

## LABELS

Jeanie Morris, Northwest Missouri State College

You would call me, I think, an American, and believe that you were highly honoring me by such a designation. But after I have told you about myself, you may not call me an American and you may understand why I am not so highly honored by this label as you might think.

I was born someplace in Europe, sometime in the Seventeenth Century--in the mind of a man. A man who had spoken strongly against church or government and who was being tortured or actually put to death for such expression. His crimes and his punishment vary, for this man is many men. And I was born in his mind when he envisioned a society in which freedom of expression was a right and a privilege and a commonplace. This society was to be the United States of America.

Unlike Minerva, I did not spring full-grown. I spent my childhood travelling with the religious isolates to the colonies; I spent my adolescence in storm and stress, fighting to erect the colonies as a society of freedom; and with a constitution established for this society, I began my adulthood.

The most important provision of the new Constitution I had helped write was the very first of the freedom guarantees, the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." Our nation stood and does stand on this pillar, the freedom to speak and the freedom to hear others speak.

I was not only at the Constitutional Convention. I was also in San Francisco in May, 1960, when students demonstrated in protest against the House Un-American Activities Committee. If you're like most people, particularly those who saw the "Operation Abolition" film or who read the Committee's publication on the incident, you believe those students Communists or, perhaps worse, Communist dupes. Do you call them this because there is proof of their cooperation with the Communists? Because there is proof Communists encouraged the student leaders? Because there is proof the Communists actually aided the demonstrators? No. Study the film or the publication and you will find that there is no substantial evidence that the students were Communist affiliated. But it's so easy to say that they were. It's easy--far easier--to label the actions of these students than to search for actual reasons.

It's the old problem of guilt by association of ideas. The Communists would quite obviously approve all forms of objections to the very Committee that investigates them. But just because the California students performed one of the acts Communists approve doesn't mean they are Communist, too. Many accepted public figures and magazines--The Christian Century, The New Republic--criticize the House Un-American Activities Committee. To deny this criticism would be to transgress the First Amendment. And to label student critics part of the international Communist movement is to make a mockery of their freedom. Actual Communists must be dealt with, of course. But not Communists convicted by label alone.

The House Committee is in fact one of the prime agents today which is trampling free expression. Let's take a look at a recent case the Committee investigated.

Carl Braden and his wife are residents of North Carolina and they favor integration. Some years ago, the couple knew a Negro family who wanted to purchase a particular home in a white-colored section of town but whose owners wouldn't sell to Negroes. So the Bradens purchased the house and re-sold it to the Negro family.

The Bradens were soon arrested and sentenced under a state sedition act, with the local prosecutor claiming that they were supporting the Communist cause by stirring up trouble between the races.

After the Bradens were released, the House Un-American Activities Committee was quick to see that this was an opportunity for them, too. They summoned Carl for hearings, badgered him with questions, asked for on-the-spot proof of his



innocence, and worked continually to discredit Braden by this reasoning: Communists want racial tension in the United States, so Communists often aid Negroes. Braden aided Negroes, so therefore Braden is a Communist.

This just isn't logic at all. Nothing else in Braden's past could possibly connect him with seditious acts. And Braden himself knew that the Committee was at fault. The Committee isn't equipped to issue a formal indictment--yet they ply men like Braden with questions. Braden wouldn't answer. In his own words, "Actually the questions were all about matters that were public knowledge....It seemed to me that if I answered the Committee's questions I would be conceding its right to ask them."

As a reward for this attitude, Carl Braden was charged with contempt for which he served one year in prison, beginning May, 1960. One year in prison because he objects to being labelled in the face of no evidence.

There are numerous examples of such cases. Listen to what people say, read what periodicals are printing. A magazine entitled "The 'Left Swing' in Education", published by the Institute for Special Research in Pasadena, California, was recently received by educators. The magazine is typical in denouncing the following actions: Chicago churchmen and educators in 1955 urged a ban on the A-Bomb; ninety-three prominent individuals in 1948 supported the visit of the "Red Dean of Canterbury" to the United States; at the University of California in 1960, students were demanding classes in Marxist economics. This magazine, like others, condemns these actions as part of a Communist-front movement. But there is no other proof except that some Communists support these measures. And the list includes completely desirable and constitutional activities. Worldwide A-Bomb bans may be in fact the only means to achieve peace. Hearing a Communist speak should assure advocates of democracy that their cause is right. And students' learning about Marxist economics is the best thing that could happen: this nation needs educated individuals who can deal effectively with our enemy through understanding. Hiding the truth about Communist just strikes at democracy.

Let's consider a final revealing example. In 1961, the day following the death of Patrice Lumumba, hundreds of American Negroes protested by rioting in UN. In the eyes of the world, these Negroes were actual Communists or Communist pawns--because the Communists themselves might desire such an occurrence. Author James Baldwin sees the injustice in this situation and he says, "I do not doubt that among the people at the UN that day there were Stalinists and professional revolutionists....Wherever there is great social discontent, these people are, sooner or later, to be found. But to say that these people were the rioters ignores the problem. The climate and events of the last decade, and the steady pressure of the 'cold' war, have given Americans yet another means of avoiding self-examination, so it has been decided that the riots were 'Communist'...."

Baldwin's statements are sound. This nation has a fear of Communism, a reasonable fear. But we must remember that our most precious weapon is our most prized possession--freedom of expression. Freedom in America must not be merely the freedom to set our alarm clocks for 7:15. Freedom that doesn't stand up in a real test is no freedom at all. And the test is being free to do what we think is right, being free from the stifling influence of labels, for labels will only produce the tensions our enemies desire.

I don't want to be just a Communist--or even just an American. I can't support everything "American," like that House Committee. I want to be myself.