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Author(s): Arthur O. Lovejoy

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Communism *versus* Academic Freedom

Arthur O. Lovejoy

THE QUESTION here under discussion is a specific and limited one. It is not the question whether the Communist Party should be "outlawed," or its members be denied the ordinary rights of citizenship. That is a question which concerns all citizens *as* citizens, and it will be settled by the political and judicial processes of constitutional democratic government. The question is certainly not whether communism in the purely economic sense—the completely centralized governmental control of production and distribution—is a worse or a better system than competitive private enterprise. The issue to be considered in this symposium relates to educational institutions only: Are there sufficient reasons for holding that adherents of the Communist Party should be excluded from the teaching bodies of schools and universities? The present contribution to the discussion will be still further limited to the question as it concerns universities. I shall contend that—irrespective of the answers to be given to any of the other questions mentioned—there are cogent reasons against admitting members of the Communist Party in America to university faculties. But to make those reasons clear it is necessary first to consider what kind of institution a university is, for what ends it exists, and what is prerequisite to the performance by professional scholars of the specific social function assigned to them.

The distinctive function of university teachers and of the institutions in which they serve, in the economy of modern

society, is to furnish to other men the results of the investigations of disinterested experts in the several provinces of thought and knowledge. The existence of the profession rests upon the assumption that it is useful, and even needful, for society to maintain such a body of trained investigators, and to be informed as to the conclusions which they may individually or collectively reach. Society, therefore, is not getting from the scholar the particular service which is the principal *raison d'être* of his calling, unless it gets from him his honest report of what *he* finds, or believes, to be true, after careful study of the problems with which he deals. Insofar, then, as faculties are made up of men whose teachings express, *not* the results of their own research and reflection and that of their fellow-specialists, but rather the opinions of other men—whether holders of public office or private persons from whom endowments are received—just so far are colleges and universities perverted from their proper function. This, of course, does not mean that experts are infallible, or that other men are under any compulsion to accept their conclusions. It means only that one specific and (it will be admitted) highly important organ of the intellectual life and rational progress of the community cannot function at all unless it is left free to function by its own method—which is the method of open-minded inquiry and of frank and unhampered discussion, carried on by men dedicated to the scholar's life and specially trained in the disciplines to which they devote themselves.*

✪ ARTHUR O. LOVEJOY is now professor emeritus of philosophy in Johns Hopkins University. He initiated in 1913 the movement for the organization of the American Association of University Professors, was the first secretary of the Association, its president in 1919, and has been chairman or a member of many of its committees to investigate conditions affecting academic freedom and tenure in individual institutions.

*This paragraph was written in 1920 and printed in the *Nation* of that year; it is the more pertinent here because it was then made the basis of a criticism of the trustees of an American college for accepting from a "capitalist" an endowment for a special professorship to be devoted to showing "the fallacies of socialism and kindred theories and practices." I have now added only the words "holders of public office."

This, I suggest, is what may be called the basic "philosophy" of academic freedom. Such freedom is not more necessary for the community at large than freedom in general—of speech, of the press, of religion, of political action. But for universities, and for the guild of scholars, it is literally vital; without the *Luft der Freiheit* they cannot exist as universities and as members of that guild. It is no luxury generously granted by the rest of society to a privileged class of eccentrics called professors; for if it is indispensable to them for the carrying on of the task allotted to them, and if the performance of that task is itself indispensable in a civilized society, then the maintenance of the scholar's intellectual freedom should be a matter of concern to all enlightened members of society. But the protection of this essential condition for the discharge of their function is for scholars in universities a primary and special concern. It is as much an obligation as a right. Freedom of teaching has been won, to the considerable degree in which it has been won in all reputable institutions, by a long and hard struggle, and every new threat to it should encounter the determined resistance of the entire academic profession.

Now one reason why I think that members of the Communist Party should not be appointed to university faculties is that I hold this belief in the indispensability of academic freedom. Yet I find other professed believers in it who draw from that belief precisely the opposite conclusion. From an identical premise, contrary consequences are inferred. I must therefore try to state as clearly as I can the argument which appears to me to show that the employment of Communist teachers is inimical to academic freedom. It is a very simple argument; it can best be put, in the logician's fashion, in a series of numbered theorems:

1. Freedom of inquiry, of opinion, and of teaching in universities is a prerequisite, if the academic scholar is to perform the function proper to his profession.

2. The Communist Party in the United States is an organization whose aim is to bring about the establishment in this country of a political as well as an economic

system essentially similar to that which now exists in the Soviet Union.

