

What I Believe

by howard fast

I have been told that agents of the FBI have been stopping various members of the left on the street and asking them what they believed now; the point being that since Stalin has been exposed as a good deal less than his admirers thought, a person who accepted his greatness should now be utterly disillusioned.

I have not yet been asked this question by the FBI, but good people have asked it of me—and good people, many good people, are hurt and shaken and bewildered. Perhaps what I believe is no more important than what any other American believes; but as a writer, I can spell it out, and I still have a place where it will be printed. I also have the advantage of not speaking officially for anything in the way of organization; I speak only for myself—and what I am to say are my own conclusions, not easily arrived at, but still my own.



DISILLUSION is a part of our time; and in the flux and motion of the past 20 years, no thoughtful person could have been entirely free of it.

But disillusion can be many things, things as far apart as birth and death. It can be an end or a beginning—just as it can be a process of cynicism or a process of learning. To say that I have been free of disillusionment recently would be a lie, and whether I have been mistaken or not in the past, I have never willfully lied about my relationship to socialism and social movements. I do not intend to now.

My own feeling is that I never accepted the theory of great men as makers of history—or even as prime movers. I fought this out with myself 20 years ago, when I wrote a book called "The Unvanquished," about George Washington—and based it upon the proposition that leaders are made by the events of their time and by the people they lead. When a man serves the needs, the deep human needs, of those he gives leadership to, he is great; but his greatness is a gift from the people. When he takes the power the people gave him and uses it contrary to their needs, he becomes a tyrant, a malignant growth upon the forward march of the people. This has happened many times in history. The tyrants go, but the people endure, and their slow, patient and sometimes unbearably-painful march forward continues.

THE SALIENT and basic fact of the Soviet Union was never Stalin, and it is not Bulganin or Khrushchev—it is socialism and it is the Soviet people, who have made socialism their way of life. It was the mighty life force of socialism that destroyed Hitler and his irresistible army, and neither the mistakes of Stalin nor the villainy of Beria could alter that process. I have believed in socialism for a long time—and I believe in it now, more firmly than ever.

It is a belief that cannot exist without a belief in people—a belief that holds that there is meaning and purpose in the life and development of mankind. I believe that people are basically good, and while I have seen many things in the course of my life, I have experienced nothing to alter that belief. I believe that the highest meaning of life is the love and brotherhood of people in a developing social structure, and I believe that the needs of the broad masses of people are the only gauge of what is right and what is wrong. I have never seen evil come from these broad masses of the people; they never take up arms, except in the ultimate defense of their lives; they make no wars; their desire to live in peace and brotherhood is as old and as profound as their very existence.

I believe that through scientific socialism, the brotherhood of man will come into being—and that then, working together and in peace, all things will be possible for mankind. I believe that the childhood of the human race is passing, and that we are entering the first stage of our bright maturity.

To imagine that we could take the 6,000 years of recorded history, the 6,000 years of mass murder and unbearable oppression, of injustice and hate and greed and hunger and barbarism—and out of this create utopia without mistakes, deviations, blind-alleys, injustices and pain beyond description—to imagine this would be childish; and I think we are beginning to be done with childishness.

THE BEST PEOPLE I have ever known, the bravest, the warmest and the most principled are those who believed so strongly in socialism that they were willing to dedicate their lives to the struggle for it. That dedication is its own reward—for howsoever it may seem, their instinct was toward the ultimate in man, toward the still mysterious meaning of our own existence.

For unless man believes in himself, he is doomed—and the misery of his doom is unavoidable. Just as he could never live by bread alone, so he will not live to any kind of fulfillment in the bazaar of washing machines, two-tone automobiles, atomic war-heads and coca-cola that sums up the promise of capitalism. I believe that if the gates of heaven are not gold, neither are they chromium-plated; and the society that produces ten million mentally sick people, as we have just been informed concerning our country, is self-condemned.

I believe that the American people will come to socialism, and that they will have to come to it their own way. There can be no steps backward. We have fought too hard for freedom of speech and for the right of dissent ever to give them up. They are our badge of honor, ill-used, truncated, battered, but still our badge of honor; and I do not think we will surrender them. Nor do I think that the American working class will ever surrender its right to a full and good life. In other words, I believe in the future of this land and this people, not alone, but as a part of the entire company of mankind.