

The Long Shadow of Senator McCarthy

by Amitai Etzioni

IT is now almost ten years since Senator McCarthy's death, but his impact on American society has far from disappeared. More than a decade has elapsed since his influence reached its zenith on Capitol Hill, but it is still felt across the country. Having just begun active participation in public affairs in the early 'sixties, I noticed McCarthy's shadow wherever I turned: organizing a faculty peace group on a campus, setting up a conference on international affairs, writing a book, as well as teaching at Columbia University and directing a research project.

Undoubtedly, the impact of McCarthy has declined since the early 'fifties. The House Committee on Un-American Activities is less popular and powerful than it used to be; blacklisting of actors and writers is much less common and some persons who were victimized have regained employment in their professions. Violations of academic freedom are less flagrant. Investigating political beliefs of citizens as a ladder to national stardom has lost its utility. But, at the same time, substantial residues of McCarthyism are slowly settling into the bones of our society. They are often less dramatic, less visible than the earlier assaults; they are often manifested in an attitude and a frame of mind more than in institutional expressions, such as unnecessary and unfair barriers to employment. But for this very reason these residues are less detectable and less removable. Unless a greater effort is made to expose these remains, and systematically dispose of them, there is a growing danger that these patterns of thought and behavior will become part and parcel of what America is—a standard, accepted guide for behavior. Such an acceptance of McCarthyism would make some restriction of freedom and some violations of civil rights routine, just as the signing of a loyalty oath has already become in many quarters. It would provide a basis from which future "McCarthyites" would try to further narrow the right to dissent and criticize.

MY FIRST encounter with the reflex of fear McCarthyism left behind was in 1961 at the University of California at Berkeley, where I served as a visiting professor. The focus of campus activism in 1961 was foreign policy, especially the need for a ban on the testing of thermonuclear weapons. The main debate, often pursued by professors in front of thousands of students, was between various shades of left-liberal positions. (One debate, for instance, took place between Professor S. M. Lipset, at that time a member of the Socialist Party, Professor B. Skewers-Cox, a left-democrat, and myself, a member of Americans for Democratic Action.) Berkeley, a generally liberal campus, had at the time a Socialist (anti-Communist) group, an active Trotskyite wing, and a small family of fellow-travelers. The Americans for Democratic Action was considered by many as almost a right wing organization, at least pro-"Establishment." It was therefore no surprise that the foreign policy debate was between those who saw the United States as the mainspring of the Cold War, in the grip of a military-industrial complex, seeking to protect its overseas investments, and those who were defending the Administration's strategy of deterrence, NATO, and civil defense. On the one hand, there were those who favored various plans of unilateral disarmament (always of the U.S., never of the U.S.S.R.), at least sizeable unilateral concessions to show our good will; and on the other hand there were those who believed in the prevention of war by threatening war (the balance-of-terror rationale for maintaining huge nuclear arsenals).

Obviously there were many individuals who held to some intermediate position, who were concerned lest the balance-of-terror be upset, but who were unwilling to make any but minor unilateral concessions; they tended to favor multi-lateral disarmament, which at that time was not yet a goal of the U.S. foreign policy. It occurred to me under these circumstances to organize another group, their number at Berkeley already a legion, to make more visible the existence of this "loyal opposition" to the Administration's viewpoint. The informal slogan of the new group was, "Neither Red Nor Dead, But Free And Alive." It formulated a set of principles that stressed its concern with political

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freedom and a stable peace. The group chose as its name the "Council for the Gradualist Way to Peace," to call attention to its non-radical nature. It is important for the understanding of the situation at the time to stress that this Council gained considerable support on the Berkeley campus. Its members included Nobel Prize Winner Owen Chamberlain, a scholar who worked for the Government and had access to classified data; Ernst Haas, David Apter, Charles Muscatine, and Mark Schorer, all distinguished members of the faculty, none known for a radical position. Actually, as the *New York Times* reported at the time, the Council gained some following on several other campuses and a national council was formed that included notable persons such as Margaret Mead, Hans Morgenthau, Erwin Griswold (Dean of the Harvard Law School), John Bennett (at the time Dean of the Union Theological Seminary), and Paul Tillich.

