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Author(s): Robert Griffith

Source: *The Review of Politics*, Jan., 1971, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Jan., 1971), pp. 24-35

Published by: Cambridge University Press for the University of Notre Dame du lac on behalf of Review of Politics

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1406357>

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# The Political Context of McCarthyism

Robert Griffith

FROM 1950 to 1954 American politics were dominated as never before by one man, Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, and by the phenomenon of "McCarthyism." Yet many of the questions raised by those years of turmoil and controversy remain unanswered. What was the source and nature of the power that McCarthy wielded over the United States Senate? Why did the members of that body acquiesce, for nearly five years, in his continued abuse of the democratic process? Beyond this, were the McCarthy years aberrational? Did they represent some malfunction in our political machinery? Or were they the natural and inevitable by-product of that system itself?

Some writers have been preoccupied with McCarthy's formidable personality. Richard H. Rovere, for example, has called him "the most gifted and successful demagogue this country has ever known."<sup>1</sup> Most general historians have attributed McCarthyism to the frustration and internal stress produced by the Cold War in general and by the fall of Nationalist China, the Korean War and the conviction of Alger Hiss in particular.<sup>2</sup> But if the Cold War explained the objective circumstances from which McCarthyism erupted, it did not explain its style, rhetoric or mass appeal. Under the leadership of Richard Hofstadter, Seymour Martin Lipset and Daniel Bell, a number of historians and social scientists have turned to the concept of status anxiety in an attempt to explain mid-twentieth-century American politics. McCarthy's support, they have argued, came from groups rising or falling in status who vented their accumulated discontents on their betters. This accounts for the anti-intellectual and the anti-establishmentarian mood of McCarthyism, the scorn for "egg-sucking liberals," "dilettante diplomats" and "the bright young men who are born with silver spoons in their mouths."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Richard H. Rovere, "The Most Gifted and Successful Demagogue This Country Has Ever Known," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 30, 1967, VI, 23; Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy* (New York, 1959); Jack Anderson and Ronald W. May, *McCarthy: The Man, the Senator, the "Ism"* (Boston, 1952); Reinhard H. Luthin, *American Demagogues* (Boston, 1954), pp. 237-297.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Agar, *The Price of Power: America Since 1945* (Chicago, 1957), pp. 86-105; Eric Goldman, *The Crucial Decade — And After: America, 1945-1960* (New York, 1960), pp. 91-145.

But if theories about status politics help to explain the peculiar style and rhetoric of McCarthyism, they leave quite as many questions still unanswered. To begin with there are certain methodological problems. The polls on which many of these arguments depend do show a relatively high incidence of pro-McCarthyism among groups experiencing status change. They do not show, however, whether those responding favorably to the Senator actually perceived this change as such. Most of the data, moreover, applies to the relatively small group of ardent McCarthy supporters. What needs explanation is the larger segment of the population which did not support McCarthy so much as it tolerated him. And beyond this, assuming the widespread presence of status grievances, why did these resentments become especially powerful and politically operational during the late nineteen-forties and the early nineteen-fifties?

A partial answer to these questions involves a political definition of McCarthyism. McCarthyism, the charge of "communism in government," was not just a response to status anxieties or to the tensions of the Cold War, but was generated by the American political system. Joe McCarthy did not win national notoriety simply because of some chance remarks made at Wheeling, West Virginia, or because of the conviction of Alger Hiss or even because of the Cold War. He rose to power because of a political dynamic created during the late nineteen-forties by a band of Republican partisans as they scrapped and clawed their way toward power. The broad issue of American policy toward Communist nations and the more specific issue of "communism in government" were, to be sure, made viable by the Cold War; but they were made dynamic by these partisans for whom they represented success or a means to success. McCarthy's real triumph, both in 1950 and afterwards, lay in making himself a personal symbol of these issues. And once he had accomplished this, the task of dislodging or even restraining him became immensely complicated. He held a privileged position in American politics, not by virtue of the

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<sup>3</sup> The best introduction to this argument may be found in Daniel Bell (ed.), *The New American Right* (New York, 1955), and its revised edition, *The Radical Right* (New York, 1963). Included are essays by Bell, Richard Hofstadter, David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, Peter Viereck, Talcott Parsons, Alan F. Westin, H. H. Hyman and Seymour Martin Lipset. The interested student should also consult the individual works of the various contributors as well as the growing body of supportive literature cited in the footnotes of the revised edition.

constitutional immunities which adhered to the office of the United States Senator, but because of the political immunities which he gained by identification with the communist issue.

