Whittaker Chambers' *Witness*—A Review

By The Right Honorable The Earl Jowitt of Stevenage

There has recently been published a book by Mr. Whittaker Chambers called *Witness*. It is an account by the author of his experiences when he was a Communist, and of his later years when, having realised how base, how ignoble and how unsatisfying the Communist ideology had proved to be, he embraced the ideal of the democratic way of life. The book runs to no less than 800 pages. It would, I think, have been a better book if it had been a shorter book, and if some of the purple passages had been omitted; for fine words are no adequate substitute for clear thinking. Yet the author, in spite of much rhodomontade, tells a most interesting story, and the book well repays careful study.

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In 1925 he joined the Communist Party. He left it in 1937, according to his earlier statements made to the F.B.I. and to the House Committee. At the trial he put the date of his leaving as the 15th April, 1938. He adopts this latter date in his book. If it were possible to establish the exact date, it would be a matter of some importance; for the incriminating documents which proved the downfall of Hiss were all dated between the 1st January and the 15th April, 1938.

No doubt the mental processes which caused him finally to leave the Party covered some period of time. It is at least certain that he had begun making his preparations in the course of the year 1937. During that year he had become, so he says, a God-fearing man; though I must confess that the steps he took preparatory to leaving evidenced but little fear of God. He describes these—amongst other things he wanted to obtain what he calls in his book "a life preserver, in the form of copies of official documents stolen by the apparatus, which, should the Party move against my life, I might have an outside chance of using as dissuader." He was lucky enough to obtain in those first three months of 1938 just the incriminating documents he wanted: not mere photographs of secret documents—for a photograph does not prove the source from which it came. He got something much better—documents written by Hiss in his own handwriting, and copies of secret documents typed on an old typewriter which belonged to Hiss. Mr. Chambers knew how revealing a typewriter can be. He had, he tells us, taken the precaution to get rid of his own typewriter in such a way that it could not be traced to him.

From the day Mr. Chambers joined the Party, when he was 24, to the day he left it when he was about 37, I can find no single act that redounds to his credit. This is hardly surprising, for he explains that the Communist ideology has no use for our morality. Lying, treachery, even murder, are not regarded as bad in themselves, for the end justifies the means, and the end is the overthrow of Christianity, and the Western way of life and the installation of world government on the Communist pattern.

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But Mr. Chambers has no misgivings: he is right—and all who differ from him are wrong. He sees himself as the modern St. George, clad in shining armour and engaged in deadly combat with the dragon of Communism. As for the case, it is not a mere case in which an individual called Chambers is testifying against an individual called Hiss. It is a "tragedy, [illegible]. The generation is on trial and Chambers is a witne[illegible] The contest is a contest between the forces of good (as represented by Chambers) and the forces of evil (as represented by Hiss), and what is involved in the contest is the soul of the American people—indeed of the whole free world.

One real interest of this book rests in its portrayal of the character and development of the author, and his account of his early life explains much. Unhappily his parents quarrelled and his father left his mother with two small children—the author and his younger brother. She had been brought up in comfortable circumstances, and still entertained lively recollections of that past, rolling off the names of distinguished families. Young Whittaker used to wonder why, if these people were all such friends, "they never came to visit us." The truth was that the mother was finding it very difficult to make both ends meet. Nor was the health of the children satisfactory. They would lie on a couch enduring the torments of toothache studying a print called "Death the Comforter." The boy had no real friends, he had the unpleasant feeling of being "out of step." His father was unapproachable.

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a man of great gifts and high intelligence drifted into Communism. We do not, however, learn what there is in the Communist creed which makes it attractive to an intelligent mind. Such attraction as it has seems to be negative rather than positive. The world as we know it with its series of wars and economic crises is wrong and we must escape, so the argument runs, from the bad old order, and so Communism becomes a refuge for those in distress.

Then we come to that part of the story with which readers of the Hiss trial will already be familiar. Chambers in 1934 comes to Washington as a Communist agent in charge of the underground. There he finds a group of Communists already organised by one Harold Ware, and he asserts that Alger Hiss and his brother Donald were members of that group. I could wish that in his book he had given us a considered and authoritative account of the circumstances in which he used to collect Communist dues from the group, for he gave three conflicting accounts to the House Committee and, oddly enough, the matter was never referred to at the trial. He explains once more his repeated denial when under oath that he possessed any evidence of espionage. I confess I find his explanation singularly unconvincing: there is, I think, a much simpler explanation than any he has given. We hear again of the incident in 1936, when Hiss had suddenly volunteered that he could bring out secret documents belonging to the Nye Committee. Were these documents secret documents at all? Were they not documents which were made available to any representative of the press? It is a striking fact that in the course of the second trial the allegation that these documents were secret seems to have been more or less abandoned.

