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McCARTHYISM AND THE ACADEMIC MIND

One of the obstacles proponents of freedom of speech have to hurdle is the apathy of their friends. I do not mean their friends who are active in civic organizations. I am thinking of the millions of Americans who, though they sincerely believe in our constitutional guarantees, assume that a democratic society operates on the principle of a gyroscope. Excesses, however horrible, they take for sporadic aberrations. After a short time society is sure to ride an even keel once more. The Salem witch trials, it is true, were a temporary flurry in an otherwise sober New England society. Trade unionism recovered from the Haymarket trials, and Tom Mooney was at long last pardoned. Even as the liberal mind recoils with aversion from such excesses, it is consoled by the thought, based on what seems the evidence of history, that the wave of societal abnormality will soon sink back into normalcy.

From any point of view this is an attitude of doubtful validity. It is a rationalization justifying the apathy of "business as usual," and hence preventing any effective opposition to the excess until its excessiveness has reached the brink of the uncontrollable. Still worse, assuming that history ever repeats itself, it remains blind, until the edge of chaos has been reached, to the simple fact that history is not repeating itself in the phenomenon we call McCarthyism.

Previous instances have been not only sporadic. They have been local in area and candid in motivation. McCarthyism is the opposite. It is not sporadic, nor local, nor candid.

Never before have there been so many bodies of investigation. We now have three national legislative investigating com-

mittees (that apparently can investigate anywhere), in addition to at least three set up by the executive branch to investigate its internal concerns. Several states have instituted their own committees or authorized their departments of justice to act as such. Municipalities have followed suit, especially in the area of education. The loyalty oath, new style, is becoming universal. Now virtually compulsory for employees of many national, state, and city governments, under guise that they are working on government contracts it is spreading to the large corporations. And this extension of McCarthyism has received the aid in many communities of the local branch of the American Legion and the other self-proclaimed defenders of Americanism, who have frequently assumed the authority of investigating committees. Nor is there anything sporadic to a movement which began some fifteen years ago with the establishment of the original Dies Committee.

In another sense the present situation is without precedent. Every past attack upon civil liberties has been clear-cut. That what was clear was also wrong is irrelevant. The magistrates and clergy of Salem could define a witch and proceed to apply their definition. But no Salem witch-hunter ever called the governor of the state a witch and a harbinger of witches in the state government. When Socialists were ousted from the New York state legislature after the first World War, however unconstitutional the law may have turned out to be, what the law sought to do and did accomplish for the time being was without ambiguity. The Sacco-Vanzetti case hinged upon a plain question of fact: did they commit a murder? The many instances of repression of members of labor unions, often mounting to the extremes of brutality and murder, may have been illegal use of the police power. Those instigating them knew what they were doing, and did not conceal their motives. What President Taft wrote his wife about the Pullman strike had been said often enough in one way or another in the public press: that a little blood-letting was needed to keep labor in its place. Men might

differ over the justification for such actions. It is apparent that they knew precisely what they were differing about. President Taft did not pretend he was promoting economic democracy, as McCarthyism pretends it is preserving our “democratic way of life” against the subversive activities of Communists.

At the same time, it is one of the ironies of history that never before the period that begins with the Dies Committee and comes down to McCarthyism have American intellectuals been so concerned with the nature of sophistry. At the very moment when language was becoming, in the field of politics, a skillful device to mislead, when our carefree traditional “buncombe” in politics was becoming a fine art, there arose a movement for its exposure. Let me acknowledge here our debt to the Institute for Propaganda Analysis, under the direction of Clyde Miller, and remember that its flourishing coincided with the life of the Dies Committee. Since then, its largely practical activities have been superseded by the rise of a new movement in American philosophy (though basically of European origin), concerned solely with the importance of accuracy in the use of language to convey meanings without distortion or deception. The work of Carnap and Hayakawa, as philosophers of Logical Positivism, has been largely concerned with the exposure of the faulty use of words by those who would make the worse appear the better reason, and with the elaboration of those devices to test the meaning of language which will promote recognition of ambiguity and knowledge of reality, and hence pave the way for wise action. But, whatever may be the reason, whether it lies in some error in their method or elsewhere, the fact that counts in our present context is that it has been without any significant influence. It has never analyzed specific fallacies such as those in the writing of Professor Sidney Hook for instance. And it has been Professor Hook and not Professor Carnap to whom the pages of the *New York Times* have been open and who is listened to by the American Association of College Presidents. Not only has it had no influence upon American intellectuals

outside the cult of its own adherents in philosophy, but, despite its publication of a magazine, it has had no influence on the public at large. At the very time when we have been given an effective device to expose the semantic errors by the use of which McCarthyism wins its vast popular following, semantic errors flourish as never before in our history.

