

Think It Over, Mrs. Roosevelt

by Joseph Starobin

MRS. ELEANOR ROOSEVELT has entered into the current discussion about the policies of the American Communists. I am referring to her syndicated column last Saturday, and an echo of that column in Monday's Scripps-Howard press.

We must welcome Mrs. Roosevelt's desire to have her say on what the Communists are thinking and doing. The issues are of general public concern. The Communists have nothing to hide—either with respect to their achievements or with respect to their mistakes.



All progressive circles are therefore watching our behavior, and are taking part in our debate in various ways. This is as it should be. It reflects the basic truth that American Communists are an integral force in the American nation, and the day is past when national issues can be discussed and decided without hearing out and reckoning with American Communist views.

Distressing Procedure

Apparently, Mrs. Roosevelt finds it possible to make judgments on American Communists without having read what they themselves are saying. Such a procedure is distressing, to say the least. One may disagree with the Communists as sharply as one desires. But how can one disagree without having read from original sources exactly what they are saying?

The N. Y. Times did the same thing a week ago, in picking up a phrase from a statement by Browder on June 4 and drawing the unwarranted conclusion that American Communists are dubious about supporting the war against Japan.

This was a misquotation. It was made all the worse by the fact that the N. Y. Times failed to publish a letter of correction sent out by the National Board of our organization the very next day. This letter drew attention to the emphasis in the resolution of the National Board, calling for the complete defeat of militarist Japan, and stressing the need for a democratic policy toward China.

When anyone in this discussion misquotes to begin with, and then refuses to acknowledge the correction of a previous misquotation, I can only conclude that such behavior is deliberate. Without ascribing the same motive to Mrs. Roosevelt, certainly the same problem remains.

For example, she says that "it frightens us to see any group in our midst proposing to propagandize instead of cooperating where possible" . . . She fears "this may lead to war at home and abroad." Therefore, she continues, "the French Communist leader and the American Communists who encourage a policy of world revolution have done the peace of the world harm."

But where—in the article by Jacques Duclos or in the statements of our own organization—did Mrs. Roosevelt get the idea that Communists, either here or abroad, are advocating "world revolution"?

I have the documents before me. There is no mention of this phrase at all. It is of course ridiculous to suggest that American Communists can make a "world revolution," and neither can the French. But aside from that, why should any progressive, like Mrs. Roosevelt, employ such a loose and meaningless phrase, which has obviously been culled from a newspaper summary that bears the imprint of the newspaper writer's prejudice, and just does not correspond with the facts?

Further along the same line, "The American Communists had been cooperative, where they could be. But now, as we understand it, they are to force Communism on

our democracy. This we will not tolerate."

Here again—in all fairness to Mrs. Roosevelt—I am compelled to suggest that she has not read any of our discussions thus far. The draft resolution of our National Board (June 2) says that "it is essential to weld together and consolidate the broadest national coalition of all anti-fascist and democratic forces, including all supporters of Roosevelt's anti-Axis policies . . ."

At another point, the resolution says: "While cooperating with the patriotic and democratic forces from all walks of life, Labor must in the first place strengthen its ties with the veterans, the toiling farmers, the Negro people, the youth, the women, professionals and small-business men and with their democratic organizations."

This hardly sounds as though Communists are suddenly ceasing to be cooperative, does it? Indeed, the resolution stresses that cooperation with the dominant sections of monopoly capitalism is illusory. It says that cooperation must take place on the basis of principle—roughly speaking, on "Roosevelt's anti-Axis policies." The resolution proposes to criticize mercilessly all hesitations toward these policies and all concessions to the reactionaries. This has nothing to do with "forcing Communism upon our democracy." The conception that Communism can be forced upon any people is an insult both to the Communists and to the people upon whom it would be allegedly be foisted.