Then there was the case against Donald Hiss. He was called at the trial and gave his evidence. He was cross-examined, but the cross-examination consisted of precisely eleven questions. Now, if Donald Hiss had never been a Communist and therefore not a member of any Communist group, what becomes of the

he had collected Communist Party dues from Donald Hiss? The case against Donald Hiss was allowed, I think, to go by default.

It was not until the libel action had been launched and Mr. Chambers found himself confronted with a claim for $75,000 by way of damages that he decided to reveal the contents of his life preserver. So he arranges to go round to his friend Mr. Levine, with whom he had left the envelope containing these documents in the summer of 1938, some ten years before. He describes with what surprise he realised what the envelope contained—not only the documents provided by Hiss, but documents too in the handwriting of Mr. White. How strange that both these intelligent men should have supplied handwritten documents to a Communist agent instead of having them photographed in the usual manner. How odd that Mr. Chambers should have sworn that he had no such documents.

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Communism is a danger that confronts us all. We should try to understand what it is that makes men Communists, and how Communism works. This book answers some of these problems—and for that reason I think it should be widely read.

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found himself becoming impudent and rebe
himself to acquire the art of cursing, and dete
he was to be outcast that he would be outcast
would say to himself, 'I am an outcast. My fam
have no friends, no social ties, no church, no
we claim and that claims us, no community.'
as was his wont in later life, he came to the co
world had lost its soul. It was arranged that
Williams College, but after one or two days h
was not the place for him and entered Colu
There he got into trouble with the authorit
blasphemous play, ridiculing the events of Eas
home once more to find that grandmother had
them. She was insane and was given to picking
were scenes too between grandmother, armed
father, who would fling himself against grand
anger. Indeed these scenes became a regular p
life - and what a life it must have been.

Then the brother started to drink and ask
enter into a suicide pact. He asked in vain, an
a solitary suicide. Whittaker, much to his
stopped him once; then after horrible fights be
and the brother about women, the brother was
his head in a gas oven, and Whittaker, believ
too gentle for this world, wondered if he was
his brother make the journey alone.

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There was no sort of religious atmosphere in the home; on one occasion Whittaker in some rambling child's conversation used the phrase, "When God made the world," and his mother promptly replied, "The world was formed by gases cooling in space."

When the father left, the mother moved the children's cots into her room and used to keep an axe under her bed, and the child, though his mother did not know it, kept a knife under his pillow which gave him a feeling of security. One night when the mother heard screams coming from outside, she screamed herself in sympathy and told the children to scream too. What an atmosphere in which to bring up an emotional and highly strung child.

Then, when he was older, he would accompany his grandfather on his drinking bouts, for grandfather [illegible] great deal, and from time to time would "disgorge quotations from Roman—and be ready for more." Then long after dark the child, tired out, would take one of grandfather's hands and guide him home, for he was no longer quite sure of his footing.

Then father made up his mind to return home, he lived an

...separate life having his meals on a tray in his room, and the chill of his presence spread through the house, and the family life festered incurably.

When the time came for Whittaker to go to High School, he found himself becoming impudent and rebellious. He forced himself to acquire the art of cursing, and determined that since he was to be outcast that he would be outcast up to the hilt. He would say to himself, 'I am an outcast. My family is outcast. We have no friends, no social ties, no church, no organisation that we claim and that claims us, no community', and generalising, as was his wont in later life, he came to the conclusion that the world had lost its soul. It was arranged that he should go to Williams College, but after one or two days he decided that it was not the place for him and entered Columbia University. There he got into trouble with the authorities for writing a blasphemous play, ridiculing the events of Easter Sunday. Back home once more to find that grandmother had come to live with them. She was insane and was given to picking up knives. There were scenes too between grandmother, armed with scissors, and father, who would fling himself against grandmother's door in anger. Indeed these scenes became a regular part of the family life – and what a life it must have been.

Then the brother started to drink and asked Whittaker to enter into a suicide pact. He asked in vain, and determined on solitary suicide. Whittaker, much to his brother's regret, stopped him once; then after horrible fights between the father and the brother about women, the brother was found dead with his head in a gas oven, and Whittaker, believing himself to be too gentle for this world, wondered if he was not wrong to let his brother make the journey alone. Kisseloff-23422

Here indeed with a drunken grandfather, an insane grandmother, a suicidal brother and disunited parents, we have all the elements of a Greek tragedy, and Whittaker Chambers, believing that the world was dying a death of the spirit, now becomes an irreconcilable Communist. So we learn how it was that

a man of great gifts and high intelligence drifted into Communism. We do not, however, learn what there is in the Communist creed which makes it attractive to an intelligent mind. Such attraction as it has seems to be negative rather than positive. The world as we know it with its series of wars and economic crises is wrong and we must escape, so the argument runs, from the bad old order, and so Communism becomes a refuge for those in distress.