This interpretation is scarcely original and seemed self-evident to the reporters who covered Washington during the McCarthy years. Yet all too often this insight has been obscured by sociologists probing the appeal of McCarthyism for evidence of status anxiety and by intellectual historians exhuming the rhetoric of the fifties in search of neo-populism, paranoia and incipient fascism. In 1960 Nelson Polsby provocatively redirected attention to the political aspects of McCarthyism.<sup>4</sup> More recently Earl Latham has developed at great length a somewhat similar argument. For Latham, McCarthyism was the function of a conservative drive for power which, frustrated by the re-election of Harry S. Truman in 1948, asserted itself through the legislative branch.<sup>5</sup> The best of the recent work on this problem is by Michael Paul Rogin. Rogin challenged the work of "pluralist" scholars like Hofstadter, Lipset and Bell who interpreted McCarthyism in terms of mass politics, populist appeals and the "radicalism" of the right, and in a brilliant closing chapter insisted instead upon the role of traditional political elites in creating and sustaining McCarthyism.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship of conventional politics to McCarthyism is well illustrated by the Senate's reaction to the McCarran Internal Security Act and to the Communist Control Act. The first measure passed Congress in September, 1950, near the beginning of the McCarthy years. The second was enacted in August, 1954, at a time when the Senator's influence was rapidly diminishing. McCarthy himself was not conspicuously identified with either the McCarran Act or the Communist Control Act. Yet because they typified the collapse of congressional courage and good sense in the face of the communist issue, they help to explain a great deal about both McCarthy and "McCarthyism."

The McCarran Act was an omnibus "anti-subversive" measure with provisions for the registration of Communist-action and Communist-front groups, the emergency detention of persons believed

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<sup>4</sup> Nelson Polsby, "Toward An Explanation of McCarthyism," *Political Studies*, VIII (October, 1969), 250-271.

<sup>5</sup> Earl Latham, *The Communist Controversy in America: From the New Deal to McCarthy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Paul Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

likely to commit espionage and sabotage and the tightening of laws against sedition and espionage. The legislative history of the bill considerably predated McCarthy's sudden rise to notoriety. Throughout the late nineteen-forties popular concern over domestic communism had been steadily increasing. Many constitutional lawyers argued that existing statutes were sufficient protection against potential espionage or subversion; but by 1950 it seemed obvious to even the most casual observers that some type of internal security legislation was in the works, if for no other reason than as a symbolic propitiation of public fears. In 1948 the House of Representatives passed a Communist registration bill sponsored by Congressmen Richard M. Nixon and Karl E. Mundt, and the following year the Senate Judiciary Committee gave detailed consideration to a similar measure cosponsored by Republicans Karl Mundt and Homer Ferguson and Democrat Olin D. Johnston. In July, 1950, the Senate Republican Policy Committee placed a version of the Mundt-Nixon bill on its "must list" and the Democrats came under heavy pressure to support it lest they appear remiss in their patriotism.<sup>7</sup>

President Truman was adamant in his opposition to the Mundt-Nixon bill which he believed "adopted police-state tactics and unduly encroached on individual rights." Although the situation in Congress was the worst it had been since the Alien and Sedition Acts, with "a lot of people on the Hill . . . running with their tails between their legs," the President promised to veto the bill "regardless of how politically unpopular it was — election year or no election year."<sup>8</sup> On August 8 he sent Congress a message on internal security and mounted a campaign for limited and moderate legislation. By then, however, it was too late. Congress was already stampeding toward the enactment of sweeping internal security measures and the President was unable to establish any control over the flow of events.

In the Senate, the key figure was Pat McCarran, the silver-haired, 74-year-old chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and the leader of a coalition of conservative Republicans and

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen J. Spingarn to Clark Clifford, May 2, 1949; Spingarn to Charles S. Murphy *et al.*, July 20, 1950, National Defense -S2311; Spingarn to Murphy August 1, 1950, National Defense — Internal Security and Individual Rights, vol. II, all in the Spingarn Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen J. Spingarn, Memorandum for the Files, July 22, 1950, National Defense — Internal Security and Individual Rights, vol. I, Spingarn Papers.