3. That system does not permit freedom of inquiry, of opinion, and of teaching, either in or outside of universities; in it the political government claims and exercises the right to dictate to scholars what conclusions they must accept, or at least profess to accept, even on questions lying within their own specialties—for example, in philosophy, in history, in aesthetics and literary criticism, in economics, in biology.

4. A member of the Communist Party is therefore engaged in a movement which has already extinguished academic freedom in many countries and would—if it were successful here—result in the abolition of such freedom in American universities.

5. No one, therefore, who desires to maintain academic freedom in America can consistently favor that movement, or give indirect assistance to it by accepting as fit members of the faculties of universities, persons who have voluntarily adhered to an organization one of whose aims is to abolish academic freedom.

Of these five propositions, the first is one of principle. For those who do not accept it, the conclusion does not follow. The argument is addressed only to those who do accept that premise. The second, third and fourth propositions are statements of fact. I submit that they cannot be honestly gainsaid by any who are acquainted with the relevant facts. With respect to the second, it will be noted that it does not say that the American section of the Communist Party seeks to overthrow our present form of government "by force and violence." That is at least denied by most American Communists; it is not directly pertinent to the specific issue of academic freedom; and, at the date of writing this, it is a question which is before the Federal courts for judicial determination. But whatever the *means* by which American Communists propose to accomplish their end—whether by peaceful or (if a favorable opportunity arises) by violent methods—no one who reads the manifestoes and publications of the Party can have any doubt about the nature of the end. It is to set up in the

United States a system modeled upon that of the Soviet Union—a so-called “dictatorship of the proletariat” (in reality, of a Party committee) in accordance with the principles and program set forth in the writings of Lenin and Stalin. And those writings, as well as the actual practice of the Soviet government, make it abundantly clear that the system admits no limit to the authority of the one-party state not merely to restrict freedom of thought and expression generally, but also positively to prescribe to writers and scholars, including university teachers and members of research institutes, what opinions they must profess and teach.

The cases of Nicolai Vavilov in genetics and of Varga in economics are the best-known evidence of this; they are far from being the only examples. The former is doubtless already familiar—at all events it should be—to readers of *THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR* from the article (in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, December 11, 1948) by the eminent Russian-American geneticist Professor H. J. Muller; but it is pertinent to recall two sentences from this article, whose author was himself, before 1937, senior geneticist in the Institute of Genetics in Moscow: “Certain it is that from 1936 on Soviet geneticists of all ranks lived a life of terror. Most of those who were not imprisoned, banished, or executed, were forced to enter other lines of work”—or publicly to recant the “errors” into which their own researches, and those of their fellow-specialists, had led them.

Has the American Communist Party even denounced this reign of terror in science or repudiated the whole authoritarian conception of the State which would permit political functionaries, having no training or competence in the sciences upon which they pronounce, to compel investigators in those sciences to teach what, as scientists they know to be false—or else? The Communist Party avows—or boasts—that its members are subject to an “iron discipline” they must follow the “Party line”; and the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has now officially defined the party line for biolo-

gists—namely, that the Mendelian theory, the basis of all modern scientific genetics, is a “bourgeois deviation” not to be tolerated. It is this sort of régime that an American Communist is committed to defending, and would introduce into the United States. Any professional scholar of whom this is true is disloyal to the spirit of science and to one of the most binding obligations of his profession, and should have no place in an American university.

It will perhaps be objected that the exclusion of Communist teachers would itself be a restriction upon freedom of opinion and of teaching—*viz.*, of the opinion and teaching that intellectual freedom should be abolished in and outside of universities; and that it is self-contradictory to argue for the restriction of freedom in the name of freedom. The objection has a specious air of logicity, but it is in fact an absurdity. The believer in the indispensability of freedom, whether academic or political, is not thereby committed to the conclusion that it is his duty to facilitate its destruction, by placing its enemies in strategic positions of power, prestige or influence. Those enemies often argue in just this fashion: we (they sometimes are frank enough to tell us) will—if or insofar as we have the power—put an end to the freedom in which you believe; and *you*, just because you believe in it, can in consistency do nothing (except talk, so long as you are allowed to talk) to stop us.

But the conception of freedom is not one which implies the legitimacy and inevitability of its own suicide. It is, on the contrary, a conception which, so to say, defines the limit of its own applicability; what it implies is that there is *one* kind of freedom which is inadmissible—the freedom to destroy freedom. The defender of liberty of thought and speech is not morally bound to enter the fight with both hands tied behind his back. And those who would deny such freedom to others, if they could, have no moral or logical basis for the claim to enjoy the freedom which they would deny. Anyone who would set up such a claim must come into court “with clean hands”; but no one who is lending aid to an international political movement which has al-

ready destroyed the freedom of universities wherever it has attained its objectives, and must be expected to do so wherever it may attain them in the future, can come into the academic court of equity with clean hands.

