

THOMAS T. HAMMOND

## Revisionism Reconsidered

THE NEW LEFT AND THE ORIGINS OF THE COLD WAR. By *Robert James Maddox*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973. ix, 169 pp. \$7.95.

One of the odd things about the great debate over the origins of the cold war has been the relative lack of rebuttal to the "revisionists." During the first stage of the debate, the "orthodox" writers (notably Herbert Feis) presented their view that the cold war was caused mainly by the Russians. Then the revisionists, in a whole series of books, attacked the orthodox positions, arguing that the United States was principally to blame. Until now, however, there has been no major attempt to answer the revisionist arguments. Mr. Feis, with Olympian disdain, ignored them except for one contemptuous footnote, and no other author undertook a detailed, book-length counterattack. Meanwhile, the revisionists became ever more popular and influential, received many enthusiastic reviews, and found their interpretations increasingly incorporated into textbooks and other works.

Now comes the Maddox blast at the revisionists. Maddox has not attempted, except *en passant*, to present a rebuttal of the revisionists' *views*; instead he has undertaken the more limited objective of criticizing their *scholarship*. He has examined seven of the leading revisionist works and has come to the following conclusion: "Granting a generous allowance for mere carelessness, . . . these books *without exception* are based upon pervasive misusages of the source materials." The misusages, he believes, are so common and are so consistently twisted in one direction, that they could only have been due to an effort to force the facts into preconceived theoretical molds. Not surprisingly, his book has caused considerable controversy. The objects of his attack have charged that his volume is "petty," an "intemperate polemic," a McCarthy-like witchhunt, a "hatchet job," and a "politically motivated slander masquerading as disinterested scholarship" (*New York Times Book Review*, June 17, 1973, p. 8). To review the book properly, therefore, one must read not only the Maddox volume, but also the seven books he criticizes, plus the replies of the seven authors to Maddox. Even then the review must be somewhat cursory, since a full examination of the charges and countercharges would require a book longer than Maddox's.

Appropriately enough, Maddox starts with William Appleman Williams's book, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York, 1962). Williams has been for many years a popular and influential professor (principally at

the University of Wisconsin), has produced a whole generation of historians of American diplomacy, and was probably as responsible as anyone for inspiring the birth of the New Left. Maddox finds that, among other things, Williams's version of a statement supposedly made by Stalin at the first general session of the Potsdam Conference is in fact a pastiche of comments made over a period of three days, pasted together in a manner that alters the original meaning (Williams, pp. 246–47; Maddox, pp. 20–21). Similarly, Williams quotes out of context, omits those parts of quotations that contradict his preconceived views, and describes a meeting that never took place. More basic, however, is the conclusion by Maddox that Williams fails to prove his basic Open Door thesis: "The mortal weakness of Williams's interpretation lay in his inability to produce even the scantiest evidence that American policy-makers actually regarded an Open Door in Eastern Europe as the critical factor, rather than as one of many subsidiary goals, in relations with Russia" (Maddox, p. 16). Williams has not replied in detail to these charges, having limited himself to a brief note in the *New York Times*.

Maddox next attacks another member of the older generation of revisionists, D. F. Fleming, whose two-volume work, *The Cold War and Its Origins* (Garden City, N.Y., 1961), was one of the earliest revisionist interpretations. Maddox points out, as others have done before, that Fleming's work is based heavily on ephemeral newspaper and magazine articles and that Fleming uses a double standard when appraising Soviet and American policies. For example (to quote Maddox), "Fleming asserted that as late as June 1945 Stalin had no intention of forcing communism on Poland." Fleming's evidence? Stalin said so (Fleming, pp. 244–45; Maddox, p. 60). Fleming has not replied to these charges except to quote selected laudatory passages from reviews of his book. Such a technique can hardly be very compelling, however, to anyone accustomed to reading critical reviews of Broadway plays and comparing them with the quotations in advertisements for these same plays. Indeed, one of the reviewers cited by Fleming (Charles Burton Marshall) has already pointed out that the phrase quoted (or rather, misquoted) by Fleming from his review is most untypical of the review as a whole (*New York Times Book Review*, July 29, 1973, p. 20).

One of the most highly praised revisionist books is *Atomic Diplomacy* (New York, 1965), by Gar Alperovitz. In many ways it is an impressive piece of work, based on extensive research in a vast number of sources and containing, according to the author, approximately 1,400 references. Yet Maddox demonstrates conclusively what the present reviewer had already discovered independently—that Alperovitz repeatedly distorts his sources by using quotations out of context, by omitting those parts of quotations which do not support his argument, or by summarizing statements in a misleading

manner. Maddox first published the chapter on Alperovitz in the *Journal of American History* (March 1973), and Alperovitz was given a chance to reply. Of the eighteen specific charges by Maddox, Alperovitz responded to only four, perhaps for lack of space, but perhaps also for lack of answers. Alperovitz was able to show that a few of the points cited by Maddox are either petty, ambiguous, or matters of opinion, but there still remains an impressive body of evidence that Alperovitz has “proved” important parts of his argument only by misrepresenting or suppressing the evidence.

Target No. 4 is *The Free World Colossus* (New York, 1965) by David Horowitz, a member of the editorial board of *Ramparts*. Maddox shows that Horowitz has indulged in a practice which our least intelligent students sometimes follow—copying whole paragraphs from another author, changing two or three words per sentence, and failing to use quotation marks. In Horowitz’s seventeen-page rebuttal he admits the copying, but offers the standard undergraduate excuse: This isn’t plagiarism because I included footnotes. As for Maddox’s charge that the book is unscholarly, Horowitz replied quite candidly that he had never claimed that his work was “a piece of original research in the academic sense.”