But what is the source of this strange thinking from Eleanor
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Worth Repeating

SOVIET-BAITING is the specialty of those who viewed the Nazis advance with complacency and even satisfaction, says Robert Lash in the Chicago Sun of June 4, in which we read:

Isn't it curious that the most stirring speeches against the Soviet "injustice" in eastern Europe are being made these days by those who viewed the march of fascism without qualms?

Those who want us to impose our political ideology upon the Soviet Union are the same people who demanded that the Nazis be left free to extend their gangster rule clear across Europe. It did not disturb these gentlemen to see Hitler as the conqueror of France and the near-conqueror of Britain. But today they are mightily aroused by the very prospect of Soviet influence in Poland, Austria and the Balkans. They saw no menace in a Nazi Europe; but now they would have us prepare for future war against a hypothetical Red Europe.

This turnabout is all the more strange when one considers that, by all the tests of national behavior, Soviet Russia has no aggressive ambitions like those which in Germany's case were plain to all.

— Between the Lines —

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Roosevelt? It is contained in another paragraph of her first column last Saturday, in which she says: "Earl Browder has been reprimanded for an attitude which many of us believed had represented the attitude of the Soviet government."

In other words, Mrs. Roosevelt is still laboring under the delusion that when Americans become Communists they are by that token less Americans. The refusal to accord Americans the right to be Communists undermine a very basic tenet of our form of government.

If Mrs. Roosevelt is saying that democracy stops when Americans become Communists, then she herself is contributing to a significant exposure of the real essence of what is known as "bourgeois democracy."

Moscow Agent Tale

But to go further. Mrs. Roosevelt is suggesting once again that Communists in any country are agents of the Soviet Union. She asks that the "whole situation of the Communists outside of the Soviet Union shall be cleared up authoritatively." This familiar position undoubtedly explains why she did not bother to read our material at first hand.

This view has a double aspect. It is a direct charge against the Soviet Union of the most serious kind. Whoever makes that charge must remember that it is not original.

Second, it is with equal seriousness an abdication of American democracy. Mrs. Roosevelt is evidently prepared to invite the Soviet Union to intervene in our American internal affairs. She is ready to accord the Soviet Union the right to determine whether Americans can be Communists, a right guaranteed by our Constitution. This would be a serious violation of American sovereignty, if it were seriously pressed.

So in either case—the whole approach toward Communists along Mrs. Roosevelt's lines gets her into serious difficulties. It is

high time such an approach were abandoned. The Communists at any rate will defend their rights as Americans.

Authoritative Suppression

Or perhaps Mrs. Roosevelt is suggesting that the United States itself—rather than the Soviet Union—should "authoritatively" consider the suppression of American Communists.

In that case, let me remind her that one of her former colleagues on the Scripps-Howard press—Mr. Westbrook Pegler—has already made the suggestion. It is again, unoriginal. In the Hearst press last Monday, Pegler proposes an all-out drive on the Communists, but in his view the Communists include many members of the former Roosevelt administration, including Henry Wallace.

In other words, while Mrs. Roosevelt makes this suggestion Pegler is already on the spot and proposes to include some of Mrs. Roosevelt's best friends in the anti-Communist dragnet.

Hitler Tried It Before

Isn't this all very familiar? Did not Hitler attempt the very thing, and did he not smash Europe by this very same assault upon Communism which include non-Communist democrats, like Mrs. Roosevelt herself?

Nor does Mrs. Roosevelt help matters by suggesting in her second column on Monday that the fascists, too, are just as responsible as the Communists et cetera, etcetera. This is a curious afterthought, on Mrs. Roosevelt's part. But it makes matters worse. The fact that Mrs. Roosevelt added this formula as an afterthought only strengthens my conviction that her mind is deep in the grip of those confusions which have disarmed many American liberals in the struggle against fascism.

Yes, the Communists represent a danger to fascism. We are proud of that. We will fight against fascism—whether American or any other kind—to the end. That is what most Americans want to do—including Mrs. Roosevelt, I believe.