

Benjamin Mandel



Keeps Working

By **NELSON FRANK**

IT IS UNLIKELY that anyone working in Washington has as much pleasure doing his work as Benjamin Mandel, presently Research Director of the Senate Internal Securities Subcommittee and a former member of the National Committee of the Communist Party. He gets paid for his work, it is true, but even if he didn't, he would be doing the same sort of thing either for someone else or on his own — as was the case before he first went to Washington some fourteen years ago.

Ben Mandel is a man whose mind is constantly working and he fairly oozes with ideas to annoy, disrupt and destroy the Communists, their agents and agencies both here and abroad. A casual FBI agent dropping in to ask for a single fact may find himself loaded down with suggestions for getting the maximum data on his subject. "The worst of it is," one once complained, "they are all so valuable that you have to follow them through."

Friends or even acquaintances are

constantly getting postal cards from Mandel that contain anything from a tip for a headline story to suggestions for writing a book. He has been the godfather of a number of books and has even ghosted one himself. All, of course, had one aim: to expose the Communist conspiracy that Mandel knows so well, having been on the scene and watched it from the inside.

He was expelled back in 1929 under his party name of Bert Miller, the first in a series of top leaders who refused to obey the orders of Joe Stalin, then just taking over the world Communist machine. Though he lingered on the outskirts of the party for several years more, by 1934 he had set himself to work to undo any services he may have performed for the "comrades," and with something over to spare. He was fortunately possessed of a sense of humor which made it possible for him both to laugh off his own original mistakes and to enjoy the pleasure of outsmarting the Commie machine, single-handedly at first, then in co-operation with government and private agencies.

Gradually he built up a circle of friends who realized that here was a man to call on for information and a man to heed if he called or wrote about Commie operations. There was the time in 1938 when he returned to his home in New York and noticed in the *Daily Worker* that a forthcoming rally at Madison Square Garden was listed as having as its key speakers a governor and other assorted important personages. Presumably none of the big shots realized they were being used by a Commie front, but Mandel knew it for what it was. A few coins for phone calls to officials of respectable organizations who trusted him, and the word was passed along. The rally was held as scheduled but days before, all the principal speakers had withdrawn and only the frontiers were on hand to speak.

It was that same year that he read a story in the *AMERICAN MERCURY* called "Comintern Agent" by an unknown writer telling of his work in the international Red underground. He wrote the author, care of the magazine, met him and later financed him while he wrote the whole story of his experiences. This was Jan Valtin and the book, *Out of the Night*, was a best-seller and Book-of-the-Month Club Selection that infuriated the comrades.

It was Valtin who later jokingly said, "You know, on Ben's tombstone we'll have to write just one word: 'Activist.' Then we'll have a quote from his works. It will be,

'Something Ought to Be Done.'"

BEN MANDEL was born in New York City and educated there. He passed examinations to become a school teacher. His subject was stenography, typing and shorthand.

As a youngster he was caught in the tide that followed the Socialist Party and joined in the movement that succeeded in electing one man to Congress and others to city and state posts. When the Russian revolution split the party into those who were for or against the Soviet idea of socialism, Mandel was with the majority that split to form the Communist Party. Almost at once he was recognized as an able man and he became so active in party and party-controlled organizations that he surrendered his tenure in the public school system and became a full-time party functionary.

One of his posts was as an official of a party-run outfit called the Friends of Soviet Russia. It was here that he saw the party taking for local political purposes — money collected to help victims of the famine in Russia, something that was just good Bolshevik practice, he was told.

He was given various party assignments in Boston and Chicago. It was in the latter city that his natural gift for getting a quick idea gave the party one of the best victories it had in those days. As the comrade in charge of a demonstration protesting the presence in this

country of Queen Marie of Rumania, he was told to have his pickets shout a word which was something like "Plotescue." The party propagandists had found, they said, that this word, the name of a town, was offensive to her and was not permitted to be used in her presence. It was supposed to have been the scene of alleged debauchery by members of her court. His few pickets were soon pushed back by the police and shoved aside by the huge crowd of cheering citizens. Mandel began moving around through the crowd calling "Shout Plotescue, it's a Rumanian word of greeting, shout Plotescue. . . ." The word was taken up by the crowd and the Queen came out to hear thousands of innocent Chicagoans shouting the offensive term. The party always contended that she cut her trip short after that incident.