Next Maddox scrutinizes one of the most prolific of the New Left economic determinists, Gabriel Kolko, and his highly praised book, *The Politics of War* (New York, 1968). Among many other things, Maddox shows that Kolko’s account of Tito’s relations with the Big Three is full of distortions and inaccuracies. In an eight-page section on Yugoslavia that is filled with errors, Kolko stresses over and over again the support America gave to Mihailović, but says not a word about U.S. aid to Tito (Kolko, pp. 131–38; Maddox, pp. 110–11). Similarly, Kolko has the U.S. chief of mission in Albania saying things which he clearly did *not* say about the Greeks and the British (Kolko, p. 584; Maddox, p. 113). In a six-page rebuttal Kolko has attempted to answer these and other points, but his arguments are unconvincing.

Maddox has some words of high praise for *Yalta*, by Diane Shaver Clemens (New York, 1970). The bulk of the book, he says, “is a detailed, at times penetrating analysis of the negotiations carried on” at the Crimean conference. In her concluding chapter, however, he feels that she “abandoned the role of historian for that of prosecutor” (Maddox, p. 123). Professor Clemens, like most of the revisionists, considers Truman to be Culprit No. 1. According to her, Truman immediately began to renege on the Yalta agreements, by telling Molotov, for example, that a “new” government had to be formed in Poland (Clemens, p. 269). Maddox shows that the memorandum presented to Molotov by Truman, instead of embodying a change of policy, was simply a paraphrase of the Yalta accord (Maddox, p. 126). Professor

Clemens also expresses considerable faith in Stalin, saying that “there was no reason to believe that Stalin—whose record included sponsoring [*sic*] free elections in Finland and Austria . . . would not allow moderately free elections in Poland as promised” (Clemens, p. 270).

Maddox appears to have rather contradictory feelings about Lloyd C. Gardner and his book, *Architects of Illusion* (Chicago, 1970). On the one hand, he finds it “the most sophisticated and convincing account of how the Cold War began yet written from the New Left point of view,” but at the same time he considers it to be “a compendium of myths” (Maddox, p. 139). This somewhat mixed estimate of Gardner’s book is reflected in Maddox’s critique, which is much less damaging than some of his other chapters, especially when read in conjunction with Gardner’s forty-page rebuttal. On three or four points Gardner’s replies seem persuasive, on some the outcome is a draw, while on others he manages to show that Maddox is quarreling over minutiae. Still, Maddox makes telling blows on some issues, such as the reorganization of the government and the holding of free elections in Poland. Perhaps Gardner’s worst sin, however, was the use of a *Fortune* opinion poll in a highly misleading fashion (Gardner, pp. 57–58; Maddox, pp. 150–51). All in all, however, Gardner’s book lacks the flagrant and wholesale distortions that characterize some of the other volumes.

What general conclusions can one make about the Maddox book? He has convincingly demonstrated that the scholarship of several of the revisionists is at best sloppy, and perhaps dishonest, although the quality naturally varies from one author to another. He also shows that too many people, including reviewers, have been excessively trusting in accepting the writings of the revisionists. There has been a tendency on the part of many academics to assume that the truth about the cold war lies halfway between revisionism and orthodoxy, but Maddox casts considerable doubt on the justification for such a “middle of the road” position. While the revisionists have performed the useful function of forcing scholars to re-examine the orthodox arguments, Maddox shows that it is equally necessary to re-examine the arguments of the revisionists. Finding numerous errors in the scholarship of the revisionists *does not*, of course, demonstrate that their broad interpretations are necessarily fallacious, but it does mean that these views have yet to be proved.

How can Maddox himself be faulted? First, the title probably should have omitted the term “New Left,” since Fleming, at least, is more “old” than “new.” Second, some of the points raised by Maddox do seem to be, as his victims charge, mere nit-picking. Third, some of the “errors” that Maddox catalogues may be nothing more than honest disagreements about complicated issues and ambiguous quotations. Fourth, in a few instances Maddox seems to be simply wrong in his accusations. Fifth, Maddox would have been more

effective if he had adopted a less polemical tone (a criticism that could also be directed against the revisionists). Sixth, his case would have been strengthened if he had emphasized that he was discussing *only a few* of the many errors he had found. While any attempt to discuss *all* of the errors would have been excessively tedious, Maddox might have added an appendix in which he listed, without comment, other fallacious statements. Finally, he sometimes writes as though he believed the revisionists to be a monolithic group with uniform views—perhaps even some sort of left-wing conspiracy.

Still, despite some faults, the Maddox book is an invaluable contribution to our ongoing search for the truth about the origins of the cold war. It would be unfair to criticize Maddox for failing to undertake a comprehensive examination of the *views* of the revisionists, although such a work badly needs to be written. Similarly, it is absurd to attack Princeton University Press, as Horowitz has done, for publishing his book. The revisionists have shown no mercy in their attacks on the American leaders and the orthodox historians, and they must learn to take criticism as well as to dish it out. It would be interesting if someone would write another book embodying a dispassionate, point-by-point examination of the Maddox volume. Perhaps also the seven revisionists could publish a collection of essays in which each author would present his own rebuttal. Meanwhile, Maddox's book is obligatory reading for anyone interested in the cold war. We are deeply indebted to him for his detailed and painstaking detective work.