

The Right to Demand Scholars

"Loathsome Ideas" on the Washington Campus

MERRITT E. BENSON

HARVARD's Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in his "The Right to Loathsome Ideas" [SRL May 14], presents the University of Washington's dismissal of party-line faculty members in a perspective which I believe misleading. No one questions his right to disapprove and to state his position in strong terms. Everyone interested in this important question, however, has a right to insist that it be treated fairly.

Early in his argument Professor Schlesinger makes the statement that the University of Washington discharged "two Communists and one fellow-traveler" from its faculty "solely on the grounds of political belief." At this point he cites the document "Communism and Academic Freedom," published by the university, to support his statement. It doesn't. Even a casual reading of the document reveals that four of the seven tenure committee members who voted for the dismissal of the fellow-traveler, specifically rejected political beliefs as a basis for their action and based their decision on the fellow-traveler's (Gundlach's) misuse of the university's prestige for partisan political purposes, his evasiveness, deviousness, and lack of forthrightness in his dealings with the committee and the administration. Three other members of the committee emphasized the same reasoning in their findings.

None of the committee members was a Johnny-come-lately to the scene. All had been on the campus for many years, knew the respondents personally, were familiar with many of their activities and their reputations as teachers. The committee after sitting as a jury for many weeks (two

copies of the 4,000-page transcript of testimony were available in the East, had Professor Schlesinger been interested in doing a careful job) finally found Gundlach unfit. Political belief was not the sole or even the foremost reason upon which action was based, as the document Schlesinger had in his hands will show. That he failed to consult the transcript of testimony before he sat down to write, merely makes more remarkable his eagerness to pass judgment on events which occurred 3,000 miles away.

NOR were the two Communists (Phillips and Butterworth) discharged "solely on the grounds of political belief." Rather, they were discharged because they had abandoned the profession of scholarship. As their own witness they called the secretary of the Washington State Communist Party, who testified that they owed him the same loyalty demanded of other Party members and that if in their classes they should make the error of favoring the Marshall Plan they would be expelled. Other testimony from the Communists revealed that they secretly had helped organize a teachers' union on the campus, had assumed secret Party names, had secretly engaged in many Communist activities. Neither had made an objective study of Communism before joining. One presented the committee with the weird conclusion that he opposed selective service in the United States as a matter of principle, yet approved universal military service in the Soviet Union. Evidence of their scholarship was unimpressive. Again, the committee sitting as a jury found them unfit.

Political belief, as such, was not the basis of committee action. The overt act of Party membership requiring adherence to an amoral ethic, to Lenin's infamous injunction "to use any ruse, cunning, unlawful method, evasion, and concealment of the truth"; an adherence demanding *de facto* resignation from the company of free minds and abandonment of the profession of scholarship was the basis of the decision taken.

STRONGEST proof of this lies in the testimony of Professor Garland Ethel, a philosophical Marxist and former Communist, still a member of the University of Washington faculty. He was asked:

Question: There is nothing essentially wrong with the Communist Party that you could not belong to it, is there?

Answer: If you put it on a philosophical basis, there isn't, but as you too well know, this concrete world is different than the world of philosophy, and to be a political Communist is a whole lot different from being a philosophical Marxist. Now I am a philosophical Marxist, but I just do not want to have anything to do with contemporary politics and particularly with contemporary Marxist politics.

Question: Now you have recently witnessed a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in this country?

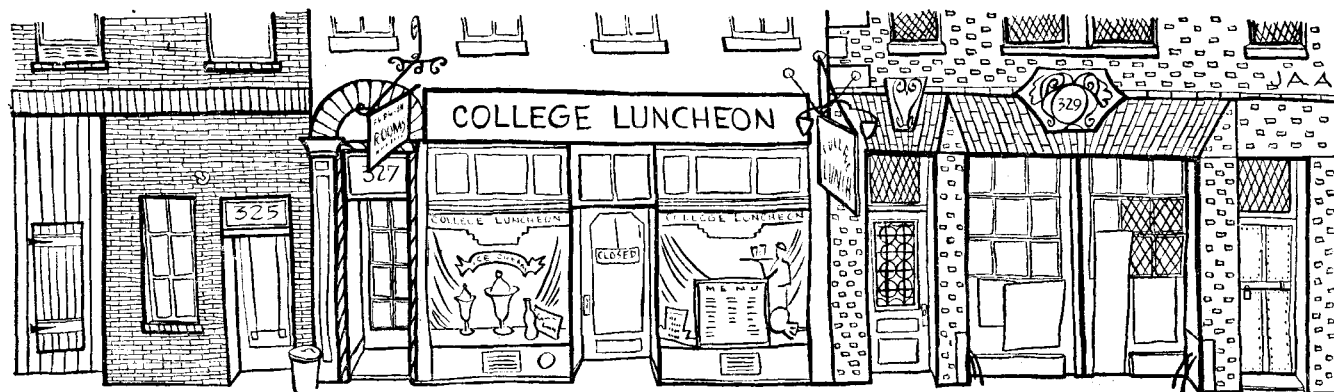
Answer: A slight one.

