

## McCarthyism is Dead; Intolerance Lives (A rejoinder essay)

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Joseph R. McCarthy's influence was broken on December 2, 1954, when his Senate colleagues voted 67 to 22 that his conduct was "contrary to Senate traditions." Nevertheless, today, McCarthyism is recognized by lexicographers to be part of our language, and is discussed at great length in innumerable books and journals as though it was a recent, major event of the twentieth century. Academics are particularly fond of the topic, and the article in *Education and Culture*, Summer, 2000, by Karen Lea Riley and Barbara Slater Stone, "Curriculum War and Cold War Politics," is very similar in its attitudes and concerns to countless similar pieces that have appeared for the last four decades.

As examples of the continuing interest in McCarthyism, there are three books by Ellen Schrecker, the current editor of *Academe*. And from a different direction there is a passionate diatribe against McCarthyism by Ted Hall, who delivered our atomic secrets to Stalin, in a recent book, *Bombshell*, by Albright and Kunstel, about his spying activities.

No one will contest the very familiar charges against McCarthy for his overreactions to the domestic threats of Communism. But while acknowledging over-reaction, we should recognize that by so doing we are conceding that he had some cause. Even Ellen Schrecker, one of his most intense critics, was forced to publish an apologetic preface to the paperback edition of her *Many Are the Crimes - McCarthyism in America*, writing that "if I could revise my text, I would acknowledge more conclusively than I did that American Communists spied for the Soviet Union."

And in all honesty we must recognize that McCarthy expressed concerns shared by many people we respect, including, most significantly, although it is rarely recognized, by John Dewey himself. It is simply stated in his obituary in *The New York Times* for June 2, 1952, that "he was opposed to teachers loyalty oaths, but came to believe that known Communists should not be permitted to teach children" — a statement that certainly was similar in spirit to what Joseph McCarthy said and for which he was soundly condemned.

One cannot take issue with anyone who deplores the excesses of McCarthyism. But by the same token one must deplore *all* excesses directed at individuals merely because of the opinions they hold. That principle must apply not

merely to those who hold opinions that are Communist, or from that part of the political spectrum. To defend those who deviate only to the left is pure hypocrisy, is alien to fundamental civil liberties values, and to the civilized resolution of differences.

We must not forget that during the Cold War political partisanship in this country, and in particular in academe, was often very bitter both on the right and on the left. Both sides far too often went beyond the Marquis of Queensberry's Rules in the way they fought. But where there is a formal symmetry between left and right, and fault is to be found on both sides, it is significant to observe that the insistent attacks on McCarthyism have very little counterpart from people who were denounced and harassed as "fascists" and "reactionaries," but were merely serious conservatives of the Adam Smith School of economic thought, and may or may not have been outspoken anti-communists.

A rare example of such a conservative complaint is to be found in an almost completely neglected article by Professor William Breit in *Economic Inquiry* for October, 1987, pp. 645-657, "Creating the 'Virginia School': Charlottesville as an Academic Environment in the 1960s."

Having been a close witness to the events described in that article, I venture to say that the title is a masterpiece of understatement. In fact, one of the most remarkable groups of conservative economists ever assembled in America was purged wholesale and ruthlessly by a Dean who professed the highest sentiments in support of academic freedom. Yet he denounced faculty colleagues (privately of course) as "reactionaries" whom he was determined "to get rid of," and he proceeded to do precisely that. Two of those whom he "got rid of" soon went on to receive Nobel Prizes in Economics, Ronald Coase and James Buchanan, whose contributions are recognized classics of economic science.

Lest it be said that this was an extraordinary event of academic history, it is pertinent to recall words of the late Kingman Brewster, when he was President of Yale in the sixties, that the main source of intolerance in academic institutions was not outside the university but in struggles of doctrine and of ambition and power that were entirely within the university. And to that opinion this writer, who has observed the academic wars both from close in and from a distance, enters a hearty Amen.

If those wars are to abate, or be carried on under more gentlemanly rules of engagement, it is fortunate that a foundation has been laid for which in the last analysis we have to thank John Dewey. It was he who initiated the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1915, and was the first chair of its Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure, and of its Committee B on Academic Responsibility.

The AAUP is still a work in being. It enlists only a very small fraction of faculty, and is often regarded as an allegiance secondary to that owed to organizations devoted to one's subject matter specialty. But if academics are committed to the idea of academic professionalism, as John Dewey was, they may eventually alter that view and regard the AAUP as their primary allegiance. If and when that comes to pass, perhaps, in addition to other benefits of a mature professionalism, we shall see a waning of back-stabbing academic wars, and, with continuing professional development, the emergence of an ethic of tolerance that reaches beyond fellow-believers.