It is, then, first of all, to safeguard academic freedom that members of the Communist Party should be excluded from university teaching positions. They are allies of the most threatening enemy of that freedom now existing in the world; and, even though at present they have no prospect of suppressing it in America, they cannot be depended upon to carry on their professional activity in a free institution by the method and in the spirit of the scientific investigator. If they are consistent and devoted party members, the conclusions they express will conform to the shifting dictates of the party line—which is to say that they will not be conclusions resulting from the free pursuit of knowledge, uninfluenced by extraneous pressures and irrelevant motives.

But though the first—and in itself sufficient—reason for exclusion is the incompatibility between political communism and loyalty to academic freedom, there are other reasons not less conclusive. To understand them, it is necessary to read the authoritative statements of the party and its leaders on the obligations of party membership, and also to appreciate the actual temper generally characteristic of its members. A sincere Communist—and of the burning sincerity of most of them there can be no question—believes, as the protagonists of the Party have taught him to believe, that the one supreme end, to which everything else must be subordinated, the glorious consummation of all human history, is the world revolution. The value of this end is in his eyes so great that the use of any means which seem likely to promote it is not only justified but obligatory.

From this conviction two consequences result. The first is that any position which he may hold—in a school, a trade union, or any other organization—is conceived by him as primarily, not to say solely, instrumental to this end, to be used either for proselytizing or for troubling the waters

of “capitalist society” and making life unpleasant for the bourgeoisie (including his colleagues). A writer in the *Communist* (1937), Richard Frank, says: “Only when teachers have really mastered Marxism-Leninism, will they be able skillfully to inject it into their teaching at the least risk of exposure and at the same time to conduct struggles around the schools in a truly Bolshevik manner.” In short, a Communist teacher in a school or a university may be expected to be in fact, first and last and all the time, a secret propagandist and an indefatigable intriguer in the interest of the one cause to which he is devoted. Such persons are hardly ideal members of teaching bodies.

The second consequence which follows from the fundamental conviction of the Communist is the rejection of the generally accepted code of morals. Lenin wrote—and his followers naturally act accordingly—that “morality is entirely subordinate to the interest of the class war. . . . Communist morality is identical with the fight for the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat.” Conspicuous among the “bourgeois” virtues which the properly indoctrinated Communist thus discards are candor and veracity. When it will serve the cause, mendacity is not only permissible but a duty; “it is necessary,” as Lenin elsewhere wrote, “to use any ruse, cunning, unlawful method, evasion, and concealment of the truth” which can help to hasten the triumph of the cause. Now truthfulness is, doubtless, not universally and conspicuously characteristic of politicians of any party. But it is a virtue which ought to be peculiarly esteemed and cherished in universities. In the professional code of the scholar, the man of science, the teacher, the first commandment is: Thou shalt not knowingly misrepresent facts, nor tell lies to students or to the public. Those who not merely sometimes break this commandment, but repudiate any obligation to respect it, are obviously disqualified for membership in any body of investigators and teachers which maintains the elementary requirements of professional integrity.

To say these things is not to say that the

economic and even the political doctrines of communism should not be presented and freely discussed within academic walls. To treat them simply as "dangerous thoughts," with which students should not be permitted to have any contact, would give rise to a plausible suspicion that they are taboo because they would, if presented, be all too convincing; and out of that suspicion young Communists are bred. These doctrines, moreover, are historical facts; for better or worse, they play an immense part in the intellectual and political controversies of the present age. To deny to students means of learning accurately what they are, and of reaching informed judgments about them, would be to fail in one of the major pedagogic obligations of a university—to enable students to understand the world in which they will live, and to take an intelligent part in its affairs. All departments of economics or of political science, or both, should offer courses in which the principal writings of Marx, Engels, and the contemporary theorists of communism are read, and their reasonings *and* those of their opponents are closely analyzed, discussed and evaluated, under instructors learned in the literature of these controversies, and capable of dealing with it in the cool and critical temper of the man of science. An essential part of such courses should be an examination of communism in practice in the Soviet Union, and of its program and methods in international relations. From time to time, members of the Communist Party should be invited to speak before students; but they should be introduced, not as unbiased and objective investigators of economic and political problems, but as party propagandists—and propagandists of a party of which all members are expected by it to adhere strictly to the party line of the moment, as laid down by a group of politicians in Moscow, whose evident and admitted motive is to increase the power of the party organization by any methods (including suppression and misrepresentation of facts) which seem to them serviceable to that purpose.