Democrats demanding new and drastic legislation. McCarran was sometimes compared with McCarthy. Both were Irish Catholics and played heavily upon the communist issue. Though a Democrat, McCarran was usually aligned with the Republican Right. But Joe McCarthy had no real sense of grand strategy. His genius was for turmoil and confusion, and for the excitement and notoriety they produced. What power he exercised was of an unconventional nature, derived from his symbolic role as exemplar of the anti-communist persuasion and from his near monopoly of the mass media. McCarran, by contrast, had a swift and sure instinct for the traditional levers of congressional power. He exercised baronial authority over the Senate Judiciary Committee and through his control of all judicial appointments he was able to extract tribute from the Administration and his fellow senators alike. He could extort from Attorney General James P. McGranery, in return for the latter's confirmation, the promise that the Justice Department would press perjury charges against Owen Lattimore. And he could browbeat a Deputy Attorney General into promising that — "Cross my heart" — he would carry out a demand made by the chairman.<sup>9</sup>

On August 17, just nine days after the President had warned Congress that much of the legislation then pending before Congress was "unnecessary, ineffective and dangerous," McCarran reported from committee an omnibus internal security bill incorporating not only the Mundt-Nixon bill but the provisions of four other internal security measures as well. Opponents of the bill argued that the registration provisions were cumbersome and ineffective; and that they would, moreover, endanger traditional American liberties guaranteed by the First and Fifth Amendments to the Constitution. The editorial positions of liberal, moderate, and even

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<sup>9</sup> Thurman Arnold, *Fair Fights and Foul: A Dissenting Lawyer's Life* (New York, 1965), p. 217; Anderson and May, *McCarthy*, p. 341. McCarran's power was increased by the institutional habits of the Senate. Most senators tend to specialize, concentrating their efforts in one legislative area and relying upon the counsel of their friends and the party leadership in other matters. When an especially powerful man like McCarran dominates an area, there is often no countervailing force to push and plead legislative alternatives. "Senators, like myself, who are not members of the Judiciary Committee, rely to a great extent, of course, upon the recommendation which it makes after a thorough analysis of the particular matter under consideration," explained Texas Senator Tom Connally to an angry constituent. Tom T. Connally to Mrs. W. A. Nauwald, March 26, 1951, box 118, Tom T. Connally Papers, Library of Congress.

some constructive dailies were strongly against the measure.<sup>10</sup> Yet in the Senate both the center and the left collapsed as the "McCarran bill" carried by a vote of 70-7.<sup>11</sup>

On every side were reports of fear and gross hypocrisy. One group of Democratic senators met and concluded that although the bill was "a bad measure" which, under ordinary circumstances, should not be supported, "those who faced the electorate THIS year would be taking too great a risk if they voted right because of the popular lack of understanding and hysteria over the issue." One veteran newsman reported that he was "amazed in talking privately to a number of conservative senators — both Republicans and Democrats — that they voted with tongue in cheek for it and with a lot of reluctance." The Democratic leadership, having done little to keep the bill off the floor and even less to oppose it once it was reported out, now unanimously urged the President to sign it into law.<sup>12</sup>

The response of some Democratic liberals to the bill was more disconcerting to civil libertarians than the McCarran Act itself. Led by Paul H. Douglas of Illinois and Harley M. Kilgore of West Virginia, the Senate liberals proposed as a substitute for the McCarran bill an emergency detention plan for the internment of suspected subversives upon the declaration of an "internal security emergency" by the President.<sup>13</sup> This "concentration camp bill,"

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<sup>10</sup> *The Washington Post*, August 31, 1950; *The New York Herald-Tribune*, August 31, 1950; *The New York Times*, August 31, 1950; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, September 1, 1950; *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 31, 1950; *Christian Science Monitor*, September 15, 1950.

<sup>11</sup> *Congressional Record*, 81st Cong., 2nd Sess., September 12, 1950, p. 14628. Voting against the bill were Senators Graham, Green, Kefauver, Leahy, Lehman, Murray and Taylor. Republican William Langer would have voted against the bill, but voted "yea" so that he might be able to move for reconsideration. Langer to Harry S. Truman, September 18, 1950, P.P.F. 5491, Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

<sup>12</sup> John D. Erwin to Estes Kefauver, September 24, 1950, in Legislative Files, 81st Congress, Estes Kefauver Papers, University of Tennessee; and John Steele to Arthur Vandenberg, September 27, 1950, Vandenberg Papers, W. L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

Vice President Barkley, Scott Lucas, House Speaker Sam Rayburn, and House Majority Leader John W. McCormick had all urged Truman to sign the bill. Stephen J. Spingarn, Memorandum for the Files, September 19, 1950, National Defense, Internal Security and Individual Rights, Spingarn Papers.

