

The Life and Death of an American Communist and the Plans for an Invasion of the United States

Review of the book: *Second String Red: The Life of Al Lannon, American Communist*, by Albert Vetere Lannon

Editor's note from Cliff Kincaid:

In the biography of Communist Al Lannon, written by his son (Al Lannon Jr.), it was revealed there was an actual communist plan to invade the United States. The book discusses a plan using sabotage and assisting a foreign army in an armed revolution. Is it still the plan today, adapted to include Russia's Communist allies China, Cuba, Nicaragua, etc., to invade the U.S.? Ponder that as you read the review of this important book.

Lannon was trained at the Lenin School in the 1930s and served as a national committee member. He was president of the Communist Political Association of Maryland and D.C.

We demonstrated in [our report on the March 18 communist](#) rally in Washington, D.C. that dozens of communist groups and tens of thousands of their members are active in the United States, including in what they call the "war industry."

Lenin's communist cadre was only 40,000 members and they seized control of Russia.

Summary:

Al Lannon was the leader of the ultra-left caucus of the Communist Party that developed after Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing Stalinism. Harry Haywood and Admiral Kilpatrick, both of whom trained at the Lenin School in Moscow and served in the Lincoln Brigades (Lannon did not go to Spain), were also in the caucus. Lannon was blacklisted as a result of his efforts leading the ultra-left faction of the Communist Party. He moved to San Francisco and spent the remaining decade of his life there. Other Stalinists, not Lannon, in the caucus later formed the Provisional Organizing Committee to Reconstitute a Marxist-Leninist Party (POC) under the leadership of Armando Roman.

Lannon's son wrote the book based on tapes his father made, his FBI file and his own knowledge. He is pretty open about his father and it gives a fascinating look into the psyche of a person attracted to Communism.

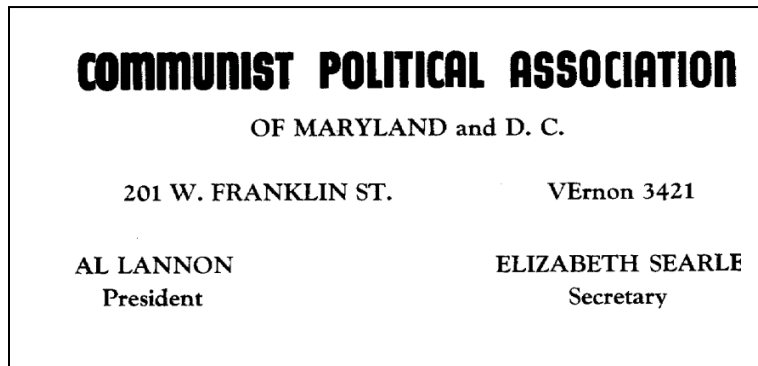


He had an abusive alcoholic father who physically abused him and his mother relentlessly. He ran away from home multiple times as a youth and became a terrible alcoholic himself. He slept with prostitutes and got a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

Book Review: *Second String Red* by Albert Vetere Lannon

By Patrick Murphy*

Al Lannon Jr. wrote the biography of his father Al Lannon Sr. [1907-1969] as his master's thesis and published it in 1999. He engaged in a candid, yet conflicted, exploration of his father's life. Lannon utilized his personal and family knowledge for some of the most personal aspects of his father's life, which included taped recordings his father made later in life. He utilized the extensive FBI file (more than 2,000 pages) on his father. He also used available Russian archives, other US government agency archives and multiple labor movement archives to supplement his personal knowledge and family history of his father in his later years.



The life of Al Lannon reflects an individual example of the type of person drawn into communism. Lannon's father beat him relentlessly as a child and teenager. His father, an abusive alcoholic, would physically assault his wife in front of his son. Al ran away from home multiple times during his youth to escape his father's wrath. His father would find him and physically abuse him.

At age 15, young Al, armed with a pipe, readied himself to commit patricide after seeing his father strike his mother through a window. Relatives prevented him from acting out his homicidal urges and he ran away. He would not see his family for the next two years. He briefly served in the US Coast Guard, until his father outed him as a seventeen-year-old minor and refused to waive his parental rights in allowing his son to remain in the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard discharged him for fraudulent enlistment, one of multiple humiliations he endured as a result of his father. The author notes how Al Lannon had no self-esteem due to the continuous physical assaults and psychological abuse from his father.

Al Lannon took various jobs on ships after his time in the Coast Guard. He engaged in a life of vice that included stealing, gambling and visiting prostitutes. He followed in his

father's footsteps and abused alcohol. Al got drunk in Hong Kong, while his ship remained in port, and visited a prostitute. This sexual escapade led to a bad case of gonorrhea. His drinking of moonshine gin led to hallucinations, followed by two days of delirium tremens. Lannon wished to drink himself to death as a young man.

