

Letters

HUAC: Academic Challenge

Elinor Langer's brief note (News and Comment, 13 May, p. 898) on renewed efforts within the academic community to assail the House Un-American Activities Committee raises the question: Why is so much effort expended over this question in this quarter?

Raising the ghost of McCarthy is no answer. The equation of HUAC procedures with those of McCarthy will not stand even cursory examination. In fact the HUAC was the first to adopt written rules of procedure, which became a model for the standing rules of the House now governing all committees. Furthermore this committee of nine, by the process of the biennial congressional elections, has had 41 different people sitting on it over the 20 years since it became a standing committee, so it would be silly to ascribe a personality or an ideology to it.

Since HUAC, like the other 19 standing committees of the House, was established by enactment of a public law, the present attack on its constitutionality presumably is directed against its specific legislated purpose:

... The investigation of ...

1) The extent, character and objects of un-American propaganda activities in the United States.

2) The diffusion within the United States of subversive and un-American propaganda that is instigated from foreign countries or of a domestic origin and attacks the principle of the form of government as guaranteed by our Constitution, and

3) All other questions in relation thereto that would aid Congress in any accessory remedial legislation.

While the word "un-American" is certainly not precisely definable, and undoubtedly has repugnant overtones to a scholarly community with a rooted belief that its beneficial activities are omni-national, still why should there be such strenuous objections to the proposition that Congress may inform itself about acts designed to weaken the stability or alter the form of our government? This is particularly puz-

zling when this same community rejects as an article of faith that there could be any topic so sacred that its members may not make it the subject of investigation.

Alger Hiss, Harry Dexter White, the Rosenbergs, and Gouzenko, to name a few, have demonstrated beyond doubt that the Communist Party has done and can do real damage on a national scale. Indeed it can do and has done real damage in the world of scholars.

The trial of Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel revealed again the Party's implacable resolve to prohibit freedom of thought, expression, and dissent. The Lysenko affair, extending over three decades, demonstrated its unusual tenacity in submerging scientific findings in conflict with orthodox doctrine. In fact, wherever it has the power to do so, the Party seeks out and punishes heresy, an activity which is surely the antithesis of scholarship.

Thus there not only seems to be ample reason why Congress should keep itself informed about the Party and its secret mischievous undertakings, but even reason why the academic community might itself be concerned.

STUART T. MARTIN

P.O. Box 608, Burlington, Vermont

Who Judges the Teachers?

In his editorial, "Good teaching" (18 March), Warren Weaver says he has little faith in the ability of a student to judge the quality of his teacher. I would counter that the better students in a class are the only ones from whom an administrator can receive an accurate appraisal. They have seen the teacher in action far more than have any of the university personnel, have been with other teachers for comparison, and they know whether their success in the class has been because of the teacher or in spite of him.

Weaver believes that a college teacher can best be judged by his colleagues. Any department with more than two good teachers is singularly blessed

(I cite here the results of a statistically insignificant private survey). Since most of a teacher's colleagues are poor teachers themselves, they are particularly unqualified to judge his performance, not to mention the fact that they have probably never seen him teach. To paraphrase Weaver's final remark, a good teacher's colleagues are likely to judge him through the sieve of their own incompetence, prejudices, and jealousy.

LANE P. LESTER

Maynard Evans High School,
Orlando, Florida 32808

As a graduate student I can hardly agree with Warren Weaver who advocated the evaluation of university teachers by their colleagues. An immediate objection is that the colleagues do not sit in on the courses that the teacher gives. Therefore, they have no basis for "their skillful and intimately informed judgments." Further, the colleagues' judgment is colored by their personal relationship with the teacher. . . . The undergraduates are no better placed to judge the faculty, with their limited background in the subject and their limited experience with university teachers. They can hardly be expected to recognize good teaching or to be aware of the difficulties in teaching a particular subject. The best, though still far from ideal, source of evaluation is the graduate student. He knows enough of the subject to appreciate the difficulties of teaching it, and he has had experience with many teachers. Further, he is likely to have worked with the professor on research and would be able to evaluate the professor's ability both to teach research and to lecture.

DAVID LESTER

Department of Psychology,
Brandeis University,
Waltham 54, Massachusetts

Good teaching is not possible without communication, and this communication must be based on awareness of the students' capabilities and interests. Without this, teaching is at best an ego enhancing exercise conducted before a captive audience. The unfortunate facts are that most teaching is based on a hierarchy of values that places the teacher's needs first; and that teachers in most university departments are more concerned with security, status, and departmental power struggles than they are with the purposes of their chosen profession. Hence, I think