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## Letter to David Rynin from Joel H. Hildebrand, February 23, 1949

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### [Letter, February 23, 1949]

February 23, 1949  
Professor David Rynin  
422 Wheeler Hall  
Campus  
Dear David:

I have put off replying to your letter regarding communist professors until I could give it in return the thoughtful attention that it deserves. Here are my comments upon your points:

1. You cite as evidence that members of the Communist party may retain their intellectual independence the fact that "the whole history of that movement is riddled with repeated schisms, expulsions, resignations, purges, and so on...." It would seem to me that "expulsions, resignations and purges" are evidence that independence is not tolerated. Marshall Tito is not finding it easy, and, I suspect, not even safe, to deviate from the orders from on high. Joliot-Curie, according to reports, asserted that in the event of war with Russia he would not feel bound to reveal atomic information to the enemy, whereupon he was roundly rebuked for heresy. Haldane made excuses for the official Lyseuko position which prompted another British geneticist to assert publicly, "I believe that, from start to finish, his statements are designed to confuse and mislead the public, so that it may fall to understand happenings which are detrimental to the reputation of the Soviet government and therefore to the Communist party of Great Britain."
2. You believe that the jeopardy in which, I claim, a professor places his individual integrity and independence by joining the Communist party "can be exaggerated, since many fields of scholarship are not even remotely connected with Communist or Marxist dogmas, or at least no more so than with the dogmas, or at least no more so than with the dogmas of Catholicism or Fundamentalist Protestantism." You continued, "I do not see, for example, that a Professor of Sanskrit Literature need suffer as a scholar because of his possible devotion to the ideal of a classless society and his, no doubt mistaken, opinion that the Communist movement is a fit or promising vehicle for the realization of that ideal," etc.
  - a. The jeopardy could be exaggerated, but have I exaggerated it? It is true that you and I can see no connection between Sanskrit and Marxist dogma, but the hierarchy in Moscow which decides all these things for party members does see such connections. Geneticists, physicists, composers, artists and literary and dramatic critics are not only dictated to but purged. Should that be a matter of no concern to the Professor of Sanskrit? Am I to be content just because, so far as I know, no chemists have yet been banished to Siberia?
  - b. It is not holding the "ideal of a classless society" that I object to but, as another of my critics more accurately confessed, the status of "warrior, under military orders," in the "class warfare." That is not my notion of proper activity for a professor.

- c. When you say "no more so than with the dogmas of Catholicism or Fundamentalist Protestantism," you surely are way

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off, quantitatively at least. The control of the Vatican over professors who may be members of the Catholic Church is at most a very mild and benevolent control compared with that asserted by the Kremlin over Communist party members in all countries. To ignore the vast practical difference between them because of a theoretical resemblance seems to me like saying, as some did in 1940, that because our own democracy was not perfect we were not justified in opposing the Nazis.

I can forgive the man who, in the 1920's, "succumbed to the Soviet myth, led, as Sidney Hook says, "by emotional compulsion rather than by sober computation of the consequences of adopting a given proposal and its alternatives, which constitutes the every-day life of national politics," but who, "as excess followed excess in a bloody succession, as intolerance and internal coercion increased in direct proportion to the strength and stability of the Soviet State, ...felt compelled to make public their disavowal of their former allegiances." ... "What struck them most forcibly was the cruelty, the unnecessary cruelty, which pervaded almost every aspect of the Soviet administrative practice." And more, and more! This is not the 1920's but the year 1949, when everyone who reads with an open mind, everyone sensitive to human freedom and dignity has had abundant opportunity to see that here was something worse even than what the Nazis attempted, "For it was a control not only over political thought in philosophy and science, not only over what was created but also over how it was created—the style and manner as well as theme and content. Nothing like it had ever existed in the modern world. In making art and philosophy a matter for the police, it violated the sense of dignity and authenticity among these writers and artists and thinkers of the West. It also affronted their sense of integrity as craftsmen."

When I hear a professor say, as I have, that "he would not know whether a professor who remains in the Communist party accepts official party doctrine," he sounds to me like one of those intellectuals confused by more ideas than they can digest of whom A. P. Hebert was thinking when he said, in disgust, "You will now begin to understand, perhaps, why, if I wish to meet a moralist, I go to Billingsgate and talk to a fishporter." It would be just as intelligent to say that one could not know whether a man who joins the Ku Klux Klan approves terrorizing negroes.

3. I do not for a moment suspect you of communist leanings.
4. I agree that prejudice is a sin, but one should not call a judgment a prejudice unless it is a pre-judgment. I have examined a lot of evidence before coming to so definite a judgment. I agree that "the virtues and vices of a man reside in him and not in some assumed mystical relation between him and an abstraction called party," but if a man is a member of the Communist party, it is he not I, who has "assumed" the relation, it is not "mystical," and that party is no "abstraction." Turn on your semantics, David!

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5. I have never advocated dismissing a professor without a hearing for this or any other cause. My point is simply that when a member of a company of scholars joins the Communist party, or any other militant, closely disciplined movement directed towards the overthrow of intellectual freedom by a dogmatic authority, he has voluntarily associated himself with guilt for failure to live up to the high ideals of the sanctity of truth without which there can be no true universities.
6. I think it important that these matters be discussed, but I dread the oratory that would be spilled at a meeting. Is not small scale discussion, such as this, likely to bring better agreement?

Sincerely  
JHH:lb