

INSIDE THE KINGDOM

June 6, 2018

the Chronicle

Section B – 16 Pages

An insightful book on Vermont in the McCarthy Era

Red Scare in the Green Mountains: Vermont in the McCarthy Era 1946-1960, by Rick Winston. Published by Rootstock Publishing, July 2018. 151 pages. Paperback. \$14.95.

Reviewed by Joseph Gresser

Bernie Sanders has represented Vermont in Congress for over 26 years. He's won election campaigns with as much as 70 percent of the statewide vote.

If in 1950 someone had predicted such success for a candidate who proudly describes himself as a democratic socialist, she would have been urged to see psychiatric help. Or, on the other hand, a listener might have assumed the forecaster was predicting a takeover of the U.S. government by the Soviet Union.

In his new book, Rick Winston, who many people know from his years as the proprietor of the Savoy Theater in Montpelier, recalls a time when political paranoia was the order of the day, and those suspected of holding Marxist views could be hounded out of their jobs and blacklisted to make sure no one else would hire them.

Red Scare in the Green Mountains gives a portrait of the McCarthy Era from a Vermont perspective. Mr. Winston paints a picture of people and institutions who behaved in ways they regretted for years afterward, and of unlikely heroes who bucked a fierce political tide to do what they considered the right thing.

While Senator Joseph McCarthy gave his name to the tactic of making wild accusations of communist influence, he was hardly the only person who made political hay by searching out those thought to be a threat to the democratic system of government.

There were, in fact, actual communists in the 1930s and 1940s. Many joined the party because it was one of the only political organizations supportive of civil rights for African Americans or because they favored union efforts.

For a period the Communist Party had a policy known as the Popular Front and lent its support to groups that worked to carry out the goals of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal.

More people favored the Soviet Union's anti-fascist stance, especially its support of Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War in opposition to Francisco Franco's Nationalists who were being aided by Hitler's Wehrmacht.

Party membership dropped sharply after the cynical Molotov-

Ribbentrop Pact, in which Stalin and Hitler pledged not to attack each other's country. But a positive attitude toward the Soviet Union was not considered a sin while it was a U.S. ally during World War II.

That changed rapidly after the war's end. Communist governments were established in Eastern European countries and it was uncertain whether the communist parties of France, Italy, and Greece would gain power. In 1949 Mao Zedong and the Red Army defeated the nationalist forces led by Chiang Kai-shek.

Many, like Senator McCarthy, seized on the idea that subversive forces within the U.S. government were responsible for these developments, and the hunt for communists was on.

The administration of President Harry Truman helped get the ball rolling by requiring many public employees to take loyalty oaths, but right wing Republicans took it much further.

Congressional committees summoned witnesses believed to be, or have been, communists. They grilled them on their political views and, in order to show their loyalty to the U.S., demanded they name names of others who held leftist sympathies.

Many of those who refused lost their jobs and were unable to find employment in their fields for years afterward. In his forward Mr. Winston tells how his schoolteacher parents were pressured to inform on others.

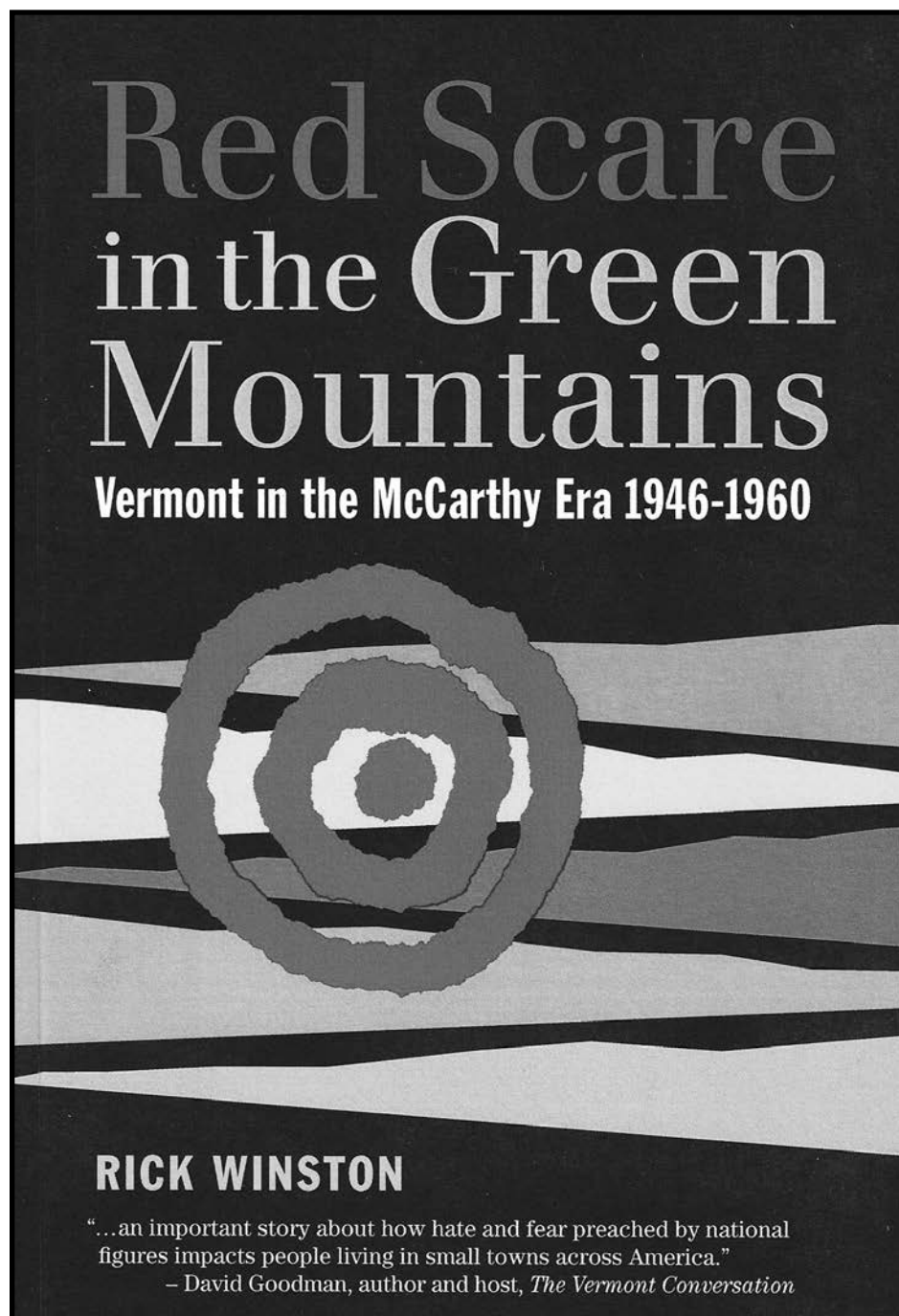
His father refused and lost his teaching career. His mother was more fortunate and was allowed to continue teaching.