There are, I suppose, some American members of the Party who will protest

that they do not desire, and would not, even if they had the power, introduce here the authoritarian system of one-party government which exists in the Soviet Union, with its negation of both academic and political freedom. They belong to the Party, they will perhaps say, because they believe merely in the economic doctrine and the (professed) ultimate social ideals of communism—a "classless society" in which the law of distribution will be "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." I shall believe them when, and only when, they prove by acts as well as words their genuine opposition to the whole *political* system of the U.S.S.R.; and this proof would require of them, among other things, a frank public admission that both intellectual and political freedom are ruthlessly suppressed under that system, and a public denunciation of such suppression; a demand that the Party condemn as undemocratic the program of a "dictatorship of the proletariat," with its denial of the right of political agitation and action to all but one party; and an insistence that the American party declare, and show by its practice, that it accepts no obligation to subject its policies to the "Party line" as prescribed by Moscow, or by any international organization.

I should not anticipate that, if any American party members should in good faith give such evidence of loyalty to the principles of intellectual and political liberty, they would have a very happy time with their "comrades." For they would conclusively convict themselves of the heresies of "revisionism" and "right-deviationism," and align themselves with the Democratic Socialists—who, to the true disciples of Lenin and Stalin, are even more odious than the unabashed defenders of "capitalism." What is certain is that such heretics, if any such are, for reasons of expediency, temporarily tolerated, do not control the Party; but that, by their nominal adherence to it, they give furtherance to aims of which (if their protestations are honest) they deeply disapprove. The only convincing evidence that they do not share those aims would be resignation from the Party and abstention from any assistance to it.

All the foregoing relates to future appointments to American university faculties. There remains the question, raised in the University of Washington cases—on which I have been asked to comment—as to what should be done with respect to present members of faculties who are on permanent tenure. The issue of present Party membership arose clearly only in two of the three cases. In one of the cases, the evidence was conflicting, and the dismissal was apparently based on different alleged grounds. In the two others, both teachers frankly admitted present membership in the Communist Party. There are, however, some indications, in the rather summary report of the testimony published by the University, that they are “Communists” of the unorthodox sort referred to in the preceding paragraph. Unfortunately, it does not appear that the crucial questions which would have elicited their actual positions were expressly put to them: (1) Are you aware that the political program of the Communist Party is the setting-up of a one-party dictatorship, and that, wherever it has attained power, it has established such a dictatorship, in which both academic and political freedom are suppressed? (2) Do you reject this program, and will you publicly declare that you reject it? (3) Do you also reject the teaching of Lenin (still to be found in current Party publications) that a party member should, when it will serve the interest of the movement, resort to “any ruse, cunning, unlawful method, evasion, and concealment of the truth”? (4) If you reject these features of

Communist doctrine and practice, are you willing to give proof that you do so by resigning from the Party?

A negative answer to the first question would be evidence either of almost incredible ignorance or (more probably) of falsehood; either would be sufficient ground for removal. Affirmative answers to all the other questions would eliminate any legitimate grounds for dismissal, so far as the instant cases are concerned; negative answers to any of them would justify dismissal. Since I do not know what answers would be given by these two teachers, I cannot express an opinion about the propriety of the action taken with respect to them by the University; I can only regret that (so far as the record thus far published shows) the questions were not put.

In the three other cases, in which the only substantiated charge was that of *past* membership in the Communist Party, it is gratifying to find that this was not held to be a ground for dismissal. The Administrative Code, in enumerating “the reasons for which persons having tenure may be removed from the faculty of the University,” did not, by any natural interpretation of its language, include such membership among those reasons; and the well-grounded American aversion to *ex post facto* legislation prevailed in the decision of these cases. The Board of Regents, however, in my opinion, acted unwisely and unfairly in imposing an unnecessary stigma upon these teachers, who admittedly had voluntarily withdrawn from the Party some years earlier, by putting them on probation for two years.

The Mandarins and the Pariahs

Max Lerner

☞ Recently assistant to the publisher of *PM*, after that columnist on the *New York Star*, and now on the *New York Post*, MAX LERNER was professor of political science at Williams College from 1938 to 1943. Mr. Lerner is the author of *Ideas for the Ice Age*, *The Mind and Faith of Justice Holmes* and, most recently, *Actions and Passions*.

READING the reports of the faculty committee and the President in the University of Washington cases, I could not escape the disquieting sense of imperfect men (as all of us are) excommunicating godless heretics with bell and book and candle. And there is a grim and somewhat breathtaking note in