Then we come to that part of the story with which readers of the Hiss trial will already be familiar. Chambers in 1934 comes to Washington as a Communist agent in charge of the underground. There he finds a group of Communists already organised by one Harold Ware, and he asserts that Alger Hiss and his brother Donald were members of that group. I could wish that in his book he had given us a considered and authoritative account of the circumstances in which he used to collect Communist dues from the group; for he gave three conflicting accounts to the House Committee and, oddly enough, the matter was never referred to at the trial. He explains once more his repeated denial when under oath that he possessed any evidence of espionage. I confess I find his explanation singularly unconvincing—there is, I think, a much simpler explanation than any he has given. We hear again of the incident in 1935 when Hiss had suddenly volunteered that he could bring out secret documents belonging to the Nye Committee. Were these documents secret documents at all? Were they not documents which were made available to any representative of the press? It is a striking fact that in the course of the second trial the allegation that these documents were secret seems to have been more or less abandoned.

Then there was the case against Donald Hiss. He was called at the trial and gave his evidence. He was cross-examined, but the cross-examination consisted of precisely eleven questions. Now, if Donald Hiss had never been a Communist and therefore not a member of any Communist group, what becomes of the

worn testimony of Chambers before the House Committee that he had collected Communist Party dues from Donald Hiss? The case against Donald Hiss was allowed, I think, to go by default.

It was not until the libel action had been launched and Mr. Chambers found himself confronted with a claim for $75,000 by way of damages that he decided to reveal the contents of his life preserver. So he arranges to go round to his friend Mr. Levine, with whom he had left the envelope containing these documents in the summer of 1938, some ten years before. He describes with what surprise he realised what the envelope contained—not only the documents provided by Hiss, but documents too in the handwriting of Mr. White. How strange that both these intelligent men should have supplied handwritten documents to a Communist agent instead of having them photographed in the usual manner. How odd that Mr. Chambers should have sworn that he had no such documents.

The book *Witness* contains a revealing account of the mental agony which Mr. Chambers went through before he could bring himself to testify about these documents. He felt that the time had come to remove himself as the only living witness. Let the documents and the microfilm speak for themselves. So he wrote a letter to his wife, to each of his children, and finally a letter addressed simply "To all." He explained that the act he was about to commit was not suicide but self-execution, a subtle distinction which I fail to appreciate. Fortunately he has survived to write this book, but the description he gives of this attempt justifies me in saying that he is plainly a neurotic.

Communism is a danger that confronts us all. We should try to understand what it is that makes men Communists, and how Communism works. This book answers some of these problems—and for that reason I think it should be widely read.

Review of Recent Decisions of the United States Court

By Marvin Schwartz and Edwin M. Zimmerman

YOUNGSTOWN SHEET & TUBE CO., ET AL. V. SAWYER

(June 2, 1952)

On November 27, 1951, the United Steelworkers of America, C.I.O. submitted 22 demands to steel companies which accounted for almost the whole of the nation's steel production. These demands, which were said by the steel companies to encompass more than 100 issues, included a wage increase averaging 18½ per hour, premium pay for Saturdays and Sundays, a guaranteed annual wage, severance pay for all layoffs and for all terminations and the union shop. With the existing five-year collective bargaining agreement scheduled to expire by its own terms on December 31, 1951, the union had on November 1, 1951 requested the opening of negotiations for a new contract.

Negotiations failed to resolve the dispute and on December 18 the union gave notice of an intention to strike when the existing contract expired. After fruitless intervention by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service and when it was plain that a strike was inevitable, President Truman intervened, on December 22, 1951, by referring the dispute to the Wage Stabilization Board and directing it to report to him its recommendations as to fair and equitable terms of settlement.

The Wage Stabilization Board was created by Executive Order pursuant to titles IV and V of the Defense Production Act of 1950, 50 U.S.C. App. §§ 2101–2110 (1946 ed. Supp. V), which provides that:

> "It is the intent of Congress, in order to provide for effective price and wage stabilization pursuant to title IV of this Act and to maintain uninterrupted production, that there be effective procedures for the settlement of labor disputes affecting national defense." 50 U.S.C. App. § 2121 (1946 ed. Supp. V)

The President is authorized "to initiate voluntary conferences between management [and] labor" and to "designate such [illegible] as he may deem appropriate to carry out the provisions [illegible] U.S.C. App. § 2121 (1946 ed. Supp. V).

In referring the dispute to the Wage Stabilization Board the President called upon the steel companies and the union to maintain production. His call was heeded, despite the non-existence of a collective bargaining agreement, through an initial Board hearing on January 7, 1952 and through