Soon the party was in the midst of factional fights and Ben Mandel was active as a partisan for one side — the losing one, as it turned out. After his expulsion, he stayed with the followers of Jay Lovestone and Ben Gitlow. He was one of the first to leave this group which ultimately fell apart and produced numbers of militant anti-Commie activists.

BACK in the New York school system as a substitute and evening-school teacher, Ben Mandel continued teaching until 1939. Then Dr. J. B. Matthews, who had taken

on the job of steering the House Committee on Un-American Activities, requested him to come to Washington as an assistant. The pay was less than he was earning in the schools but the opportunity for action was greater, and Mandel moved to the Capital.

Students of history will learn that sometime after 1940 the number of Congressmen making speeches exposing and denouncing the Communists and the Soviets increased considerably. Mandel had discovered that the legislators were grateful to have someone prepare speeches for them, especially those who could give them reliable speeches that would occasionally make headlines. Reporters had found that Mandel often knew when a good story might be hidden in some upcoming speech. Most reporters assigned to the committee soon became friendly with Mandel. But not all.

One day a reporter from the *New York Post* came in and asked permission to use the bound volumes of the *Daily Worker* the committee had on loan from the Library of Congress. Mandel went out of his way to get them and even helped find specific items desired. He was always on the lookout to make friends for the committee and extra service was one way. The reporter thanked him and left. Several days later, Mandel saw a story in the *Post* by the reporter, James Wechsler, attacking the committee for having the volumes in its possession, so that students at the

Library who wanted them couldn't see them.

It was while he was with the committee that he built up a constantly expanding group of friends from other agencies of the Government. With them he worked out a plan that forced off the federal payroll some of the first Commies ousted as such. When applicants for Army or Navy commissions were found to have Commie records in the committee's fast-growing files and were holding government jobs — a common situation — Mandel would pass the word to his Civil Service friends. He served as a liaison between a number of government agencies which had no official contact with one another, and through him many Commies were not only rejected for commissions but were booted from Civil Service jobs. Indeed, he became a sort of ready reference source for numerous agencies and newspaper reporters who wanted the details on Communist policy, figures, history, and fronts. What he didn't recall offhand he had easily available in his personal library, which probably was bigger than that of any government agency. Trade unionists, while officially passing resolutions opposing the committee, came to Mandel secretly to gather data on their Commie opponents. As in all cases, he had just one criterion — Are they fighting the Communists? If so, he was on hand to help.

At the end of 1944 it appeared the committee would be disbanded. Both

Mandel and Matthews left, but while Matthews went to New York to open a private research service, Mandel, who had been cleared by Civil Service, went to the State Department security branch.

THE State staff wanted no opponents of Russian Communism active in the days 1944 to 1946, and soon Mandel was boxed off in an attic room with no assignments but with pay coming in regularly. He would have quit but for the chance he had to do research projects he had set for himself and never had time for in the past. Quickly, he put together a compilation called *The Communist Party as the Agent of a Foreign Power*, which was passed around the department as a secret document. Later it was issued by the House Committee. Other like projects kept him busy during the couple of years he was there, and then he went back to the committee as research director. "One thing you'll have to cut out in State," he had been told on going there: "We can't have you writing speeches for Congressmen." Mandel nodded. "Did you stop?" he was later asked by friends. He chuckled. "My boss was writing them too in a short time," he said. He had shrugged off the attic office. "It was very high level," he said in his best protocol manner.