Question: And should this resurgence occur and should you join and seek again a means of direct action, you might very well join the Communist Party secretly, and not tell anybody about it just as you did the last time?

Answer: Well, just as a purely hypothetical position, I think that might be tenable. . . .

Professor Ethel's "right to loathsome ideas" has not been questioned. Professor Phillips was given the largest auditorium in the university, after his dismissal, so that he might express his "loathsome ideas" freely. No matter what Schlesinger believes he observes from his vantage 3,000 miles away, the fact is "the winds of doctrine" still blow across the Washington campus.

Professor Schlesinger next proceeds



to expound a specious "clear and present danger" test, which he tries to attribute to the late Oliver Wendell Holmes. Mr. Justice Holmes did indeed suggest a "clear and present danger" test in a criminal case in which the issue was whether or not the defendant should be imprisoned. In the context in which it was applied by Justice Holmes the idea made excellent sense, and still does in the same context. Professor Schlesinger, however, wants to apply it to cases involving faculty tenure. To do so legitimately he first must demonstrate that the right to stay out of jail and the privilege of membership in a university faculty are identical.

"The proceedings in Seattle," he writes, "in other words, systematically ignored the traditional test by which we judge curtailment of civil freedom."

The proceedings did nothing of the sort. No one was in jeopardy. Nowhere were the civil rights of anyone in question. Fines and jail terms were nowhere in the offing.

SCHLESINGER is again misleading when he writes: "Indeed, the University of Washington glories in the fact that it eliminated all consideration of the context and effects of the beliefs held by the accused. . . ." The "context and effects of the beliefs held by the accused" occupied many days of the hearings. Scores of Communist documents were studied. The scope of the evidence admitted was limited only by the choice of the respondents themselves. Many pages in the document Schlesinger had at hand when he wrote refute his statement.

The "monstrous fallacy" to which he objects is entirely his own creation. Apparently he is impressed by the fantastic umbrella which the Communists have labeled "civil rights invasions," and under which they have assembled, without regard for context, all of the things they do not like. Only by embracing this monstrous fallacy can one be led into the absurdity of declaring that the right to stay out of jail and the privilege of membership in a company of scholars are identical.

Professor Schlesinger admits "we may concede that the conduct of the cases was scrupulous and fair," that the university "paid the traveling expenses [across the continent] of, and fees to, expert witnesses called by the respondents," and then exclaims: "Indeed, the very technical fairness of the proceedings makes the whole affair the more grotesque." Thus by using the light touch of Herr Goebbels he transforms scrupulous fairness (a thing to be admired) into technical fairness, a smear word, a shabby sham

which he calls grotesque. Is there any context in which scrupulous fairness, using the generally accepted meaning of the term, can ever appear grotesque?

In Schlesinger's attack on President Allen he writes:

At one point in order to clarify his [Allen's] position he even compares Communist Party membership to "a judge attempting to conceal a financial interest in a firm that was involved in litigation or receivership in his court." Are we to assume that President Allen is going to investigate the stock holdings of the member of the Economics Department who gives the course on monopoly in order to make sure that he is serving no concealed interests?

Keep the italics in mind while you read the rest of the same paragraph from which Schlesinger tore his quote about the judge. Here it is:

...in his court. It is not against the law for any American citizen to own stock in a company. It would be occasion for removal from office, however, if it were discovered that a judge had prejudiced his decision by the ownership of stock in a company in such a case. An important function of the uni-

versity is to teach citizenship. For this teaching to be in the hands of faculty men who secretly belong to an organization advocating the complete overthrow of the American system should no more be tolerated than the unethical and immoral behavior of the judge. (Honest, above-board criticism of the capitalistic system, which no one contends is perfect, is quite another matter and goes on every day both inside our universities and in the business world.)

Professor Schlesinger had read the answer before he phrased his question. Why then his rhetorical flourish? Was he trying to be fair?

Semantic analysis of the Schlesinger article yields only the impression that he has encountered something which he doesn't like. And so, with a curious lynch-law dialectic, he lays lustily about to destroy it. His followers want his help in finding the truth and he has served them badly.

