to these periods. During period of Americanization, recruiting was easier, and the flow of short-term members into the party increased. During period of radicalization, new members were fewer, and the flow of people out of the party increased, often producing a net shrinkage in party membership. Clearly, short-term Communists tended to find Americanization comfortable. This result did not surprise me, and probably does not surprise anyone here. But the reaction of the core of militants, however, did surprise me. It did not surprise me that they readily accepted the shifts. Otherwise, they wouldn't be long-term members, would they? But what did surprise me was the tone I noticed in memoirs and accounts of, for example, the 1945 repudiation of the 'Browderism' and the adoption of a much more confrontational stance toward American politics and American society. The tone reflected in my reading was that most long-term core members were psychologically more comfortable with periods of radicalism and anti-Americanism; they

found it natural. They accepted the period of Americanization, but really only as a tactical stance.

In addition, I found the argument advanced by Aileen Kraditor in her 1988 book, *“Jimmy Higgins”: The Mental World of the American Rank-and-File Communist, 1930–1958* highly persuasive. She stated that a core psychological attribute of long-term CPUSA members was intense hatred. There were several targets for this hatred, but among the chief objects of American Communist hatred was America itself. In 1929 the Daily Worker’s poet, Edwin Rolfe, called for American Communists to develop language with “the power to hate.” Most did. Among Kraditor’s numerous examples of American Communist hatred of America was a 1949 statement by Herbert Aptheker, one of the party’s leading intellectuals, that the United States was “so putrid . . . that it no longer dares permit the people to live at all” and America’s elite he described as having “the morals of goats, the learning of gorillas and the ethics of--well, of what they are: racist, war-inciting enemies of humanity, rotten to the core, parasitic, merciless.”

Eventually I began to realize that anti-Americanism was not just a tactical by-product of Communist ideology but one of its animating principles. And with that I began to pay more attention to anti-Americanism as a subject. So, here we return to Paul Hollander. One of the first things that strikes one when looking into scholarly consideration of anti-Americanism is that while some historians, Simon Schama and Daniel Boorstin among the more prominent names, have given the issue serious attention, only a few have focused on the phenomena. And among those who have focused, certainly not only in the front rank but leading the charge is Paul Hollander. His 1992 book, *Anti-Americanism: Critiques at Home and Abroad, 1965–1990* (reissued in revised form in 1995 as *Anti-Americanism: Irrational & Rational*), was a pioneering work.

I learned a great deal from it that helped to make sense of some aspects of my own interest in the history of domestic American communism and anticommunism. It also assisted in understanding the frenzied hatred in sections of the academic world directed the books and articles that my colleague Harvey Klehr and I have authored. Among our bitter critics was Scott Lucas, an American academic who taught American Studies at the University of Birmingham in Great Britain. I remember attending a lecture of his at the 2001 conference of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations where he proclaimed his adherence to “rational anti-Americanism” and then cracked wise that while he officially taught American Studies, his real pursuit was “anti-American studies.” I have little doubt that “anti-American studies” is, in fact, exactly what Professor Lucas has taught to thousands of British university students.

Hollander’s discussion of the various strains of anti-Americanism and the variety of resentments and frustrations that fuel anti-Americanism also caused me to revisit the 1922 book, *Americanism: A World Menace*, that I mentioned at the beginning of this talk. In particular, I better understood a statement in the preface to the book. The preface was written by Tom Mann, a close colleague of W.T. Colyer, who authored the book itself. Mann, like Colyer, was one of the founders of the British Communist Party. He also had the distinction of going on to become one of the founders of Australian Communist Party. In addition, he served as an agent of the Communist International for years, and even had

a Spanish Civil War International Brigades unit, the Tom Mann Centuria, named after him. Mann's preface, not surprisingly, endorsed his colleague's, or should I say his comrade's, book but also had this observation: "If we refuse to travel towards Communism the only alternative is to become Americanised."

In one sense Mann's remark was puzzling in that if one took the book literally, Communists had little to fear from the United States. In Colyer's account America and its people come across as a dysfunctional nation whose ill-educated and unhealthy population was led by a stupidly short-sighted and utterly debased ruling class whose greed had produced a ruinously inefficient and crippled industrial economy. This was a menace to the world? And how could such a society be a threat to the socialist society being built in the USSR where Communists were confident that the Marxist-Leninist organization of society would produce a prodigious increase in industrial production as well as outpouring of cultural, educational, and social improvement that would astound the world with its intellectual, artistic, and scientific achievements?

Given the disabilities of American civilization and the, in Communist eyes, the manifest advantages of the socialist mode of life how could Mann say: "If we refuse to travel towards Communism the only alternative is to become Americanised." Part of the answer, I believe, can be found in one of Paul Hollander's observations. He wrote: the deepest and broadest source of anti-Americanism, one that unites its proponents abroad and within the United States, is the aversion to (or, at least, ambivalence about) modernity, which the United States most strikingly represents.

Hollander's point about America's embodiment of modernity strikes me as important in understanding communism's fundamental hostility to the United States. Ideologically, communism claimed to represent the future, to own modernity, to be or to be building the most modern civilization and culture that could be. While Colyer would not admit, and Mann only inadvertently admits, is that both deeply feared that Americanism was Communism's rival to own the future, to embody modernity.

Communism and Americanism were not rivals, one should note, in an intellectual ideological sense. Communism had a formal ideology, Marxism-Leninism, that claimed that the science of dialectical materialism allowed it to understand the past, present, and future of human history. Americanism was not a formal ideology, although it had ideological elements. It was, instead, a civilization and a culture that embodied a particular dynamic modernism. While to Mann and Colyer, and to other Communists, the science of Marxism-Leninism taught that Communism embodied modernism and was the scientifically pre-ordained next step in human civilization, the reality on the ground was that American culture and American civilization was powerfully attractive to people all over the world. And despite the Communist view that America's market capitalism was inherently inefficient and structurally flawed, again the reality on the ground was that America was the richest nation on the earth, its industry the most advanced, its ordinary workers the best paid in the world, and it embodied dynamic change. Intellectually Communists denied all of this or found reasons to explain it away. Emotionally, however, at some level they sensed the attraction of Americanism and treated

Americanism as a Siren song that could cause the ship of communism to crash on the rocks. Thus, the vehemence, indeed, often hysterical and raging hatred of America that was an ongoing element of communism in its day. In the end, of course, Mann's fears were realized, at least in part. One could say the Siren song worked, communism did crash on the rocks, and a major reason was that the civilization communism built simply could not compete economically, technologically, and, importantly, culturally with America and the Americanized West.

But, of course, anti-Americanism lives on. The continued hatred of America and Americanism one finds on the left has, I think, two elements. One is bitter resentment that Americanism did defeat communism and the once confident hopes of the radical left of a future socialist utopia. This is anti-American as leftist revenge and sour grapes. But, additionally, leftist utopianism lives on various forms such as radical environmentalism, radical feminism, and radical multiculturalism. These radical movements also fear that American culture and civilization as well as "Americanized" attitudes in the rest of the world are the major road blocs to their utopian goals. Thus raging hatred of America is a inherent element in these contemporary radical movements.

Let me close by saying that Paul Hollander's pioneering work in bringing the historical importance of anti-Americanism to the attention of the scholarly world deserves certainly the attention we give it here today but much more as well.