

# Book Reviews

## UNDERMINING THE CONSTITUTION A HISTORY OF LAWLESS GOVERNMENT

(By Thomas James Norton. New York: The Devin-Adair Company. 1950  
Pp XIV, 351. (\$3.00))

The most surprising thing about this book is that it was ever published at all. It is nothing more than an irrational and hysterical attack on the legislation of the late President Roosevelt. In one chapter, Roosevelt is called a communist, in another he is a fascist, and in yet another he is accused of "alienism" (whatever that is). The Tennessee Valley Authority is described as a "fascist corporation". One would hope that no self-respecting Canadian undergraduate would use either the author's arguments or the grammatical construction that contains those arguments. The book has a huge content of propaganda and inaccuracy.

It is so filled with hatred that one would suppose that the dagger or stiletto would be more appropriate to the author's purposes than the pen.

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WITNESS, Whittaker Chambers (Toronto: Random House of  
Canada, Limited, 1952) 808pp. \$6.00

Published earlier this year was a book, outwardly impressive in size and design, of immediate interest to the reading public generally and of particular note to students at law because of the legal "backdrop" to the unfolding drama of nearly one-third of the book. The subject matter of **Witness** can be considered on three planes: (1) as an autobiography in itself; (2) as pointing up acutely the signal conflict of our time, communism versus the free world, with special consideration deserved by a memorable foreword which takes the form of a letter by the author to his children; (3) for its treatment of the hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities and the Alger Hiss trials.

As the autobiography of Whittaker Chambers **Witness** relates the activities of a man who navigated the seas of communism on the surface as a member of the open Communist Party and below as an agent of a section of the Soviet Military Intelligence, operating in Washington and New York. During his career in the Communist

Party Chambers was a member of the staff of the **Daily Worker** and for a short period editor of the **New Masses**. It was not until 1934, after he had moved underground, that he met Alger Hiss, a man who in later years was active at Dumbarton Oaks, Yalta, the setting-up of the United Nations at San Francisco, and who became the president of the Carnegie Endowment for World Peace. The two, according to Chambers, became close friends as members of the communist conspiracy and remained such until Chambers broke with communism in the spring of 1938. In 1939 Chambers was offered a position with **Time** and when he voluntarily left that magazine some nine years later he had risen to the post of a senior editor.

Through the testimony in the hearing and trials reproduced in the book the reader is able to attempt a delineation of the character of each man. Throughout the committee hearing and Hiss' two trials on charges of perjury one is ever conscious of the striking dissimilarity between the mode of offering testimony by Chambers and that by Hiss: that of the former is straightforward and unambiguous, that by the latter monotonously qualified. Another arresting fact is that Hiss was represented by prominent counsel, while Chambers, after his resignation from **Time**, was never accompanied by a lawyer when he appeared before the Grand Juries.

Since publication, **Witness** and what it purports to expound has been a controversial topic. It has been condemned and acclaimed for its approach to the present-day ideological crisis; the trials themselves are yet stirring arguments: the validity of important evidence impugned and even the trial procedure criticized. Some reviews term it the best book on communism to appear on this continent to date. In contrast is the view of an American professor of law who had occasion to refer in print to **Witness** as "one of the longest works of fiction of the year". Words descriptive from "fascinating" to "boring" have been applied to this book. One statement at least seems capable of assertion — **Witness** should be read by all, for, rightly or otherwise, it takes its place as a monumental book of the present.

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