<sup>13</sup> S. 4130 was cosponsored by Senators Douglas, Kilgore, Humphrey, Lehman, Graham, Kefauver and Benton. Not all liberals, of course, were shocked by the Douglas-Kilgore proposal. Some like James Loeb, Jr. of

as one White House aide labeled it, became the uneasy rallying point for those liberals who were trying to block the McCarran bill. It was a "very bad bill," confessed Julius C. C. Edelstein, the legislative assistant to New York Democrat Herbert H. Lehman. It had "profound" constitutional weaknesses in seeking to set aside the right of *habeas corpus*. Still, it would "certainly impress the public with the fact that you are determined to act against communists." The only real dangers that Edelstein foresaw were: 1) the bill might actually be passed; and 2) Thomas E. Dewey might be able to dramatize it in order to show "that you are really more of a fascist than he is."<sup>14</sup>

On September 6, 1950, Douglas, Kilgore, Lehman, Hubert Humphrey and several other liberal Democrats called on President Truman to explain their proposal. They told Truman that "they had to make a move of this sort as the only possible way of beating the McCarran bill." The President declined to commit himself, telling the senators to go ahead with their plans, but that he would reserve judgment until such time as the measure might reach his desk.<sup>15</sup>

In a series of complicated parliamentary maneuvers the concentration camp proviso was first rejected as a substitute for the McCarran bill, then later accepted as an addition to the measure. This last move followed a surprise motion by Majority Leader Scott Lucas which caught the liberals completely unprepared; and as a result a number of them — Humphrey, Kilgore, Benton, Douglas, Clinton Anderson, Warren Magnuson and Wayne Morse — voted for the McCarran bill on its final Senate passage.<sup>16</sup>

"As I look back on it I am very ashamed of my vote on the McCarran Act," confessed Connecticut Democrat William Benton. "I do have some excuses and alibis, though in retrospect they are not good ones." "I was very proud of you and your vote on the McCarran Act,"

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Americans for Democratic Action, felt the bill was "justified both by realistic justice and by political expedience." James Loeb, Jr. to Miss Evelyn Dubrow, November 1, 1950, Legislative File, box 34, American for Democratic Action Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

<sup>14</sup> Memorandum, Julius C. C. Edelstein to Herbert H. Lehman, September 4, 1950, Senate Files, Research — drawer one, Herbert H. Lehman Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen J. Spingarn, Memorandum for the Files, September 6, 1950, National Defense — Internal Security and Individual Rights, vol. III, Spingarn Papers.

<sup>16</sup> *Congressional Record*, 81st Cong., 2nd Sess., September 12, 1950, p. 14628.



ran bill," wrote Hubert Humphrey to Tennessee's Estes Kefauver. "I wish I could say the same for myself."<sup>17</sup> A number of Senate liberals, including some like Humphrey and Kilgore who had voted for the bill, now urged Truman to veto it.<sup>18</sup>

The President needed no encouragement. He returned the bill to Congress with a strong veto message on September 22. In the House the veto was quickly overridden by a vote of 286 to 46. In the Senate, a vote was delayed by a last minute attempt by William Langer and Hubert Humphrey to prolong debate in the hope of sustaining the President. Langer, who had earlier told the President that the bill was "one of the most vicious, most dangerous pieces of legislation against the people that has ever been passed by any Senate," spoke for nearly five hours before he collapsed near dawn. Humphrey took the floor for several more hours but fearing an "adverse reaction" finally allowed the measure to come before the Senate. The final vote was 57 to 10. Only a tiny band of liberals and one lone Republican, the irrepressible Langer, supported the President. The entire Democratic leadership of the Senate deserted the President, and of the eastern, "liberal" Republicans not one was counted.<sup>19</sup> If the passage of the McCarran Act could be taken as an index to the strength of the communist issue within the Senate and of the inability of either the Administration or the Senate leadership to develop an opposition, then it should be clear why the Upper Chamber was vulnerable to McCarthy's brand of political adventure. He filled a vacuum created by a combination of irresponsibility, irresolution and ineptitude on the part of Republicans and Democrats alike.

Similar circumstances surrounded the passage four years later

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<sup>17</sup> William Benton to Ralph Flanders, February 17, 1954, box 113, Ralph Flanders Papers, Syracuse University; Benton to Francis Biddle, November 7, 1950, Legislative File, box 34, ADA Papers; Hubert H. Humphrey to Estes Kefauver, September 19, 1950, Legislative Files, 81st Congress, Kefauver Papers.

