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# CONFORMITY IS NOT LOYALTY

THIS article, which we reprint from the "New Statesman," appeared first in "Harper's Magazine," and "was designed," the author points out, "for an American audience familiar with the situation to which it is addressed." Before it was used in the "New Statesman," he added this foreword:

"While it would be a mistake to discount the significance of the current 'loyalty' drive, it would be a no less unfortunate error to exaggerate it. The United States is in the grip neither of reaction nor of Fascism, and the present 'purge' is not comparable to those which afflicted Russia and other totalitarian States before the war. The protest against current Red-baiting is strong and effective; and the situation has by no means deteriorated to that which obtained during the Red hysteria of 1919 and 1920."

ON May 6 last a Russian-born girl, Mrs. Shura Lewis, gave a talk about Russia to the students of the Western High School of Washington, D.C. Mrs. Lewis said nothing that had not been said a thousand times, in speeches, in newspapers, magazines and books. She said nothing that any normal person could find objectionable.

Her speech, however, created a sensation. A few students walked out on it. Others improvised placards proclaiming their devotion to Americanism. Indignant mothers telephoned their protests. Newspapers took a strong stand against the outrage. Congress, rarely concerned for the political or economic welfare of the citizens of the capital city, reacted sharply when its intellectual welfare was at stake. Congressmen Rankin and Dirksen thundered and lightened; the District of Columbia Committee went into a huddle; there were demands for house-cleaning in the whole school system, which was obviously shot through and through with Communism.

Merely by talking about Russia Mrs. Lewis was thought to be attacking Americanism. It is indicative of the seriousness of the situation that during this same week the House found it necessary to take time out from the discussion of the Labour Bill, the Tax Bill, the International Trade Organisation, and the world famine, to meet assaults upon Americanism from a new quarter. This time it was the artists who were undermining the American system, and members of the House spent some hours passing around reproductions of the paintings which the State Department had sent abroad as part of its programme for advertising American culture.

What was wrong with these paintings, it shortly appeared, was that they were un-American. The copious files of the Committee on un-American activities were levied upon to prove that of the 45 artists represented "no fewer than 20 were definitely New Deal in various shades of Communism." The damning facts are specified for each of the pernicious 20; we can content ourselves with the first of them, Ben-Zion. What is the evidence here? "Ben-Zion was one of the signers of a letter sent to President Roosevelt by the United American Artists, which urged help to the U.S.S.R. and Britain after Hitler attacked Russia. He was, in short, a fellow-traveller of Churchill and Roosevelt."

The same day that Dr. Dirksen was denouncing the Washington school authorities for allowing students to hear about Russia, Representative Williams, of Mississippi, rose to denounce the Survey-Graphic magazine. The Survey-Graphic, he said, "contained 129 pages of outrageously vile and nauseating anti-Southern, anti-Christian, un-American, and pro-Communist tripe, ostensibly directed toward the elimination of

the custom of racial segregation in the South." It was written by "meddling un-American purveyors of hate and indecency."

## Congress Kept Busy

All in all, it was a busy week for the House. Yet those who make a practice of reading their Record will agree that it was a typical week. For increasingly Congress is concerned with the eradication of disloyalty and the defence of Americanism, and scarcely a day passes that some Congressman does not treat us to exhortations and admonitions, impassioned appeals and eloquent declamations. And scarcely a day passes that the outlines of the new loyalty and the new Americanism are not etched more sharply in public policy.

This is what is significant—the emergence of new patterns of Americanism and of loyalty, patterns radically different from those which have long been traditional. It is not only the Congress that is busy designing the new patterns. They are outlined in President Truman's recent disloyalty order; in similar orders formulated by the New York City Council and by State and local authorities throughout the country; in the programmes of the D.A.R., the American Legion, and similar patriotic organisations; in the editorials of the Hearst and the McCormick-Patterson papers; and in an elaborate series of advertisements sponsored by large corporations and business organisations. In the making is a revival of the Red hysteria of the early 1920's, one of the shabbiest chapters in the history of American democracy; and more than a revival, for the new crusade is designed not merely to frustrate Communism but to formulate a positive definition of Americanism, and a positive concept of loyalty.

## Uncritical Acceptance

What is the new loyalty? It is, above all, conformity. It is the uncritical and unquestioning acceptance of America as it is—the political institutions, the social relationships, the economic practices. It rejects inquiry into the race question or socialised medicine, or public housing. It regards as particularly heinous any challenge to what is called "the system of private enterprise," identifying that system with Americanism. It abandons evolution, repudiates the once popular concept of progress, and regards America as a finished product, perfect and complete.

It is, it must be added, easily satisfied. For it wants not intellectual conviction nor spiritual conquest, but mere outward conformity. In matters of loyalty it takes the word for the deed, the gesture for the principle. It is content with the flag salute, and does not pause to consider the warning of our Supreme Court that "a person gets from a symbol the meaning he puts into it, and what is one man's comfort and inspiration is another's jest and scorn." It is satisfied with membership in respectable organisations and, as it assumes that every member of a liberal organisation is a

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Communist, concludes that every member of a conservative one is a true American. It has not yet learned that not everyone who saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is designed neither to discover real disloyalty nor to foster true loyalty.

What is wrong with this new concept of loyalty? What, fundamentally, is wrong with the pusillanimous retreat of the Washington educators, the hysterical outbursts of the D.A.R., the gross and vulgar appeals of business corporations? It is not merely that these things are offensive. It is rather that they are wrong—morally, socially, and politically.

## False Concept

The concept of loyalty as conformity is a false one. It is narrow and restrictive, denies freedom of thought and of conscience, and is irremediably stained by private and selfish considerations. Loyalty must be to something larger than oneself, untainted by private purposes or selfish ends. But what are we to say of the attempts to identify loyalty with the system of private enterprise? Is it not as if officeholders should attempt to identify loyalty with their own party, their own political careers? Do not those organisations that deplore, in the name of patriotism, the extension of government operation of hydro-electric power expect to profit from their campaign?

Certainly it is a gross perversion not only of the concept of loyalty but of the concept of Americanism to identify it with a particular economic system. If loyalty and private enterprise are inextricably associated, what is to preserve loyalty if private enterprise fails. Those who associate Americanism with a particular programme of economic practices have a grave responsibility, for if their programme should fail they expose Americanism itself to disrepute.

The effort to equate loyalty with conformity is misguided because it assumes that there is a fixed content to loyalty and that this can be determined and defined. But loyalty is a principle, and eludes definition except in its own terms. It is devotion to the best interests of the commonwealth and may require hostility to the particular policies which the Government pursues, the particular practices which the economy undertakes, the particular institutions which society maintains. "If there is any fixed star in our Constitutional constellation," said the Supreme Court in the *Barnette* case, "it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion, or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein. If there are any circumstances which permit an exception they do not now occur to us."

## Tradition of Revolt

True loyalty may require, in fact, what appears to the naive to be disloyalty. It may require hostility to certain provisions of the Constitution itself, and historians have not concluded that those who subscribed to the "Higher Law" were lacking in patriotism. We should not forget that our tradition is one of

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