

# The Saturday Review

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## Are Subversives Really Subversive?

THERE is much to suggest that the impassioned pursuit of "internal security" is subsiding. The voice of the Senator from Wisconsin has been strangely muted; former Senator Cain has spoken up resoundingly (and unexpectedly) for the old verities of due process; Harvey Matusow, whatever his motives, has shaken the political-informer system; and even the Department of Justice has made certain minor and tacit admissions of past error.

But the massive edifice of "internal security" built up over the past ten years stands virtually unimpaired. People are still being hauled up by the hundreds, if not the thousands, before secret tribunals on anonymous charges of "security risk"; they are being suspended and often fired not only from Federal employment ("a privilege and not a right") but from jobs in great areas of wholly private employment in the defense and maritime industries as well. A large part of the FBI's activities are still those of a secret political police; and it is asking authority from Congress to extend its pursuit of potential (not actual) spies, saboteurs, and "subversives" through further wide areas of private industry. And the Attorney General is still clinging as doggedly as ever to the basic rationale, the still unproven assumptions, on which this remarkable structure rests.

This appears very plainly from the stenographically recorded interview—"Shall Doors Be Opened to Spies and Subversives?"—which Brownell gave recently to *The U.S. News and World Report*. Under the friendly questioning of his interlocutors the chief legal officer of the United States drew a

fairly clear picture of the political police structure over which he presides. It is engaged, as Brownell frankly puts it, on a "drive to exterminate the Communist Party and Communist espionage in this country." To these ends it feels it necessary to use the eavesdropper (or wiretapper), the police "plant," the paid informer, the anonymous accuser, the protected volunteer gossip, the self-incriminatory oath, the secret trial and conviction—the immemorial and probably indispensable weapons of any war upon heresy. All are repugnant to a society which founded its institutions upon a belief that heresy (whether political or religious) was no longer of importance to government and heretical opinion no longer a proper subject of governmental concern. Nor has the Attorney General any direct legal mandate to "exterminate the Communist Party." But he defends this structure of inquisition and extirpation on the grounds of the overriding national interest in the face of extreme peril.

There are probably few today who could deny that American Communism does actually represent what can only be described as a political heresy, and that as such it raises some dangers. It operates by concealment, misrepresentation, confusion of issues, and clandestine infiltrations; its first allegiance seems always to a hostile foreign power; it has probably somewhat facilitated (though of this we have had no proof in recent years) the espionage operations which that power, like most others, of course carries on here. Because of these unpleasant characteristics it cannot be treated like an ordinary political

party, or even an extreme radical schism which remains within the basic postulates of American politics. It seems to demand at least some controls beyond those normally applied to political thought and action in this country; while if one grants that nothing less than extirpation will suffice then one must be ready to accept the methods of inquisition and though policing which communities have always applied to the extirpation of heretical belief.

**B**UT is there anything in fact to sustain the necessity for such extreme measures, or to substantiate the Attorney General's picture of the peril from which he is defending us? It grants that the internal security system is often at variance with established ideas of individual right; but he insists that in such cases "the general welfare of all our people is paramount to any one individual," or that no individual's rights may extend farther than is "consistent with national security." It is a "solemn obligation" not simply to take precaution against Communism but to take "every possible precaution to safeguard against any disaster that could result from disloyal people or those who are security risks being placed in any position where irreparable harm could result"—however slight apparently, that "irreparable" harm might be.

Those who have been inclined to question such sweeping claims to irresponsible police power are brusquely divided by the Attorney General into two groups: "the Communist conspiracy, their apologists, and dupes and 'sincere persons who have never been confronted with the awesome responsibility for internal security and who do not know the hard facts.'" But if there are any "hard" facts which remain unknown it is mainly because of the persistent unwillingness or inability in the Government to give a straight account of them. One never receives from the Attorney General or similar spokesmen anything permitting a concrete estimate of the extent or danger of Soviet espionage in this country, of the degree to which the Communist heresy is in fact promoting espionage, of the extent to which it has installed or may install "trained saboteurs" in vital industries.

One receives only such vague and at times almost preposterous generalities as the Attorney General once more repeats here, as in the statement that even the few Communists remaining in the country (Party membership is estimated to be down to about 23,000) are a peril because similar small Communist groups in

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## 3,000 HUNGRY MOUTHS

AUL S. HENSHAW'S ARTICLE "80,000 Hungry Mouths a Day" [SR Aug. 13] is a piece of specious Malthusian potboiling. I don't make the claim: "An economic approach dynamic in that it gears population [in italics] to productivity." It is far easier to gear production to population than to reverse the process. The hunger now in the world, or any that may be hereafter, is and will be due to human stupidity in economic organization rather than to an insuperable tendency of man to increase his numbers. Besides, it is to betray a lack of knowledge of social and historical facts to say that "as far as we know no religion or other organization advocates carrying childbearing to the point of imposing humiliating overtury upon the family." Had some not here would have been no more than 90 million Chinese, 150 million East Indians, and twenty-five million Japanese in the world today. To one representative of a certain religious faith I charged that he and his cohorts were doing precisely that. He snapped at me, "So what! We are not interested in the material but in the spiritual side of life."

The job ahead requires us to quit moaning about our lack of new frontiers, and to get busy erecting a technological machine to produce the sustenance we need. Then we shall find it necessary to construct an economic and political intercourse system which will allow people to exchange surpluses to offset deficits. We cannot feed the world by the method of killing, restricting, and starving the population to fit the economic order.

OTIS DURANT DUNCAN.

Stillwater, Okla.