We cannot, therefore, conclude that it is only the majority of our population, the half-educated or the illiterate, which has fallen prey to the false logic of McCarthyism. The tragedy of the present situation is that as many proportionately of the highly educated and highly placed are its victims. If we had the statistics, I am sure this would be found to be true. And I think also it would be unwarranted to furnish our intellectuals with the dubious alibi that, when they act as college presidents or influential columnists moulding public opinion, they ape the half-educated, they are conscious of their tongues being firmly in their cheeks. Our intellectuals, with rare exceptions, are too much under the influence of the Puritan tradition to be capable of such duplicity. They have had to go through an elaborate process of self-deception as training for these self-preservative activities. But however they started, they are sure to end by believing their own rationalizations. I would not accuse Professor Hook of knowing what a vicious influence he has been upon American thinking in recent years.

The proof for these assertions does not seem to me to be difficult.

At about the time when McCarthyism was in its infancy in the old Dies Committee, and when Logical Positivism was starting its attempt to enlighten us, the American Association of College Professors began wrestling with the concept of academic freedom. It worked out a statement of principles which it has, since then, reaffirmed three or four times, each time with the achievement of greater precision of statement.

It is not difficult to summarize these principles. They spring from the guarantees of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution.

They therefore divide the rights and duties of the teacher into two parts: first, his academic life within his particular specialization, and secondly, his private life as a citizen. The principles assert that an institution can only have concern for and control over those activities of a teacher which relate to his competence in the field of scholarship for which he was chosen for his position. On this basis only was he chosen. On this basis he must be either promoted or discharged. And on this basis alone. His private rights, on the other hand, guaranteed by the Constitution, are the concern of the state. The Bill of Rights guarantees him freedom of speech and association. If he breaks laws, the state tries him. If he is suspected of traitorous activities, it is the province of the state to investigate them. But this careful delineation of areas does not mean that there is no relationship between them. In the AAUP code, the relationship is as carefully stated as the distinction (as in any good definition), and may be put in both a positive and a negative way. Positively, if the teacher has been convicted and jailed for a criminal (as distinguished from a civil) offense, he is automatically discharged.

Negatively, the institution leaves such investigation and conviction entirely to the state. It recognizes its separate and independent function in our society as the custodian of education. It recognizes that it should not assume the prerogatives of the governmental apparatus by instituting political investigations. It follows from this position that the university should not become a tool of the governmental apparatus by instigating such a type of investigation of its teaching staff as even McCarthyism cannot do, that is to say, a political investigation in which, under cloak of the independence of the institution, the guarantees of the Bill of Rights are denied the teacher through the pretense that to utilize them is conduct unbecoming a teacher. Such subterfuge is part and parcel of McCarthyism.

As general statement these principles are clear. Why, then, if as intellectuals we are rational beings trained in scientific and

scholarly method, should something like consternation arise when it is now proposed that they be applied? Why should anyone find it preposterous or impossibly risky to apply them now to teachers suspected or accused of being Communists or fellow travellers or individuals who have had relations with such? Does any administrator who is neither an hysteric nor a hypocrite need to be disturbed if there are Communists or Communist suspects on his faculty? There are two simple reasons why an administrator ought not, "from a logical point of view," be disturbed. One is: with so many official investigating committees at work, it is scarcely possible that such individuals will not in due time be subpoenaed. If investigation is not followed by a suit at court, it is scarcely possible that any legitimate evidence against the teacher has been uncovered. If, on the other hand, a court suit follows and a conviction for a criminal offense is the sentence, and all appeals have been denied, then, under present rules, the teacher is automatically expelled. The second reason is illustrated as follows: suppose one believes that a Communist or a person having relations with Communists does give adherence to a philosophy which by established rules of measurement cannot be accepted as a legitimate philosophy and which contains methods of application to everyday life that are unscrupulous, unethical, Machiavellian or "Aesopean." Either the fallacies of the method are discoverable by established tests or the method is so Machiavellian as to defeat its own ends and is therefore no risk at all. What this means in terms of the code of academic freedom is that either the teacher loses his job because it can be proved that his teaching and research are not based on sound scholarship (i.e., that Marxism is not a reputable philosophy meeting the tests of sound scholarship generally) or that the most rigorous examination into his teaching and research can find nothing unsound, ulterior, Marxist, and hence nothing justifying dismissal. For an Aesopean language which is so Aesopean that it cannot be discovered can scarcely be an adequate device for making dangerous converts to Communism.

