

# 'Naked God'— Cold War Book

By SIMON W. GERSON

IT IS this reviewer's duty to report that Howard Fast has joined the dreary I-woke-from-a-nightmare school of literature with "The Naked God"\* and is therefore in the bosom of respectability. Harry Schwartz, the New York Times high priest of anti-communism, has placed his unlovely imprimatur on the book and assigned Fast his politico-literary part. "This book," intoned Schwartz, "has an important role to play, and its most important repercussions may yet be behind the Iron Curtain" (N. Y. Times Book Review, Dec. 8, 1957).

If this does not dispose of the book artistically, it at least defines its general social area. Fast's book, like that of Milovan Djilas (issued, not accidentally, by the same publishing house) is designed for a "role" in the cold war.

FAST proceeds to his task with a crusader's zeal. Ever since the Stalin revelations by Nikita Khrushchev, he writes, he has held firmly to "a single conclusion . . . that the Communist Party in the form we know should cease to exist" (P. 25). This is the same Communist Party in which, he vows, there exist "so many pure souls, so many gentle and good people, so many men and women of utter integrity" (P. 39). While he attacks those whom he terms "petty bureaucrats and physical cowards and power-drugged paranoiacs," he nevertheless admits that the party has "about the bravest men and women I have ever known" (P. 99).

One might think that Fast would be circumspect about use of the term "paranoia," but with magnificent lack of self-consciousness he describes his mission as nothing less than preventing any other generation from seeing "this avenue (of communism—S.W.C.) as a road to any future that man should face without loathing" (P. 23).

For Fast the Khrushchev report on Stalin is "central." On that report, made last year in the Soviet Union on Soviet events, he hinges all judgments. But many others—"gentle and good people . . . men and women of utter integrity"—have also read the report, agonized over it and reached utterly different conclusions from Fast's. Most important, they have reached the conclusion of the need for a Communist movement that examines and re-examines itself and introduces the vital political corrections. Some of that was clearly visible at the Communist Party's 16th national convention—even to the party's political opponents.

The truth is that the Khrushchev report WAS delivered. Horrifying though the facts were, they were placed before the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In the U. S. the Daily Worker published the report, and on June 18, 1956, carried an article by Communist leader Eugene Dennis declaring, "the crimes and brutalities that sullied the latter period of Stalin's leadership are unforgivable. Nor did they have any historical or political 'necessity'."

Fast knows that the Khrushchev revelations stimulated examination and self-examination not only in the Socialist countries but throughout the Communist movement—a process that is by no means completed. The democratization process, uneven though it may be, is historically irreversible. In many Communist movements, not least of all in the U. S. A. there is new thinking, expressed in part by the C.P.'s 16th national convention, on the question of roads to socialism and the question of socialism and civil liberties.

FAST INSISTS that for him "the destination has remained unchanged, the total brotherhood of man." Fine. But will that "total brotherhood" be achieved via Radio Liberation's microphones, or by an unseemly parade on Tex and Jinx and Barry Gray and such-like? Is it achieved by articles in investment house organs and books by cold war publishing houses?

If the author of "Citizen Tom Paine" and "Freedom Road" wants to struggle for peace and the brotherhood of man, regardless of his attitude on the Communist Party, we have a simple suggestion: Let him ask each of his recent TV and radio hosts for 10 minutes to speak for amnesty for Smith Act defendants Gil Green, Henry Winston and Irving Potash. Let him ask for a few moments to speak for peaceful co-existence, U. S.-USSR talks and an end to A and H-bomb tests.

He will discover—if he doesn't know now—that these cameras and microphones are not for those who fight against the cold war and the lords of finance.

THE MAN who wrote "Citizen Tom Paine" and "Freedom Road" made lasting contributions to our culture and understanding of the roots of American history. These we do not gainsay; his works remain on our shelves. Whether the present Fast can curb his irrational passion against the Communist Party—which adopted our 16th convention decisions and is seeking to reconstruct itself—we can doubt. The author of "Citizen Tom Paine" and "Freedom Road" chose to ask his questions within the workingclass arena; the author of "The Naked God" has chosen otherwise. Whatever his disclaimers, Fast has today become an instrument of the cold war.

\*Frederick A. Praeger. New York 1957. \$3.50.