

SPECTRUM

Positively Pink

The politics of paranoia - Part I

McCARTHYISM/ *Adrian Park looks at its origins and influences.*

by Adrian Park

The origins of McCarthyism like the origins of the Cold War, were diverse, and reflect both the personal quirks of the principal demagogues, and the broader societal insecurities they so adroitly exploited. Easily dismissed as an aberration, McCarthyism set the tenor of a society in which most of us were born and raised. It is not just the countries of the former Warsaw Pact that need to readjust to changing realities, and though McCarthyism was a US phenomenon, its poison knew no borders.

When Senator Joseph McCarthy made his infamous "list" speech on 9 February 1950 he claimed he knew the names of 205 employees of the State Department whom secretary Dean Acheson knew were "card-carrying members of the Communist Party." Within the month, however, he was referring to "communists and perverts" threatening the security of the US and its allies.

The McCarthy purge of the American left is well-documented. The purge of "perverts" is less well known, but probably affected far more individuals, and the campaign rhetoric framed the terms of several human rights issues down to the present day.

The methods employed by McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to root out both "communists" and "perverts" were identical, and ironically straight out of the KGB handbook. It was not enough for an individual to confess, anyone summoned before HUAC could only purge themselves by naming others. To take the 5th Amendment was an implicit admission of guilt. Merely to be called to testify was enough to lose employment - refusal to appear, or to co-operate resulted in black-listing. Those accused of perversion, or called to

testify about it usually found their names printed in the press - and in the 1950s that was a one-way ticket to oblivion, both in the US, Canada and the UK. Any student of the Spanish Inquisition and the witch-trials of the 16th and 17th centuries would recognize the techniques - guilt by association, and utter contempt for those twin pillars of democracy, the rule of law and due process.

On these grounds McCarthy was eventually censured by the Senate in 1954. The motion of censure was brought by that liberal doyen Margaret Chase Smith of Maine. Despite McCarthy's demise (he drank himself to death in 1957) the purge he initiated wrecked thousands of lives and poisoned the body politic for a generation. Civil servants, career diplomats, academics, writers, journalists, actors, film and TV personnel branded by HUAC found that the black-lists still functioned, and only after 1970 was any legal recompense offered. The law forbidding entry by homosexuals into the US was only repealed last year. For those caught up in the homophobic purge, no such solace was offered - unlike being a member of the Communist Party, being an active homosexual was a crime. By one estimate over 250 suicides directly stemmed from this anti-homosexual purge. One of the ironies of all this being that the two most virulent homophobes in McCarthy's clique, his principal assistant Roy Cohn, and his eminence gris, J. Edgar Hoover, were themselves both gay.

While McCarthyism undoubtedly was largely scapegoating practiced by a rabid-right wing guilt-ridden for its own appeasement of fascism in the 1930s, its homophobia was more complex. It would be easy and naive to blame the homophobia on self-hatred, such as was evidently the case with Roy Cohn, but that would miss the

mark. Like the anticommunism, the homophobia in McCarthyism drew on a deep well of fear - a fear wafted to hysteria by all sorts of circumstances in the unsettled years between 1945 and 1954.

How widespread that homophobia was is clearly indicated by a document produced by the Senate Investigations subcommittee in 1950. Entitled "Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government" (81st Congress Senate Document, 2nd Session, #241), it defines its brief as follows: "The primary objective of the subcommittee in this enquiry was to determine the extent of the

employment of homosexuals and other sex perverts in Government, to consider reasons (why) their employment is undesirable; and to examine into the efficacy of the methods used in dealing with the problem." The subcommittee heard testimony from a range of legal and medical experts and concluded that "(homosexuals) are not proper persons to be employed in Government" because they constitute security risks, and, as the report states "these perverts will frequently attempt to entice normal individuals to engage in perverted practices ... One homosexual can pollute a Gov-

ernment office."

In the 40 years of the Cold War there has been no case of breach of US security due to blackmail of gay or lesbian employees, or by their seduction by foreign agents, in either the Government, the Armed Forces, or the Security Agencies. The same holds true for Canada.