## FATHERHOOD TAX

WHY NOT IMPOSE heavy taxes on families larger than three in those countries where overpopulation is at crisis? Since the state can't feed all the people let those families who take an unduly large cut of the resources pay for doing so. The money collected could be earmarked for food imports.

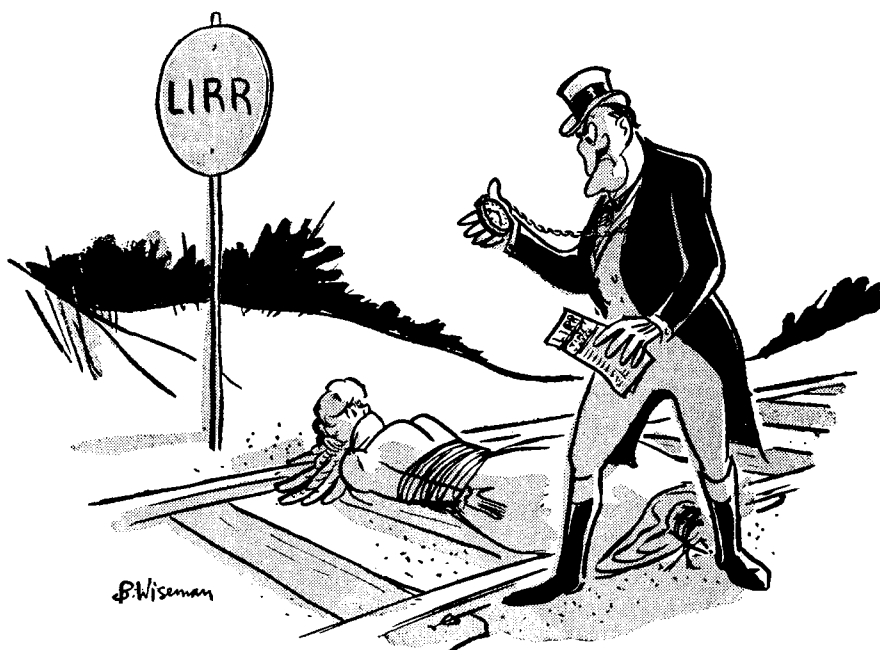
GEORGE WASH, M.D.

Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts

## READ-IT-YOURSELF

SR is to be commended for trying to take such an objective stand on such a subjective book as "Why Johnny Can't Read," by Rudolf Flesch ["Teaching Johnny to Read," SR July 30]. My thanks go to Professor Emmett Albert Betts, who wrote with great equanimity on many of the ideas that most of the rest of us who feel the same could only have expressed in language as loaded as Flesch's.

I do feel, though, that Betts minimizes the danger of this how-to-do-it-yourself book, with its implicit attitude of "between you and me, we can straighten out those imbeciles who presume to teach the youth of America." "You paint your liv-



ing room," Flesch says. Does he have any idea of how many people call in professional painters before the job is done? Unfortunately, a teacher can't clear up the mental debris as easily as the painter cleans up a botch job. Reading, just as language itself, is a psychological rather than a logical phenomenon, but, of course, since everybody knows all about psychology, why not, through this book, let everybody know all about reading? If war is really "too serious a matter to be left to the generals," as the preface to the book states, some of us would still be advising a famous leader that a winter at Valley Forge would decimate his troops. Thank heaven, in time of war we have able men trained in military strategy. Thank heaven, too, that our teachers have produced the high literacy rate of which this country so rightfully boasts.

MRS. ROBERT M. LATZER.

Summit, N. J.

## THE HIGHEST ART

LAST SPRING, toward the end of his first school year, our seven-year-old son Teddy made a comment that seems pertinent to the discussion aroused by Dr. Flesch's book. "This stuff is just too dumb," Teddy said, tossing aside his first-grade reader. "It's only fit for babies." My interest aroused, I took the time to go through his reader. I am afraid he was all too right. It occurred to me then that in stimulating children to learn to read, the disciplines of the educator, important as they are, are no substitute for the art of the storyteller.

WAYNE KEARL.

San Antonio, Tex.

## NO MORE WILDERNESS

ALTHOUGH I ATTENDED a State Teacher's College, I taught only one year—1943.

1944. I was utterly appalled by pupils in the third, fourth, and fifth grades who couldn't begin to comprehend the books which they were supposed to be reading.

I became so incensed by the flagrant misuse of the techniques of teaching reading that I wrote an article which was published in the *Maine Teachers' Digest* in the winter of 1944. At that time the harmful effects of this method of teaching reading had not yet been felt in high schools and colleges as the system was not too widespread. Therefore, I received a storm of protest from teachers who at that time were fully in accord with the method.

Time has brought many changes as well as a flood of remedial reading classes and so I believe that the timing of Mr. Flesch's book was excellent. Eleven years ago I was a voice crying in the wilderness, but today an overwhelming number of teachers, parents, and pupils are with me. It would appear that the lone "stand outers" are the so-called "educators" who perpetrated this system in the first place.

LORNA STARBIRD.

Brockton, Mass.

## OUR TROUBLED CONSCIENCE

I THINK that the editorial "Hiroshima Ten Years After" [SR Aug. 6] is a fine discussion, much in line with recent literature on the Hiroshima incident. Where SR differed dramatically was in meeting the moral and ethical question of the Great American Conscience. The lack of discussion of this side of the incident has been very noticeable. If the American people have a conscience it must be troubled. We deserve an airing of all state papers which might throw a light on this subject.

H. S. OSGOOD.

Kirkland, Wash.