

Gehres, Leslie E
Letter to Roger Revelle from Lelie E. Gehres
April 24, 1950

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Mr. Roger Revelle
Acting Director and Professor of Oceanography
Scripps Institute of Oceanography
University of California
7348 Vista Del Mar
La Jolla, California
Dear Mr. Revelle:

I have read with a great deal of interest the enclosures with your letter of April 11. I now better understand the position the University faculty has taken on this question of the special oath, although I must be frank to say I do not fully agree with that position. My own background as a Naval officer with a life lived under an oath far more binding than any which state officials take makes it difficult for me to understand why anyone should object to taking an oath disavowing Communism.

To my way of thinking, professors and teachers are in an entirely different category than any other government employees or servants. To them are entrusted not just the administration of physical assets or money, but the molding of the minds and characters of our young people and so, to a large degree, the molding of the future of this country. This is a responsibility so great that people have a right to expect of instructors in tax supported schools an even greater degree of faith in and adherence to our American form of government than that expected of any other officials of the state. Personally, I could see nothing objectionable in the wording of the oath and I, for one, would not hesitate a moment to subscribe to it.

On the other hand, however, I find myself in sympathy and agreement with the stand of the faculty on the subject of dismissal without hearing or trial before the Academic Senate. I agree that this procedure is a very serious threat to academic freedom, a denial of a basic democratic principle; and would, beyond question, cause competent men of spirit and self-respect to decline to serve in the University of California. I cannot agree that the oath required reflects upon the integrity and loyalty of the professors. It must be considered that one disloyal Communist professor in a thousand, or in five thousand, placed where he can influence the minds and thinking of young men and women, can do greater harm than a thousand Communists working in less influential positions.

I think the teaching profession must realize that the public has been distressed and shocked by the evidence of radical political thought and leadership in our colleges as exemplified by the cases of Alger and Priscilla Hiss, two highly schooled products of our university

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system. The recent case of Dr. Fuchs, who was accepted without question by many of our own most advanced professors, has added to public distress and the feeling, right or wrong, that Communists have infiltrated into faculty circles.

The support given to Mr. Wallace and Mr. Douglas in the presidential campaign of 1948 by a full professor here in San Diego State College has certainly helped to establish this belief in the minds of many people

locally. I feel that the weight of local public opinion is on the side of the Regents in this question.

As you can see, I am in somewhat of a quandry on this question. I feel that there are elements of right and wrong on both sides. I feel that the faculty is wrong in considering that this oath reflects upon their integrity or in any way infringes upon their academic freedom. I feel equally strongly that the stated intention of the Regents to dismiss without proper hearing any faculty member who refuses to sign the oath is dictatorial and an affront to which exception can be most properly taken.

Not being a lawyer, I cannot understand the Governor's assertion that the oath, not being a legal requirement, would not be binding; and could not be used for a basis of a charge of perjury, which, I understand, is one of the objects the Regents have in mind. I have always been under the impression that an oath taken "subject to the pains and penalties of perjury" did in fact subject the subscriber to those pains and penalties if he were found guilty of false swearing.

If the oath would not serve as a basis for a charge of perjury, by which to lay a proven Communist by the heels, then I can see no point in the Regents insisting on it. If the opposite is true, and the oath would serve a useful purpose, then I believe the faculty should, in order to make it possible to charge a proven Communist, accept the requirement. I feel certain that some reasonable solution can and will be reached.

I appreciate the opportunity you gave me to study the faculty's position. As like the public generally, I knew only that the faculty was refusing to take a non-Communist oath.

Sincerely yours
Leslie E. Gehres
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P.S.

This letter has been long in getting typed. I hope the press reports, to the effect that a satisfactory solution has been reached, are true.

Yours
L. E. G.