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## Commies: A Journey through the Old Left the New Left and the Leftover Left

**Ronald Radosh**
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The execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in 1953 for passing atomic secrets to the Soviet Union traumatized the Communist American Left as much as the assassination of President Kennedy devastated the country ten years later.

"Red-diaper baby" Radosh was inflamed by their deaths and would remain so until he published *The Rosenberg File* in 1983. Co-authored with Joyce Milton, the book intended to prove their innocence but actually demonstrated their guilt. Radosh was ostracized for tarnishing the image of these two martyrs of the Left, and he started to question his own beliefs.

This chronicle is a fascinating insider's view of the isolated, surreal world of American Communism, where dogma and indoctrination supplant individuality and free expression. The book also tells the story of the author's political journey from the extreme Left to the Right.

Radosh has written two other books, including the well-received *Divided They Fell: The Demise of the Democratic Party, 1964?1996*. The most fascinating chapters describe his childhood and education, from his days at P.S. 173 in New York, where as a young Jewish boy he had to run home to avoid beatings from Italian gangs, to his years at the University of Wisconsin. He chose Wisconsin because it was the only university with a recognized chapter of the Labor and Youth League and it did not have a math requirement. Summers were spent at "Commie Camp," Camp Woodland, in upstate New York, where young Communists were sent to be indoctrinated and to escape Redbaiting. The emerging folk music movement soon swept up Radosh, who could claim Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan as friends.

After receiving his Ph.D. in history from Wisconsin, Radosh began teaching at the City University of New York, where he remained for thirty years. During the sixties he was drawn to the anti-Vietnam War movement and was left by his first wife. Depressed, Radosh descended into a bleak period of drug use and sexual experimentation. Once he regained his balance, he grew increasingly disenchanted with the Left until his final break over *The Rosenberg File* . Today he wages his battles with the "leftover Left," the advocates of political correctness whom he regards as the dominating force in higher education.

Radosh's autobiography will not likely win new friends from the Left—something he is quite used to—but this engaging, perceptive tale of his personal search for political moorings should appeal to open-minded liberal, conservative, and centrist readers.

KARL HELICHER (August 16, 2001)

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