All this did not suffice to give many members of the faculty at Berkeley the assurance that it was "safe" to join this peace group. I had long lunch meetings with about twenty members of the faculty, as the Council was seeking to expand its membership. Some of my colleagues would come directly to the point. A distinguished physicist listened somewhat impatiently to my explanations about the purpose and plans of the group and then said laconically: "I hope to work for the Government some day." When I wondered why he saw any Government objection to a number of citizens organizing a political group to express and promote a legitimate viewpoint, my colleague answered sharply that he did not know whether I was an ingénue or simply ill-informed. No, of course, there was no law forbidding a person to join a political club or organization. But how was I to guarantee that no member of this group, or any of its affiliates on any other campus, was a Communist? And how was he to explain his membership in a group that had a Communist member? Had I forgotten or chosen to disregard how embarrassing it was to be a member of SANE when a U.S. Senator found, or thought he found, a Communist member in that peace group?

While some colleagues quite willingly admitted that they refused to join the Council, though they favored its purposes and work, because they were "cautious," "farsighted," or "experienced," others were more circumspect, uneasy, or guilty about their fear. These colleagues would usually express their concurrence with the group's aims (we usually approached only those we believed to be sympathetic) but would plead excessive teaching, research, or administrative commitments or a recent addition to the family ("The new baby still keeps us up nights") or

activity for some other cause ("I am deeply involved in the school bond drive"). But, as the lunch hour grew to an end, over a second cup of coffee, or as we were about to part at the end of college-walk, various side comments were made. "I probably would not join even if I were less busy," said a political scientist whose books are widely read. "It is not the kind of thing you join these days," he said. A young professor of chemistry explained, "It would upset my wife too much." A psychologist, a campus veteran, said, "You were not here during the fight over the loyalty oath."

Returning to my own campus, Columbia, I found a similar situation. About twenty of my eminent colleagues did join a Columbia Council for the Gradualist Way to Peace, but about the same number, who in temperament and viewpoint were quite close to the Council, never agreed to attend a meeting, make a contribution, or be on the membership rolls. In particular, there was a fear of records. Two law professors wanted to know if minutes were going to be kept and the names of those present at a meeting listed. A mathematician, who never attended a meeting, gave me a contribution for the Council—in cash. I was reluctant to accept it because there would be no record. "It is better this way," he commented briefly.

THE FEAR that a Communist might pop up in some chapter was so great that it was impossible to form a Council on several campuses in the Midwest until we agreed that each local Council would constitute a completely independent organization and that the National Council would not speak for the local ones or vice versa. (Such a structure is approximated by other peace organizations such as the Women's Strike for Peace and Turn Toward Peace, and for similar reasons.) To function it was necessary further to ease fear by closing the doors of several Councils, including the National one, to new members unless they were invited by a majority vote. Such an invitation often involved numerous 'phone calls across the campus privately to "investigate" the political affiliations of a candidate for membership. Several colleagues were subtly discouraged from applying for membership because their views, as the euphemism went, were "embarrassing." Accepting new members became so cumbersome that it was decided that they would be admitted only once a year.

The shadow of McCarthy, which intimidates political activity by the left and liberal camp is not cast just on the campus and is not limited to recruitment of members. Political action can hardly be advanced without funds; these funds

are hard to come by to begin with, because, unlike contributions to educational or religious causes, they are not tax deductible. Moreover, the first call on political contributions is usually to one's political party, which is socially legitimate and has clear "pay-offs" to offer, from a dinner at the White House to a Government appointment. Trying to raise funds for a peace group that sought to effect legislation (such as the test-ban treaty and defense appropriations) as well as U.S. foreign policy, provided a new set of encounters with McCarthy's ghost. I was at the home of an East Side psychiatrist in New York, who was giving a party to try to help raise funds for our peace effort. Some of his best friends refused to accept his invitation to cocktails because the invitation indicated that two Columbia professors would discuss the problems of peace and disarmament. (Of those present, our greatest hope was pinned on a figure who had made a million dollars suddenly. He was charming; he played the piano and sang songs; he made the cocktail party a smashing success. He promised to be in touch, shortly. I never heard from him again.)