Lannon's worldview soon drastically changed after his ship docked in the Soviet Union in April 1930. He spent twenty days in Novorossiysk. The Russians charmed the young and naïve Al Lannon with glorious tales of the Bolshevik Revolution and how "we [the workers] are the bosses now" in Russia.¹ Lannon signed up with the Marine Workers International Union [MWIU] in Novorossiysk, ready to engage in Marxism-Leninism upon his return to the US. Al received a warning from the mess boy on his ship, during their return to the US, that he had been fooled by communist propaganda. He failed to heed the mess boy's warning. Al joined the Communist Party back home in the US and became an organizer in the MWIU. The Party [Communist Party] chose to send Al Lannon to the Lenin school in Moscow. Al became completely devoted to the Soviet Union after his training. He even spent time with the Red Army near the border of Poland. The author makes note of J. Edgar Hoover's book: *Masters of Deceit*, when noting Hoover's writing on the purpose of the Lenin school: "the Soviets wanted rough and ready revolutionists, men who would kill, murder, blow up trains, and start revolutions."² The author also notes that the FBI file on Al Lannon states that he was "the director of all Communist Party sabotage schools" and a "spy for the Soviet government in Germany, Poland, and Italy."³

Lannon rose through the ranks of the Communist Party as a Waterfront Section leader and became an influential figure in the founding of the National Maritime Union [NMU]. He consistently maintained the Soviet line as an anti-Fascist during the Spanish Civil War from 1936 to 1939, then suddenly shifted to a position of neutrality after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939. He marched in the May Day parade of 1941, representing the Waterfront Section with his three-year-old son Al Jr. on his shoulders. The parade marchers carried signs reading: "The Yanks are Not Coming," and "United Front Against Imperialist War."⁴

Hitler invaded the Soviet Union the following month in June 1941. Al Lannon immediately advocated the Soviet line that the United States should enter the war against Nazi Germany. The author writes: "Al Lannon knew that the Soviet Union must be saved, and that he must do everything in his power to help Stalin and the Soviet people."⁵ Al Lannon had foreign intelligence contacts in Spain, Italy and France. His Waterfront Section seamen became couriers of mail and propaganda during the war. There were suspicions of espionage as well. The author notes that his father and

¹ Albert Vetere Lannon, *Second String Red* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999), 32.

² *Ibid.*, 51.

³ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

comrades would have granted any request by the Soviet Union without a second thought. Communist Party USA General Secretary Earl Browder, after receiving a prison sentence commutation from President Roosevelt, wished to help the US government in its war efforts. He requested Al Lannon come to his office on the Ninth Floor. He wished that Lannon would share his foreign intelligence contacts with the Office of Strategic Services. Lannon lied, saying he had no contacts. Browder became furious, knowing full well of his foreign intelligence contacts and that Lannon had lied to him. Lannon pledged loyalty to the Soviet Union, not the US government. Browder never forgave Lannon for refusing his request.

In 1943, Lannon moved from New York City [NYC] with his family to Maryland in order to serve as the Communist Party District Organizer for Maryland and Washington, D.C. The following year, the Party elected Lannon as an alternate member to the expanded National Committee of the Communist Party. Browder blocked him from becoming a full committee member due to his previous obstinacy in sharing his foreign intelligence contacts.

In late 1945, Al Lannon traveled to Cumberland, Maryland, to meet with Communist Party members associated with the Celanese Textile Workers Union. His seven-year-old son Al Jr. traveled with him. Charles Nicodemus, during the Cumberland, Maryland, meeting of comrades, had a question-and-answer discussion with Al Lannon. Nicodemus would later testify to this account during sworn testimony at the first Smith Act defendant trials:

“After laying out the argument for a more revolutionary organization to meet the growing hostility of Cold War capitalism, Lannon was asked by Textile Workers officer Charles Nicodemus how a socialist revolution could ever hope to be successful in the United States. *Lannon replied that the Party would need the help of the Red Army, and that could not be expected until the Soviet Union consolidated its position in Europe after the war. Nicodemus asked how the Soviet Union could ever invade the United States without a navy, and the D.O. [District Organizer – Al Lannon] responded that the Red Army in Siberia numbered in the hundreds of thousands and were building air strips. When the time came the Russians, with air support, could invade Alaska, come down through Canada, and even destroy Detroit. In the event of war, Lannon declared, the Party ‘would have to adopt a policy of*



Al Lannon (photo in public domain)

sabotage not only of war industry but of all industry.’ This would demoralize the population to reduce support for the anti-Soviet war. Nicodemus was having increasing doubts about his relationship to the Party, especially after Cumberland CPA organizer Whitey Goodfriend had told the Celanese comrades to prepare detailed maps of the plant, which was carrying on war research activity. Lannon’s comments added to his distress.”⁶ (emphasis added).