In one of the nine stories that make up his short history, Mr. Winston tells of the injustice done to Alex Novikoff, a distinguished scientist and professor of biochemistry at the University of Vermont.

Professor Novikoff was hauled before a Senate committee and asked about communist influence at Brooklyn College, where he taught before coming to Vermont. He had been a member of the Communist Party and was willing to tell the committee about his past, but he refused to speak about others.

When then Governor Lee Emerson heard about Professor Novikoff's testimony, he pressured the university's president to do something about it. UVM President Carl Borgmann put together a six-member committee to determine what should be done with Professor Novikoff.

By a 5-1 majority the



recommendation was to allow him to continue teaching.

Governor Emerson was not satisfied with the response and went to the university's trustees and, to make his desires perfectly clear, threatened to cut off funding for UVM if Professor Novikoff remained on the job.

The Governor said Vermonters needed to know their university's "faculty is 100 percent pro-America and anti-communist."

Newspapers, including the *Burlington Free Press*, amplified the Governor's demands, and the trustees succumbed to his pressure.

Professor Novikoff went on to teach at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City where he did pioneering work on the study of enzymes.

In 1983 he returned to Burlington to accept an official apology and an honorary degree from UVM. The *Free Press*, too, recognized its error and expressed its sorrow in an editorial.

Even those participating in electoral politics were susceptible to accusations of communist

sympathies. Mr. Winston speaks of former Congressman Charles Plumley, who had a habit of discovering his political opponents were communist sympathizers.

Orleans poet James Hayford, Mr. Winston writes, also came under suspicion for supporting former Vice-President Henry Wallace's third-party run for President in 1948.

Mr. Hayford was sent as a delegate to Philadelphia for the founding convention for what was known as the New Party. There he saw the party platform was on every point critical of U.S. foreign policy and supportive of Soviet policy.

He and a friend came up with a resolution declaring the New Policy was not fully in support of any nation's foreign policy. The measure was defeated, and Mr. Hayford returned home to find himself reviled from both the left and the right.

According to Mr. Winston, Mr. Hayford's experience in Philadelphia convinced him he was not cut out for a political career.

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Book offers parallel to today's political climate

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Mr. Hayford was not the only regular person who faced grief over his supposed political beliefs. Mr. Winston tells the tale of a Shaftsbury man, a political conservative, whose neighbors, on scant evidence, decided he was a red. The misunderstanding had no serious consequences, but that was a matter of luck for the self-employed author.

As years went by Senator McCarthy's hunger for publicity drove him to seek larger targets. His fall came after he went after the U.S. Army in a series of nationally televised hearings.

At the same time Vermont Senator Ralph Flanders had enough of his destructive crusade.

Senator Flanders, who had been the head of Jones and Lamson, a major machine tool manufacturing company in Springfield, was a conservative Republican.

According to Mr. Winston, he held a belief that would seem very strange today. Both liberals and conservatives are needed to properly steer the nation.

"Liberalism, he said, represented the welfare of individual people," explains Mr. Winston. "For him, conservatism was concerned with preserving institutions that serve the interests of the people collectively."

Senator Flanders persisted in his criticism of Senator McCarthy, eventually persuading a large majority of his colleagues to vote for the

resolution of censure that eventually ended McCarthy's career.

Mr. Winston's book is packed with such stories as well as with a detailed look at the part Vermont newspapers played for good and ill. It was with some satisfaction I read how several small weekly papers risked much in order to speak out against attacks on citizens for their political beliefs.

For anyone who recalls the McCarthy Era, *Red Scare in the Green Mountains* will give new insights into that difficult time. For those who are hearing about the original era of political witch hunts, it could offer a clarifying view of our present political moment.

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