<sup>18</sup> Harley Kilgore to Truman, September 14, 1950; Senators Herbert Lehman, James Murray and Estes Kefauver to Truman, September 20, 1950, both letters in O.F. 2750-C, Truman Papers; Stephen J. Spingarn, Memorandum for the Files, September 25, 1950, National Defense — Internal Security and Individual Rights, vol. III, Spingarn Papers.

<sup>19</sup> Voting "nay" were Senators Chavez, Graham, Douglas, Green, Humphrey, Kilgore, Leahy, Lehman, Murray and Kefauver. Langer, who had been taken to the hospital, was announced as opposing the bill, and Glenn Taylor of Idaho was paired against it. *Congressional Record*, 81st Cong., 2nd Sess., September 23, 1950, p. 15726.

of the Communist Control Act. This bill passed the Senate in August, 1954, following the highly publicized Army-McCarthy hearings, after Republican Senator Ralph Flanders had introduced a motion to censure McCarthy, and after the Senate itself had referred the censure resolution to a select committee headed by Utah Republican Arthur V. Watkins.

But because the Senate had at last begun, however reluctantly and however distastefully, to move toward a confrontation with Joe McCarthy, did not at all mean that it was also prepared to face up to the communist issue, or what was frequently and mistakenly called "McCarthyism." In fact it seemed almost as though the opposite were true. For while the Senate was debating what to do about Joe McCarthy, it was at the same time rushing through, virtually unopposed, a wide variety of so-called "anti-subversive" bills which in the opinion of one liberal senator were "broad enough to endanger the civil liberties of all Americans."<sup>20</sup> Prodded by the Eisenhower Administration both Senate and House quickly approved legislation to strip citizenship from persons convicted of conspiracy to advocate the violent overthrow of government, to make peacetime espionage a capital offense, to require Communist organizations to register all printing equipment, to grant immunity to witnesses before courts, grand juries and congressional committees in order to compel testimony, to increase the penalties for harboring fugitives and jumping bail and to broaden and redefine espionage and sabotage laws.<sup>21</sup>

The Communist Control Act was the most controversial of these new measures. Originally introduced by Maryland Republican John Marshall Butler, the bill was designed to amend the McCarran Internal Security Act of 1950. The McCarran Act had required that organizations designated as "Communist-action" and "Communist-front" by the Subversive Activities Control Board register with the Attorney General. Butler proposed to add a third category of groups that must register — those which the SCAB decided were "Communist-infiltrated."<sup>22</sup>

When the Butler bill reached the floor, a small group of liberals

<sup>20</sup> Herbert H. Lehman to Lloyd R. Shaw, May 6, 1955; Lehman to R. M. Stein, September 3, 1954, both in Senate Legislative File, drawer 21, Lehman Papers.

<sup>21</sup> Congressional Quarterly Service, *Congress and the Nation* (Washington, 1965), pp. 1656-1658.

<sup>22</sup> *Congressional Record*, 83rd Cong., 2nd Sess., July 6, 1954, p. 9708.

led by Hubert Humphrey introduced a substitute in the form of an amendment which declared that the Communist Party was an "agency of a hostile foreign power" and therefore was not entitled to the rights, privileges and immunities attendant upon legal bodies. "I do not intend to be a half patriot," declared Humphrey. "I will not be lukewarm. . . . Either Senators are for recognizing the Communist Party for what it is, or they will continue to trip over the niceties of legal technicalities and details."<sup>23</sup>

Like the "concentration camp" amendment to the McCarran Internal Security Act, the Humphrey amendment illustrated the tendency of some liberals to adopt as their own the policies and programs of the Right. Implicit in the Humphrey amendment were two of the cardinal assumptions of the McCarthy era — that the Communist Party constituted a real and immediate threat to the nation's security and that the way to meet this threat was through repression. "Liberalism, in its noble and historic sense, did not have one spokesman in the Senate last week," declared the *Chicago Daily News*. "The self-styled Democratic liberals could think of no answer to their detractors except to outdo them in the sponsorship of repression."<sup>24</sup>

Civil libertarians protested that the Humphrey amendment constituted a denial of the right to vote, an abridgement of free speech and association and a denial of due process. They charged that it was both a bill of attainder and an *ex post facto* law. Despite these protests ("I anticipated some of the rather emotional reaction from the liberal community because I was hitting somewhat of a sacred cow," Humphrey later confided) Humphrey, with the strong support of Lyndon Johnson, rammed the amendment through the Senate by a narrow 41-39 vote. On the final roll call only one senator, Estes Kefauver, voted against the amended bill.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The Humphrey amendment was attached to the Butler bill on August 12 and then to the House version of the measure when it came before the Senate on August 17. *Congressional Record*, 83rd Cong., 2nd Sess., August 12, 1954, pp. 14210, 14234; and August 17, 1954, p. 14727.