Getting off the plane in Geneva, where I presented some of the ideas of the Council for the Gradualist Way to Peace to the American and to the Soviet delegations to the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Conference, I saw another traveler who looked familiar. On the return flight, as I was entering the plane, there he was. "Usually I have to pay to see you," I said to the man, whom I recognized as an outstanding Broadway comedian. I spent the rest of the flight to Paris discussing peace and political activity with him and his attractive wife, a television star. (Either one of them could have financed the activities of our group for a year without feeling the pinch.) But they felt that neither they nor any of their friends or acquaintances would support a peace group. They provided me with long tales of the horrors that befell actors and actresses who were black-listed in the early 'fifties. My new acquaintances had no taste at all for any experimentation, to test whether the winds had changed (as it appeared) and whether it was now "all right" to support a peace group. The last thing they were willing to do was to join a fight against an atmosphere in which right-wing political activity is flooded with funds, while left and liberal activities, at least if associated with peace and disarmament, are parched for funds. They had a curious conception of safety: one in which you worry more about your career than about your life; more about your freedom of employment than about your freedom of organization, speech, and political activity. They were not going to try to

settle in society's bones; they were not going to see whether their fears were still based on reality or largely imaginary. By acting as if McCarthy were alive and active, they were going to keep his ghost haunting them, their friends, and their friends' friends.

IN A COLUMN syndicated in the Hearst papers, George E. Sokolsky wrote on October 19, 1961: "Dr. Etzioni maintains: 'Most of my colleagues who are experts on these matters assert that the bombs we now have can wipe out civilization on one continent, if not the entire globe. [Herman] Kahn, though, insists that it will take 10 more years to build the doomsday machine...'" "So what is the answer? Shall we retreat before a mad enemy? Shall we surrender to him? Shall we give up our national existence? What would he have us do? It would seem to me that the alternative to meeting the enemy is to capitulate to him. In a word, here we have an argument for total retreatism—'It is better to be Red than dead.'"

All the reader has to do now is to reconsider what I had actually stated, even according to the quotation Mr. Sokolsky selected. In all my writing I have stressed that my commitment to life and liberty were equally firm.

I have seen several debates on foreign policy, TV panels, and question periods following a public talk, where the person who represented the case for peace and disarmament was labeled a "Communist" by his opponent or a member of the audience. The implication usually was that no one needs to heed the arguments presented as their advocates could not be trusted.

Denying that you are a Communist is like stating that you do not beat your mother; it leaves an unpleasant aura of defensiveness. It strengthens the hand of those who employ smear tactics, and it legitimizes your opponent's claim that if you were a Communist whatever plan you favor would automatically lose its merits. Sometimes I tried a preventive approach, by stating, before anybody had a chance to challenge me, that there is no contradiction between peace and freedom, disarmament and democracy. On the lighter side, rather than defending myself, when called a Communist or asked to state where my allegiance lay, I would tell the following parable. One day Jimmy was running like mad down the street. "Jimmy," the people asked him, "why are you running?" "I heard they are castrating camels," answered Jimmy. "Well," said the people, "why worry? You are not a camel." "Hah," countered Jimmy, "go prove you are not a camel."

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that if I were a member of this or that party or organization you need not consider the merits of my ideas? What are you trying to do when you take an expression of concern over the dangers of nuclear war, an interest in peace and disarmament, a quest for a stronger United Nations and you turn these ideas into synonyms for Communist ideas and indications of Communist affiliation? What kind of a society would we have and what kind of a world would it be—if any—if only those who advocate nuclear bombardment to remove the foliage in Vietnam or threaten a holocaust at any major or small interbloc clash, were to monopolize the public arena while other viewpoints were silenced?

In addition to fear and a smear, McCarthy's mark is left on many whose careers were interrupted, who were unemployed or jailed, or who feared they might be next in line. Some of them are slowly "rehabilitated." A radio-announcer who was blacklisted in the 'fifties recently gained employment in the industry that had earlier turned him into an outcast. Writers who had to provide manuscripts to Hollywood under pseudonyms write again under their own names. But the righting of past wrongs is far from complete, nor can some of the deeper wounds left by this period be readily healed.

At a guest lecture I gave at a Midwestern university I met a grey-haired lady. She had been arrested for supposedly subversive activities in a labor union. Several of my friends, who knew the case well, assured me that she was only technically guilty and actually her political activity had neither such content nor intent. What struck me was that upon her release from jail, after paying whatever real or imaginary debt she owed to society, the university had refused to allow her to continue her studies, thus preventing her from finding a new, less turbulent, socially useful career. (Under pressure of the faculty, the university finally relented.)