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Writing. Estimates of the number of Americans who would like to be writers vary from 250,000 to 500,000. Whatever the number actually is, it has encouraged the publication since the war of unprecedented numbers of books offering counsel and inspiration to aspirants. Of these a few deserve a place on every writer's shelf—Gorham Munson's *"The Written Word,"* Paul R. Reynolds's *"The Writing Trade,"* *"Writers on Writing"* (edited by Herschel Brickell), Kenneth Roberts's *"I Wanted to Write,"* and Rudolph Flesch's and A. H. Lass's *"The Way to Write."* Two books published recently and reviewed below clearly merit a place beside them—"Writing for Love or Money," a collection of essays from the pages of *SRL* edited by Norman Cousins, and Rudolph Flesch's *"The Art of Readable Writing."* More are due shortly, including *"Willa Cather on Writing"* and Somerset Maugham's *"A Writer's Notebook."*

The Moving Pen

WRITING FOR LOVE OR MONEY.
Edited by Norman Cousins. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 278 pp. \$3.50.

By EDMUND FULLER

IT IS sound doctrine that writing cannot be "taught." Yet it can be learned. And to the endless practice and labor of self-teaching can be added the stimulating, clarifying insights into the problems of the art that are meant by any legitimate use of the phrase "teaching writing." There are many "how-to" books, of varying degrees of honesty, available to the beginning writer. These "method" and "technique" books, however, are not worth a tinker's dam by comparison with the values for the writer inherent in the journals' and notes and personal statements of working method that have been set down by accomplished writers after the maturing of their work. The "after" is vital, for whether in terms of the formal critic, or of the self-analyzing artist, it must be remembered that the practice comes before the theory. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides did not write their plays from Aristotle's *"Poetics."* He, following after them, reduced the *"Poetics"* from their plays. A confusion on this basic point turned Aristotle's brilliant study into a curse in the hands of the benighted Schoolmen and stilted "classicists." It is not too much to say that it accounts partly for the chasm that separates the living Shakespeare from the dead and ossified Racine.

The editors of *SRL* were mindful of these facts in soliciting from practising writers in fiction, non-fiction, and poetry, reflections and opinions on aspects of their craft problems. Norman

Cousins, with the assistance of Raymond Walters, Jr., has culled thirty-five articles, spanning a period of nearly twenty years, for reprint in *"Writing for Love or Money."* He tells us at once, in his foreword:

It neither offers keys to the literary kingdom, nor professes special knowledge of short cuts for converting aptitude into publishing contracts. What it does do is to deal with writing as a profession or as a serious avocation, mostly by way of discussing the problems that face the writer. . . . These questions are stated and explored rather than answered definitely, for the writer's problems begin anew with almost every new piece of work.

On this premise, *"Writing for Love or Money"* adds up to one of the most sound, stimulating, and realistic books available in the growing literature on the writing craft. Thirty-two able writers contribute the essays. I cannot attempt to mention, or even list, all the authors and the aspects of writing with which they deal.

Henry Seidel Canby, citing the Johnsonian dictum that a man who did not write for money was a fool, suggests, as a clarification not too far from the original thought, that "a writer is a fool who does not write for an audience." Most of the other contributors implicitly agree. Yet brother Saroyan and Ellen Glasgow reject the idea and insist that they write for themselves only and care not who may read.

On the other hand: if we write for others in the sense of communication, we must write for ourselves in terms of what we wish to communicate. Jesse Stuart, who seems to hold a record for getting bad advice, finally concluded: "Write something to suit yourself and many people will like it;

write something to suit everybody and scarcely anyone will care for it." It reminds me of Kin Hubbard's remark: "Tilford Moots was over to the Henryville Poor Farm the other day to see a friend of his that used to run a newspaper that pleased ever'body."

On a related theme, Edith Wharton cautions against the strictures of schools or styles. "It is less dangerous for an artist to sacrifice his artistic instincts to the pursuit of money or popularity than to immolate them to a theory." She speaks further on a point to which every fiction editor should be sensitive by now and which young novelists should not forget. Citing Goethe's counsel to plunge the hand into the thick of average human nature, Miss Wharton adds: "I believe the greatest error of the younger novelists, of whatever school, has been to imagine that abnormal or highly specialized characters offer a richer field than the normal and current varieties." (Page Truman Capote, Gore Vidal, et al.)

Somerset Maugham, one of the most profitable authors to read on the subject of craft, is frank about his use of the model in drawing character. Certainly Wolfe carried this to the ultimate. Ellen Glasgow, conversely, strained the elements of character through so fine a sieve as to be surprised when she stumbled on resemblances.

Rex Stout analyzes the detective story and offers a convincing theory in explanation of its lure: it flatters the notion of the "sapiens" in the "homo." William Rose Benét talks of the harassments of the poetry editor. Alice Dalgliesh offers sage counsel on writing for children.

Some good papers are included on criticism and reviewing. Cousins observes that "the function of criticism is to stimulate and not to dictate." On this subject, the finest item is by Maxwell Geismar, who discusses with uncommon and warming humility the problems of historical criticism.

It is unusual to find so much material as is here offered on other types of non-fiction. But it is disappointing in its value and suggests the need for more such essays. The most profitable are those of James T. Flexner on biog-