He returned to the committee during its most productive period. All the ground work done previously was now on hand and the committee

could go after the Hollywood Ten, Gerhardt and Hans Eisler, and finally the spies named by Elizabeth Bentley and Whittaker Chambers. For years, Mandel had been seeing Chambers and getting such details as the *Time* magazine editor could remember or cared to tell. Now, when the committee was confronted by the denial of Alger Hiss, Mandel more than any other person with the committee was the most certain that Chambers was truthful and Hiss was the liar. It was Mandel who asked Chambers the details of his personal recollections of the Hiss household that made the Congressmen realize Chambers must really know this man who denied ever having seen him. Most appreciative of Mandel was one Congressman most deeply concerned with the problem of Communism, Richard Nixon.

For years Mandel had been furnishing data to Robert Morris, and when the McCarran Internal Security Subcommittee was set up, Morris at once asked Mandel if he would care to join it.

Mandel hesitated. He had built up the huge names file at the House committee and he hated to leave it. But a new committee would need his knowledge and perhaps it would be able to hit harder than one a dozen years old. He became research director of the Senate committee and has been at least as happy as ever. One thing the new committee did was to put Mandel in the lime-light. He was called upon in the

widely publicized Owen Lattimore and Institute of Pacific Relations hearings to identify and read into the record the thousands of documents that committee counsel Morris wanted. This same practice was followed in the later hearing into the United Nations and the nation's school systems. Mandel would gather together the documentary evidence and read it into the record. That work is still going on. It has not stopped Mandel from his other activities of keeping suggestions going to all good Red-baiters. It has merely given him new aspects of the problem to work on.

For years, Mandel's many friends have had only one fault to find with him. He is up too early, and once up, is anxious to pass along ideas and data that may be of use. Gradually, they have eased him off until he now will wait till maybe 8:15 A.M. of a Sunday morning before he starts calling, and that is late enough for anyone, he declares.

To his friends, Ben Mandel has always seemed wedded to fighting Commies; so it was with something of a shock that they learned he was getting married, some months back. But it was all right. His wife, Maggie Rees Mandel, was a solid anti-Communist he had met at the home of J. B. Matthews. In fact, she has increased his efficiency by indexing his library. All in all, the future looks even better for Mandel and his friends and bleaker for his enemies . . . his and the free world's, that is.

APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

By GURO BJORNSON

IN the horse and buggy days there had been for many years the same two doctors in a small Wisconsin town. But one day a very young, handsome doctor stepped off the Chicago train. He took the waiting Traveler's Hotel cab and went directly to a room reserved for him.

A few days later a fresh shingle hung from a second story window over Main Street.

The young doctor subscribed for the weekly local newspaper. He stayed in his office and was seen mainly when going to the post office or eating at the hotel. His movements were brisk and timed with the town clock. Especially the women of the town learned to know his habits and became unusually interested in the mail trains and the apple pie and coffee at the Traveler's Hotel.

On Wednesday and Saturday the farmers came to town to trade eggs for coffee, and when their shopping was over and before returning to their homes, they always gathered awhile on the sidewalks to exchange news and pass the time of day with their neighbors.

It was at one of these times that they first became aware of the new doctor dashing along Main Street —

at top speed — with the fastest team of horses owned by the Jones Livery Stable.

"*Who is that?*" the farmers asked. "The new doctor," some one answered. Then, "Some urgent call, no doubt. Maybe Mrs. Johnson. She is expecting any day now. He doesn't waste time getting there." Someone added, "He is fresh out of school, I hear. He knows new ways." And the younger women said quietly to one another, "He is good looking, too."

But what they didn't know was that the doctor drove into the country — yes — Wednesdays and Saturdays in different directions. Then he would rest his horses, not too far from some farmer's gate, but he always came back to town in time for office hours. He walked rapidly, carrying his new satchel with an air of success.

Some years later he moved away into a nearby city to open a well-equipped, fine office and to "specialize."

He left behind him, no doubt, some broken hearts, but he took with him about twenty thousand dollars of capably-earned and well-deserved cash.

It paid to advertise.