Some months later, I was looking for an assistant for a research project I am conducting at the Institute of War and Peace Studies of Columbia University. At the same time I gave a lecture in a seminar conducted by one of my colleagues. One of the students impressed me with some critical questions he raised. I asked him after the seminar if he needed employment and if he would be interested in the project I was conducting. His expression became sad and hurt. "You would not employ me," he said to my surprise. "Why not?" I asked. "Well," he explained, repeating a phrase I had heard often before, "it might turn out to be embarrassing; I pleaded the Fifth." We all might underestimate the human cost, the number of scars, of broken hearts, the damaged spirits, McCarthy left. World peace

people do the natural thing, hire the person (as, of course, I did), there would be fewer victims who carry McCarthy's scars on their flesh.

Just as grim are those who respond to persecution with persecution, to hate with hate, to smear with smear. There is in New York a brotherhood of victims of McCarthy who hold hands across the city, helping each other and cutting out everybody else. In some quite important book and magazine publishing firms, and in some small foundations, you cannot get by unless you are "in." If you are pro-Establishment or just a left-liberal "reformist," you will be soon told: do not expect a fair book review from magazine X or your manuscript to be published by houses Y and Z.

Surely even this brotherhood is a far cry from the kind of conspiracy of the left McCarthy's successors see in the communications industry. Not only is the group small and its influence curtailed by internal bickering, but also the group is largely a defensive community, like that of homosexuals or users of LSD, not a political cell charged with ambition and hoping to gain power. Imposing on their fellow citizens the same kind of blacklisting and smearing that had been employed on them, they are just another tribute to McCarthy's ghost.

Traveling in Africa last summer, I delivered a few lectures under the auspices of the United States Information Service. Preparing my lectures, I spent some time in U.S. libraries abroad. I gained the impression that the section of these libraries dealing with international affairs had several books presenting a right-wing view of U.S. foreign policy, (e.g., *A Forward Strategy for America*), a few books supporting the Administration, but almost none presenting a more liberal or left viewpoint. As most of the readers in these libraries are leftist, such a selection of books seemed unrepresentative, unfair, and unwise. U.S.I.S. officials, first in Dar es Salaam and then in Nairobi, attributed this way of selecting books to the famous "book-burning tour" ten years ago of U.S.I.S. libraries by two of McCarthy's assistants. The Agency, a young USIS man explained, is divided between the older generation who knew McCarthy and who dare not "do a thing," and a younger generation frustrated by all the curbs and restrictions dating from those days. Upon returning to Washington, to check my impression, I asked one of the leading officials of the Agency if I could see the list of books the Agency sends abroad. I learned that the list was not available to the public or the press "so as not to provide a USIS seal of approval on some books as against others." When I reported the explanation that was given to me in

USIS libraries abroad, the official smiled painfully.

Back on the campus, I found McCarthy's shadow waiting in my doorway. At least twice a year, someone turns up in my campus office, waves a card with a picture before me, a card that says that he is an F.B.I. agent, or civil service commission man, or the like, and asks me questions about one of my students. As these students are considered for employment in security-sensitive positions, I have no quarrel with the need to check whether they might be loyal to a foreign power (though I fail to see how I am to know). But the long list of questions asked often goes far beyond trying to establish whatever ties with national enemies a student might have. His sentiments, beliefs, and personal habits, from sex to frugality, are all under investigation, as are his friends and friends of friends. In a case of a student who was to become a U.S. guide at an American exhibition in Moscow, all the organizations and associations he ever belonged to were examined.

It is fairly clear how to counter the more institutionalized expressions of McCarthyism that are still with us. Some can be tackled through legal action, as when one's civil rights are violated. Others require political action in Washington, such as lobbying in favor of termination of the unnecessary services of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. It is less clear how to remove the less institutionalized, more personal frames of mind and habits of response that were formed in McCarthy's heyday: the pervasive fear, the cautious habit, the "wisdom" of refraining from political action in liberal and left camps. When confronted with these, perhaps the only effective reaction is speaking up, making the fearful, cautious person aware of what he is slipping into when he refuses to join a group he would like to join, to support a friend who has been smeared, or when he withholds funds from a cause he considers worthy. This is a thankless job. Many a person is quite indignant when it is implied that he is motivated by fear. But there might be no other way to prevent the slow consolidation of these restrictions on our freedoms and rights and the growing acceptance of yesterday's outrages. Only in this way can some of the fears be shown to be no longer real, and only in this way can those sources of fear that are real be identified and countered.

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