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## Letter to Robert G. Sproul from James R. Caldwell, May 11, 1950

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### [Letter, May 11, 1950]

May 11, 1950  
President Robert G. Sproul  
Administration Building  
University of California  
Berkeley, California  
Dear President Sproul:

After long and difficult deliberation, and in no arrogant frame of mind, I have decided to decline the contract in its present form and to ask that my case be referred to the Committee on Privilege and Tenure. The difficulty of making this decision has not been lessened by my sincere reluctance to add one more to the Committee's burdens and to yours. Yours have been, I am sure, heavy enough in the past year, and theirs will evidently not be light. In coming to this decision, I have been moved specifically by my conscience as I perceive this element in myself, but it is a conscience which is a function, so to speak, of my love of this University and my love of this country. It manifests itself as a practical inability to act in a fashion that seems to me ultimately to the detriment of both.

My conscientious loyalty to the University impels me to decline the present contract for several reasons: It is my belief, as I have earlier indicated to you, that, if I am made to appear non-Communist by coercion, I am thereby emasculated in my efforts to dissuade my students from Communism. How shall any of us persuade in favor of freedom unless we are ourselves free and moving in an atmosphere of freedom? How shall we answer the cynical student who accuses us of holding to Democracy through fear for our jobs?

That members of the Communist Party are themselves not free agents seems to me an apparent fact, and I believe it is the duty of the faculty to continue to be vigilant against this kind of coercion. It is my deep conviction that you, sir, and the Committee on Privilege and Tenure are proper instruments of this vigilance and that, as occasion arises for such scrutiny, professional men should pass upon the qualifications of their colleagues, dealing with individuals with whom they work and whose modes of thought they comprehend.

As I understand it, the Board of Regents has offered to us, who by declining the present contract have in a manner of speaking put our loyalty in question, the option of reaffirming it via this traditional academic process. I gratefully accept this option regarding my choice indeed as a practical demonstration of my faith in the just intentions of the Committee, the Board of Regents, and you. I shall willingly answer any questions that you or they find it necessary to put to me, for I believe in full professional responsibility.

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My willingness to affirm my loyalty in this fashion rather than by signing the contract may, I am sure, seem to involve some fine distinctions and theoretical discriminations. I can say only that my life's training and my conception of my calling have conditioned me to live by such distinctions.

My conscience and my concept of my duty as a citizen seem to me also seem to me also to merge in prohibiting me from signing the present contract. I grow daily more alarmed at the panic wave engulfing this country, carrying before it, as it seems to me, our faiths in each other and in our institutions. The spirit of vigilantism, the unbridled zeal which permits legislative committees to broadcast irresponsible slander, the belligerency which would short-circuit constitutional rights and legal processes seem to me more alarming than any threat from without, although I do not deny the external peril. It seems to me unfortunately true that the original impetus for the imposition of a loyalty oath came from this fearful tide.

I would not be thought to arrogate to myself and others who cannot accept this contract the attribute of calm reason and to ascribe to those who proffer and subscribe to it passionate unreason. Nevertheless, it is my conscientious belief that the present contract represents a degree of acquiescence on all our parts to these frantic pressures. It seems my conscientious duty as a citizen and a university professor to stand, as long as I can, against them, even in their indirect manifestations.

These, Mr. President, are my sincere reasons for the action I am taking. I take it in full confidence that my motives will be respected by the Committee, by you, and by the Board of Regents and that I shall be permitted to continue to serve the University as I have so happily for the past twenty years. My understanding of the action of the Board at Davis on April 21 is that it is precisely intended to allow courses of action such as mine and to warrant the confidence which I have emphasized.

May I finally say that I feel no desire unnecessarily to consume the time of the Committee on Privilege and Tenure. If they care to regard this letter as sufficient ground for a finding, I should be content. If not, I shall of course be glad to go before them.

Faithfully yours

James R. Caldwell

Professor of English

cc: Professor Stuart Daggett, Chairman, Committee on Privilege and Tenure