I am not now thinking of the promising careers cut off, salaries stopped, reputations damaged as a result of the rejection of this approach and the substitution for it of the procedure of guilt by association. Unfortunate as these consequences have been to the individual, from the point of view of society, more alarming has been the bankruptcy of intellect promoted. When trustees, administrators, and large segments of the faculties of universities give evidence of processes of thinking no whit different from those used by uneducated Legionaires, the future of intelligence in America is dim indeed. When the hysteria and the rationalizations of educated men are not at all different from the hysteria and the rationalizations of the illiterate, the educated, who are in a position to know better, have been treasonous to their trust and, in the long run, to their country.

These may appear the remarks of a man who has suffered from such an investigation. But that this is not so, that these remarks are only cool, unhysterical statement of fact seems to me proved beyond a doubt by this: that with two exceptions, there is not an institution of higher learning in the country which has put into practice the traditional accepted code of the American Association of University Professors. If there are others to stand beside Sarah Lawrence and the University of Chicago, I should be glad to hear of them. I know of institutions that have tried by some subterfuge to live up to this code. They have instituted private investigations to assure themselves that certain faculty members though once Communists are no longer such or though accused of Communism are indubitably not its supporters. But such subterfuge is itself evidence of the weakening of ethical and intellectual fibre. For it is not putting investigation upon the correct theoretical basis. If the principles of the American Association of University Professors are correct, they must be espoused and applied, not evaded. This is necessary not only to reassure the teaching staff but to maintain the integrity of intelligence.

The effect of this failure of academic leadership has been to

put an intolerable burden on the individual teacher, and, in fact, on the local chapter of the American Association of University Professors. The teacher can either follow the lead of his deans and other executive officers and, like them, equivocate, to the demoralization of his capacity for clear thinking; or he can try to retain his capacity for clear thinking as a private investment concealed beneath an outward compliance with academic authority. In this second case the result is the breeding of a diffused and anxious cynicism, as any psychiatrist will testify. Such compliance protects the individual integrity, for the time being, but not for long; for cynicism carries within it the most subtle insinuations to corrode intellectual integrity.

Even the scientist, whose mechanisms for correcting prejudice and interference from subjective factors are most elaborate, cannot for long remain uncorrupted in the face of two pressures. The first is the general pressure for conformity exercised upon all intellectuals. The second is the particular pressure brought by the fact that today most scientific investigation is in one way or another dependent upon government funds and hence upon "security regulations." That this is so has been glaringly illustrated by the charges brought against Dr. Oppenheimer. These, it is true, when examined by men with any common sense surviving, are preposterous. But the recent decision of the committee which cleared him of disloyalty but nevertheless refused to reinstate him because of imprudent acts and associations in the past shows that the forces of hysteria are still in control. When the man who could have in one way or another passed the most useful information about atomic energy to the Soviet Union is admitted to have passed nothing and yet is relieved of his office because he had "relations" which presumably might have encouraged such transfer of information, the national intelligence as embodied in men in responsible conditions, vital to the welfare of our country and the world, has reached the lowest ebb in our history. And they have lost their intellectual integrity because they have been driven into hysteria by McCarthyism.

Nor should it, at this point, be forgotten that McCarthyism is bigger than Senator McCarthy. The Senator from Wisconsin is now under severe and justified attack. The common sense of the nation is at long last beginning to assert itself. When McCarthy calls President Eisenhower "a Fifth Amendment man," which is his term for "Communist," it becomes widely evident that his criteria for Communism are both inaccurate and dishonest. What must not be forgotten at this time, however, is the simple fact that all these committees, the old McCarran and the newer Velde, follow the same definitions and the same methods. It is easy to expose these when the President is attacked. But what must never be lost sight of is that the same definitions and the same methods are being applied by ALL of these committees to everyone they attack. The fallacy is less evident when lesser men are charged. But to the candid intelligence it is equally present. Hence McCarthy, as an individual, only writes large fallacies true of McCarthyism in general as a phenomenon of our troubled times.

The intellectuals of our country are at present in a mood of cynicism. But we should not become cynical ourselves at the spectacle. Intellectuals have to earn their livings like ordinary mortals; and, like them, they are bound, unless they have the spirit of the martyr or are forced by circumstances into the martyr's role, they are bound, like everybody else, to equivocate to protect their income, their habitual way of life, and their personal concerns. They do so, I am convinced, against the grain. They await the first opportunity to throw off the subterfuges which they know they cannot long maintain without loss of their integrity, as individual citizens and indeed of those very habits of mind they must keep if their professional and scientific interests are to survive. They need only some slight assurance that they have public support for their renewed venture into the open assertion of their integrity. I am sure, now that the country at large is learning the true nature of McCarthyism, that they will not prove faithless to their trust.