

Adams, George Plimpton, 1882-1961

Letter to Joel H. Hildebrand from George P. Adams, March 6, 1950

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## Letter to Joel H. Hildebrand from George P. Adams, March 6, 1950

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### [Letter, March 6, 1950]

March 6, 1950

Dear Joel:

Professor J. H. Hildebrand:

I must apologize for not having acknowledged the copy of Lovejoy's article and replying to your inquiry.

I must confess that I have been and still am somewhat torn in my mind whether Communists per se should be barred from holding academic posts. The answer hinges on certain initial premises which are, I think, debatable. If it is assumed that membership in the American Communist party is tantamount to engaging in a world conspiracy in which one renounces all intellectual standards and all moral scruples, then it certainly follows that no such person is fitted to teach in a free university. I do not know whether this assumption is justified or not. Until it is so decided, say by the courts in declaring that membership in the Communist party is ipso facto a felony, I have to believe that it is still questionable.

I am not too greatly impressed by the argument that an intellectual commitment to communist or Marxian dogmas - which would frequently lead to affiliation with the party - prevents any disinterested inquiry and attitude of mind. Suppose a scholar comes to the conclusion that the whole idea and ideal of disinterested inquiry is a fetich, that the human mind is incapable of forming any disinterested, wholly objective judgments about the things which most concern us, about human values and ideals. There are plenty of such views around, taught by a lot of philosophers, including some of my colleagues. I happen to think that they are wrong. I hold to the philosophy that the human mind and spirit are not entirely caught up in the nexus of nature's happenings, whether in the brain or in the random events of history and the clash of interests. What I happen to believe is not, at the moment, fashionable, nor is it relevant. But I welcome, as colleagues, those who believe and teach that every mind is ineluctably biased by prior commitments, so that disinterested judgments are a will o' the wisp.

Fortunately, this issue doesn't enter into our present disturbance here. I am willing to accept the Regents' ruling that Communists cannot be employed on this faculty, on the premise that Communism is a sinister world conspiracy, and because the raising of that issue would cloud the far more fundamental issues on which the faculty is united.

I am afraid that, in the recent accident in my office, Lovejoy's article went up in unmerited smoke, so that I can't return it.

Cordially yours

George P. Adams

GA/mr