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## Letter to Joel Hildebrand from David Rynin, March 1, 1949

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### [Letter, March 1, 1949]

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Dear Joel:

Many thanks for your helpful comments on my letter. We seem to be making some headway in the matter of understanding one another on this issue. I hope you will not find tedious my comments on your comments.

I am happy to see that you are willing (item 5) to give Communist professors a hearing. I had thought that your opposition to the AAUP principle amounted to an a priori assumption of guilt (incompetence, lack of integrity, ect.). Am I right in understanding that your willingness to grant such persons "a hearing" is equivalent to granting them a trial before a committee on privilege and tenure, with no prior assumption of incompetence ect., accompanied by a willingness to allow the persons charged to retain their posts if the case against them is not proven? If your position amounts to this then there is no dispute between us, but if the "hearing" is a mere formality whose results may be ignored, or if the decision is to be overridden by higher authority at its discretion, as in the U. of W. case, then our agreement is only apparent. Since our issue is whether Communists may teach there is no relevance in merely granting a hearing to ascertain whether they fall under the ban. It is the ban itself whose justice and wisdom we are discussing. In item 1, you assert that independence in Communists is not tolerated, and consider resignations, expulsions, ect., as evidence. I did not say that independence is tolerated, as indeed on fundamental issues it is obvious it is not; but this does not, I think, dispose of my point that we have here a kind of ice-berg phenomenon; or to use examples from your own speciality, something like errant molecules escaping from a fluid; for every one that breaks free and escapes there are many in various stages of approach to freedom; the analogy might even be carried farther: as the temperature rises the internal movement becomes more violent and ever more molecules escape—so I believe as the times become hotter more and more Communists will tend to desert the movement, up to a point that is. Independence I should consider as analogous to motion towards the surface.

I don't of course wish to defend H. Haldane ect., but mentioned them only as evidence against your assumption of no independence.

In item (2a) we agree on the possibility of exaggeration. That this is no mere abstract possibility is amply shown by the cases of Butterworth and Phillips at the U. of W., both of whom are given clearance in this respect by the Committee in its official report, There again I think you shift ground from my point that some individuals A, B, C, ——. Of course, I do not ask you or wish you to be content that no chemists have been sent to Siberia.

2b. I do not know that being a "warrior, under military orders" is always improper for a professor, though it might be. I hope the service (under orders) of my good friend Col. J. H. Hildebrand did not impair his value to the University. But perhaps you object to engaging in "class warfare." This is a broad term. If a professor works for the amelioration of social evils such as great extremes of wealth and poverty, this may be his way of engaging in class warfare, and is so I do not see the great evil in it. Other activities may indeed be reprehensible, but let's be specific about what we understand by "class warfare."

2c. I think I admitted that, in our time and country at least, the control of the Vatican is less vigorous than of the C. P. I only wished to indicate that we need a decision here based on specific charges of specific ends of specific persons. I'm with you and against evil doers, only let us identify them and show their evil doing, not establish it by definition.

I agree with the sense and feeling of the quotation from Hook. I only disagree with the doctrine of guilt by association. If the doctrine is true it can be shown to uphold in particular cases; if it cannot after investigation it is not universally true and to condemn a man under these circumstances is prejudice.

3. My disclaimer regarding my own tendencies was made not so much because I feared you might have misjudged me as to indicate the sense of fear and controversial issues. I have found it necessary in discussing contemporary problems to ask over zealous partisans of official "100% Americans"—so-called—who want to suppress dissident thought, such questions as, how they reconcile their "Americanism" with the first amendment and with the justification of rebellion in this University has been to glare at me and say in a menacing tone "Are you a Communist? You talk like one." The Communist label will not catch this fellow, but he is in my opinion a greater menace to true "Americanism" than at least some Communists—however misguided they may be.

4. I agree with your definition of "prejudice" and use it in that sense. That a person has examined much evidence does not, however, free him necessarily of the charge of prejudice. This depends on whether he is willing to condemn any given man before investigating him. His knowledge of the class is, I repeat, only ground for investigating a suspected member, not for condemning him without investigations, or condemning him despite evidence.

When I speak of the Communist Party as "an abstraction" I use the term to distinguish between the acts and relations of specific persons, which are real and concrete, and some entity other than these persons and these acts and relations, whose properties are imputed in words and definitions and not ascertained by observation. That party is not an abstraction if statements about it are to be translated into statements about observable behavior of individuals and groups, but if we claim to know its characteristics which we impute to it as something over and above the individuals and beyond observation, than I insist it is an abstraction. I wish it to be treated as not an abstraction, but this requires us to make empirical investigations of the acts of its members, and of any particular member who is alleged to exhibit the characteristics of any or most other members. If we accept this analysis we run the risk of finding a given individual atypical. I have no wish of course to prejudge what the outcome of such an investigation will be, and I should consider a man prejudiced in my sense only if he did so wish and act.

I see that this policy of intimidation of independent thought is begging to produce results, witness the Oregon State incident. The great evil in the policy I object to is the inevitable timidity and hypocrisy it produces—which, especially in university men, is an evil which can hardly be exaggerated.

But I presume on the time of a busy man! Part of this is of course written out for my own benefit, and I pass it along to you just in case your interest has lasted this long.

Sincerely yours  
DAVID RYNIN

P.S. Do you have an extra copy of your original A.A.U.P. letter for use. So I can have a complete record?