<sup>24</sup> *Chicago Daily News*, August 16, 1954.

<sup>25</sup> *Congressional Record*, 83rd Cong., 2nd Sess., August 17, 1954, p. 14727. The vote on the Humphrey amendment would have been tied (and consequently defeated by the chair), had not Kefauver and Alton Lennon (D., N. C.) withdrawn their votes against the amendment and allowed themselves to be paired with absent Democrats. Thus Kefauver, who received a great deal of praise for opposing the amended bill, was also responsible for the form of its final passage. *Washington Post* and *Times-Herald*, August 21, 1954. Immediately following the roll call, Lyndon Johnson moved to fore-

The language of the bill was weakened and made more imprecise in conference. "It is not as strong a blow as Hubert Humphrey would like to have struck," declared the Minnesotan. Still it remained, again in Humphrey's words, "a great blow" for freedom and against the "evil conspiracy" which was menacing our institutions. The conference report was agreed to by a vote of 79-0. Even Estes Kefauver, who earlier had been the Senate's only dissenter, now "supported and voted for it whole-heartedly."<sup>26</sup>

Thus the Senate continued its bipartisan obeisance to the accumulated slogans, stereotypes and mythologies of the anti-communist persuasion. As Wayne Morse, co-sponsor of the Humphrey amendment, declared: "In the Senate there is no division of opinion among liberals, conservatives and those in between when it comes to our utter detestation of the Communist conspiracy and our united insistence that as a Senate we will fight the growth of the Communist conspiracy. . . ." <sup>27</sup> And because the Senate remained transfixed by this anti-communist consensus, the problem of dealing with Joe McCarthy became an exercise in circumvention — to strike at McCarthy while leaving intact the issues and assumptions upon which he had built his political career. Thus in December, 1954, the Senate would finally condemn McCarthy not for reasons directly associated with the communist issue, but because his conduct was "unbecoming a Member of the United States Senate," was

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stall opposition by calling for reconsideration. His motion was then quickly tabled by a vote of 43-49.

Humphrey's statement on liberal reaction is taken from Hubert Humphrey to Marvin Rosenberg, August 27, 1954, in Legislative File, box 16, ADA Papers. In this long and highly revealing document Humphrey declared that it was time American liberals quit relying on the thinking of John Stuart Mill and do some "20th century thinking in order to face 20th century problems." He dismissed the argument that the amendment might become a precedent for the repression of other political parties, declaring that the amendment would stand on its own merits and that "it is not necessary for me to defend any possible abuse of that amendment at a later date." Although Humphrey denied any political motivation in offering the amendment — "the people of Minnesota can never be fooled into thinking Hubert Humphrey is a Communist" — he did boast in later years that the vote of one liberal Democrat on the bill saved that senator's political life. Winthrop Griffith, *Humphrey: A Candid Biography* (New York, 1965), p. 223.

<sup>26</sup> *Congressional Record*, 83rd Cong., 2nd Sess., August 19, 1954, pp. 15101-15121; Arthur Schlesinger, *New York Post*, August 29, 1954; Estes Kefauver to William R. Ross, October 22, 1954, Subject File, National Security I, Kefauver Papers.

<sup>27</sup> *Congressional Record*, 83rd Cong., 2nd Sess., August 16, 1954, p. 14565.

“contrary to senatorial traditions,” and tended “to bring the Senate into disrepute.”

These two legislative episodes, the McCarran Act and the Communist Control Act, help to explain why the United States Senate was so vulnerable to McCarthy’s demagogic tactics. They also demonstrate that because of the nature of America’s political culture and as a result of the routine operation of party politics, the communist issue possessed a strength and vitality quite apart from the personality of Joe McCarthy. Had the Senator from Wisconsin never made that famous speech at Wheeling, West Virginia, had his name never become a household word, what people have called “McCarthyism” would have remained the primary characteristic of American politics during the early 1950’s.