



Unrepentant Leftist: A Lawyer's Memoir

By Victor Rabinowitz

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In *Unrepentant Leftist*, a feisty, supremely dedicated attorney weaves a tale that is as much a tumultuous history of the old and new Left in recent decades as it is his personal story. From May Day parades to battles over McCarthyism, from the Communist party's activities to American Labor party politics, from civil liberties battles in the 1950s to civil rights battles in the 1960s, Victor Rabinowitz was there, playing a leading role in it all. In a career that spanned a half-century Rabinowitz worked valiantly and too often futilely on behalf of trade unions, victims of McCarthyism, civil rights activists, and Vietnam War resisters. His prominent clients included the government of the Republic of Cuba and many trade unions of the time, as well as Alger Hiss, Jimmy Hoffa, Benjamin Spock, and Fidel Castro. He won the case declaring that the McCarthy Committee had no authority to investigate subversive activities and the Supreme Court case establishing the right of Cuba to nationalize United States property. Rabinowitz has been a socialist since his earliest days; both his legal practice and political activity have been influenced by that fact.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Americans have "never been kind to radicals," writes Rabinowitz, a founder of the National Lawyers Guild, defender of prosecuted Communists, friend of trade unionists, the first lawyer the Rosenbergs turned to (though as he was already representing an accused spy, he advised other counsel) and "the lawyer for Cuba." Rabinowitz has taken on the government often, beginning with the notorious section 9 (h) of the 1945 Taft-Hartley Act restricting union collective bargaining and then the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Rabinowitz represented some of those called up by HUAC and in so doing faced public scorn and the combined malice of Joseph McCarthy (a man who, says Rabinowitz, "showed not the slightest hint of humanity") and Roy Cohn (whom he calls the most vicious of "all the evil men I've encountered"). Rabinowitz persuasively describes the devastating consequences of the Cold War mentality on the First Amendment rights of federal employees, Army personnel, aliens, teachers and the Hollywood set. Later, in 1964, 70 lawyers went south under the auspices of the National Lawyers Guild to help the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). For his efforts, Rabinowitz was arrested ("only once", he says), but then his stand against McCarthy had already been awarded with a HUAC investigation into his activities and with FBI surveillance that extended nearly 20 years beginning in the early 1950s. Even the FBI described Rabinowitz as "an agile-minded labor attorney," but he was also clearly a man of courage and commitment. This an inspiring, engaging memoir appropriate for a time when "liberal," let alone "leftist," is almost as sure a condemnation as "Communist" once was.

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From Library Journal

For over 50 years Rabinowitz has been a prominent left-wing lawyer with a particular interest in free speech and civil rights cases. His autobiography highlights his involvement in the trade union movement, the American Labor Party, the National Lawyers Guild, and solidarity campaigns on behalf of Castro's Cuba. Rabinowitz is unrepentant not only about his progressive politics but also about his close identification with the Communist Party. "It is too bad that a socialist revolution was so bloody," he writes, "but the purges in the Soviet Union in 1934-1938 happened, and we cannot undo them, nor let them stand in the way of progress." Although he left the party in the early 1960s, he remained in its orbit and has stayed active in progressive legal causes. His engaging account of legal and political battles from the 1930s through the 1980s will be of special interest to specialists in American labor and left-wing history. —Kent Worcester, Social Science Research Council, New York

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