The 1950 subcommittee report was unanimously endorsed by the Senate subcommittee, whose members were by no means all McCarthy sympathizers. One of them was Margaret Chase Smith, Senator for Maine and liberal doyen.

Metanoia

Sapientia and rubber duckies

OPINION/ *Making meaning and sense out of life and "daring to be wise".*

by John Valk

A father was once asked what would be the worst thing that could happen to his son at university. The father, also a professor, was well aware of what took place in and outside the halls of learning. But his response was not typical: "I think the worst thing that could happen to him would be to have the time come when he would feel it was no longer possible to make meaning" (Parks *The Critical Years* xiv).

This sensitive and insightful father was not primarily concerned with his son's potential grades, financial debt, job potentials, sexual escapades and beer parties. Rather, he was concerned about his son's core existence. It would be the son's ability to sort things out, his capacity and demand for meaning—"his conviction of the ultimate character of truth, of self, of world" (Parks xiv)—that would be most crucial. The rest would follow.

It is clear that for many entering university the opposite is the case. In fact, frequently t

he "ultimate character of truth, of self, of world" is defined by school grades, high paying jobs, sexual encounters, beer parties. That these become the primary concerns is unfortunate, but perhaps not so surprising. Do they not mirror the major concerns of our society? And, to what extent does that indicate the state of our own social and spiritual impoverishment?

Some are of the opinion that the university can do no more than mirror and perpetuate the concerns of society. To a large extent that

may be correct. But we also know that the university wishes to set standards of excellence. This university (UNB) challenges every member within its community to do just that. One only need point to the university crest. It is on the front cover of the 1992-93 Undergraduate Calendar. The Latin words are very simple: *sapere aude*-dare to be wise.

But, just what is wisdom all about? Is it filling the brain with facts and figures? Is it training for optimum job performance? Is it the party lifestyle, the beer bashes, the sexual exploitations? Is it accumulating material wealth? Maybe. But why such a narrowed scope?

One of the last places students are encouraged to look to gain wisdom is in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. That is not surprising. Our society (and university?) has so discredited religion, or shoved it to the periphery, that ignorance of this age-old source (and others) abounds. That is very unfortunate, however, because here some very wise words are spoken.

These scriptures state, for example, that the beginning of all wisdom (and knowledge) is the fear (awe, respect) of the Lord (Psalms 111:10; proverbs 1:7; 9:10). In the same breath they state that fools despise wisdom and (Scriptural) instruction. Furthermore, wisdom must be translated into action: love mercy, do justice, have compassion and walk humbly with God (Isaiah 1:17, Micah 6:8, Matthew 25:31-46). Wisdom also entails treating our bodies as holy and sacred (Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 6:13, 19-20).

And then I read of the "wise" counsel given to students in the centre spread of the October 9 *Brunswickan*. "Daring to be wise" in light of the devastating AIDS crisis amounts to little more than regarding sex as "fun" (recreation?) and wearing a "rubber ducky": "don't be a Party Pooper wear a condom".

That approach contrasts with a (much wiser) course of action taken by the New York City school board. This board now realized that the promotion of abstinence is a much better option against AIDS than condoms. It also brings to mind the words of Marcel Gervais, Archbishop of Ottawa: "I would compare public endorsement of condoms for youth to offering lessons on how to drive safely at 150mph". If the city of New York has caught on that abstinence is the most effective and appropriate method of AIDS prevention, then why haven't we caught on to that sort of wisdom here? Do we not insist on high standards at UNB?

To make meaning and sense out of life has to do with the ultimate character of truth, of self, of the world. In finding our place in the world, developing appropriate attitudes to our studies and work, educating ourselves about wholesome and meaningful relationships and sexual activity, "daring to be wise" is the tougher challenge. To be duped into false securities, distorted views of the meaning of life, twisted notions of human relationships and sexuality will only net us in the long run much pain and turmoil, be that bodily disease, social disappointment, emotional devastation, or spiritual emptiness.

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