ive governments get elected now and again. It did not if one considers the extreme demands of the students, especially after 1968. Perhaps this ambivalence can best be captured in a recent commercial on television for a large bank which used Bob Dylan’s ‘The Times They are a Changin’ as the musical motif. The union of students, young workers, feminists, and the Third World, foretold by Herbert Marcuse and others found its expression in reality in radical Islam thirty years later.

Graham’s book is evocative of a time. As a serious analysis, it is light.


As the title suggests, Harry, Tom, and Father Rice, tells the story of three men on a very personal level. The narrative demonstrates how their lives intersect during the McCarthy era and the repercussions of their actions. While many histories of the McCarthy era have focused on the impersonal, political analysis of events, John Hoerr draws on his extensive experience as a journalist to bring the story to life by demonstrating the human impact of the events his narrative describes. This provides another perspective to the studies of famous entertainers such as the Hollywood ten or academics like F.O. Matheissen.

Harry is Harry Davenport, a representative from Pittsburgh sent to Congress for one term, never to be re-elected. His 1948 election had been secured with union support, but the increasing hostility toward some left-leaning unions severely tested his courage to speak out against the excesses of the anti-communist witch-hunts. The moment which tested his resolve to the point which, in the narrative Hoerr presents, ultimately cost him his political career came when the hearings by a House Un-American Activities Committee turned their attention to members of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE).

Father Rice, is Rev. Charles Owen Rice, who made his name as a fervent anti-communist. His importance to Hoerr’s narrative comes from the attacks he concentrated on members of UE. During 1949 the CIO, in a move which strengthened their anti-communist credentials, expelled those unions which were considered to be left leaning. One such union was UE. Father Rice, closely associated with CIO president Philip Murray, provided support for this move and particularly provided a means through which pressure could be placed on members of UE.

Tom Quinn, a welder and leader in the local labour movement, was caught in the anti-communist posturing. A friend of Harry Davenport, Quinn was subpoenaed by HUAC following pressure from Father Rice. However, at the point where Davenport could have offered support to a friend who had played a central role in his election effort, his convictions failed to materialise. To the leaders of the East Pittsburgh Westinghouse plant, this was a betrayal of the support which
had been pivotal to Davenport’s election. The narrative demonstrates the repercussions of this decision on all concerned. Quinn was cited by HUAC for contempt, Father Rice has repeatedly felt the need to justify his actions, while Harry Davenport lost the support of UE and was subsequently never re-elected to Congress. Davenport spent his last days in Ulrich’s Hotel in Pennsylvania “where solitary old men, living on a Social Security pittance, go to die” (1).

John Hoerr is certainly an accomplished writer who brings the history to life through his description of the events. The construction of the McCarthy era on this personal level is aided by his personal engagement with the main protagonists. Harry Davenport was John Hoerr’s uncle and the prologue charts Hoerr’s journey in 2000 to the place where his uncle died. Furthermore, as a reporter in the 1960s his job had brought him into contact with all the main characters and the environment in which they worked. This allows Hoerr to infuse the narrative with personal reminiscences that create a particularly personal atmosphere. The sense of injustice at the excesses of the witch-hunts is palpable. Few could argue with Hoerr’s observation; “if HUAC’s intention was to inquire into Communist activity in Local 601, a glaring question was why none of the open, admitted Communists in the local were subpoenaed” (146). However, while the strength of this book is in the vivid construction of the narrative, the origins of the anti-communist fervour receive little attention. Indeed, the clear outrage at the suffering of those with whom he has a personal connection dominates the discussion. The demonstration of the persecution suffered by the innocent becomes the focus rather than an analysis of the events. There is, however, also the assertion that there were some who were ‘guilty’ within the political left and the labour movement. This creates a tension between Hoerr’s objection to the methods employed by the committees and his apparent justification of the need to take action. Hoerr does not take this opportunity to produce an analysis of this tension within the narrative construction of the book.

Hoerr also misses an opportunity to engage with the analysis of the role religion has played within the development and repression of organised labour. Given the pivotal role played by Father Rice, this narrative appears to present an ideal opportunity to engage with the area of academic research that has developed since Liston Pope produced his early works. In essence this is the locus of the tensions between the strengths and weaknesses of this work. Hoerr is an accomplished journalist who writes with great style and conviction. Through extensive research, he has been able to produce a clear narrative from material many would have found opaque. Yet while this book is a valuable contribution to the collective knowledge about both labour relations and the McCarthy era, there is ultimately a sense of disappointment about the depth of the analysis.

Ali Fisher—Counterpoint, the cultural relations think-tank of the British Council