Although these claims seem audacious and grandiose, it should be noted that Stalin had other grandiose plans to take over the United States. Stalin endorsed a plan to divide the United States by splitting off the southern states into a Soviet Black Belt Republic, which would be carried out by African American communists. Communist Party Harlem Section leader James W. Ford advocated for self-determination in the Black Belt, which meant a secession of southern states that had significant African American populations. Harry Haywood, a Lenin School trained comrade, also advocated this revolutionary strategy to divide the United States and make it ripe for a Soviet invasion. The Black Belt Revolution failed to gain traction among African Americans in the South. Both Ford and Haywood allegedly had direct contact with Soviet Intelligence. Lannon’s alleged claims may appear dubious to some readers, however, he certainly had access to Soviet Intelligence and Stalin had delusions of grandeur which included the goal of world communism. Lannon housed Comintern agent Gerhart Eisler and his wife in his apartment. The US government suspected that Lannon played a role in Eisler’s 1949 escape from the US, who had been out on bail in NYC. Ninety-nine percent of Communist Party members did not have direct contact with Soviet Intelligence, as communists utilized a cell structure. However, these leading comrades almost certainly were in that one percent who did have contact with Soviet agents. The failure of the Berlin Blockade by the Soviets and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] in 1949 prevented the Soviets from consolidating Western Europe. Therefore, the alleged grandiose plan to invade the US never came to fruition. Stalin died in 1953. The Soviet dictator failed to achieve the goal of world communism during his lifetime.

His successors focused their efforts on breaching the U.S. Monroe Doctrine in Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada, as a new strategy in achieving world communism.

The climax of Lannon’s biography entails the Smith Act trials. The Department of Justice tried the major Communist Party leaders during the first Smith Act trials in 1949. In September 1949, John Huber, a former undercover informant in the Communist Party for the FBI, testified in front of the US Senate Special Subcommittee to Investigate the Immigration Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary. He stated that Al Lannon made the following statement to him after a section committee: “He [Al Lannon] hopes that he lives until the time of the revolution so that he will be able to go down to the Foley Square office of the FBI and mow down as many FBI agents as possible with a machine

⁶ Ibid., 108.

gun.”⁷ This sworn testimony to the Senate focused attention on Al Lannon. In 1951, the FBI arrested Al Lannon, after a second round of indictments, for violating the Smith Act of 1940. The title of the book got its name from the media’s use of the term “Second String Reds” as a catch phrase for the predominantly second tier leaders of the Communist Party included in the second round of indictments. Al Lannon ended up in jail for approximately two years after a jury found him guilty.

Al Lannon got out of prison in time to lead the “ultra-left” caucus of the Communist Party against revisionist policies at the Communist Party’s Sixteenth National Convention in NYC. Lannon led a group of Stalinists at the convention who wished to maintain adherence to Stalin’s ideology of Marxism-Leninism. The author pointed out how his father had a bust of Stalin in his home which he prominently displayed on the living room mantle after the Soviet leader’s death. These Stalinists of the “ultra-left” caucus included Armando Roman, Harry Haywood, Jim Keller, Joe Dougher, Ted Allen, and Angel Torres. Lannon’s caucus lost vote after vote at the convention and when Al Lannon got in front of the microphone, he declared that the Party had lost its bearings in criticizing the Soviet military intervention in Hungary. Not one member of Lannon’s caucus, composed mainly of the Harlem and Waterfront Sections, received a spot on the National Committee. After the losses at the convention, Lannon decided to leave NYC and move to San Francisco.

Lannon spent his remaining years in San Francisco. He stayed loyal to the Soviet Union and visited the country he pledged allegiance to in the late 1960s. He died of a heart attack in 1969, shortly after expressing to his son that he wished to plan another trip to the Soviet Union.

The author’s sister Karen reminded him how Mafia crime figure Joseph Bonanno came to the family’s apartment to meet with their father in the early 1950s. They did not know what occurred during the meeting. However, the brother and sister recalled that their father made some sort of deal with Bonanno and that their father mentioned that the crime boss owed him a favor. The author reflected on the communist viewpoint of this meeting between his father and the crime boss and how Lenin stated: “morality is determined by the exigencies of the class struggle.”⁸

The most shocking conclusion to the biography is the author’s admission about how he believed his father would have acted if he had seized the power of the state in an American communist revolution: “If Al Lannon’s party had state power, if my father had the power of life and death over others, there is no reason in the record to believe that anything other than a bloody replication of Soviet history would have taken place.”⁹ The author contends that the mass murderer Stalin was the logical result of the vanguard party in power, not an aberration, and that

⁷ Ibid., 132; Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, *Communist Activities Among Aliens and National Groups*, S. 1832, (1949), p. 566.

⁸ Ibid., 164.

⁹ Ibid., 168.

his father's vanguard party would be just as murderous if they seized power through the science of Marxism-Leninism.

Marxism-Leninism is not a dogma, but a science of seizing power under any means necessary and never relinquishing it. The Russians in Novorossiysk recruited a young and naïve man with no self-esteem. They filled him with communist propaganda. Al Lannon went through a religious conversion in Novorossiysk. The Soviets indoctrinated him at the Lenin school. Al Lannon became a devout Stalinist ready to serve the Soviet Union in any capacity and break any law if it served the revolution. Al Lannon was not an aberration, but a product of Marxism-Leninism.

*Patrick Murphy is the pseudonym of a veteran anti-communist researcher and analyst.

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