

## IV

## Freedom of the Press

I THINK that today we should establish the relationship, not of a candidate talking to the public but of one newspaperman talking to others. I am sure that the body of men here whose business it is to know everything does not want to hear the usual speech that is designed especially for those who know very little about the Communist Party.

I have been puzzling my mind to find the best approach to a discussion of the election campaign issues from the point of view of the Communist Party for the benefit of such an audience and, reviewing experiences I have had in the last three weeks in my swing around the Rocky Mountain States, the Pacific Coast and the Northwest, I came to the conclusion that a few remarks about one of the issues of the campaign on which apparently there is unanimity between all parties would be the best.

This issue is the question of the freedom of the press. Every candidate and every party seems to be whole-heartedly committed to freedom of the press. This unanimity is perhaps more apparent than real, and probably is an example of the way in which language is used to conceal thoughts and policies.

I found in my recent trip very interesting experiences on this question of the freedom of the press. First of all I must disclaim any particular grievance against the press for the way in which they have treated my campaign, or their reporting of my meetings on my recent tour. In fact, I found, strangely enough, that in this year of the greatest political tensions we have experienced an unusual hospitality to the Communists in the press of this country. Attempting to find a realistic explanation for this, I have been forced to the conclusion that

the extraordinary amount of space given to the Communist campaign has been due to the hope of a large section of the press that the Communists would say something or do something that could be used as a weapon between the two major contestants for the Presidency.

This leads me to an examination of what freedom of the press means as we see it exemplified in the relation between the press and the major candidates, and the voting population and the major candidates. Here I found a rather strange situation.

With the voters divided into two camps, approximately equal (I am ignoring for the sake of simplicity the negligible votes of Norman Thomas, Mr. Lemke and myself), with a slight advantage for the President, we see that freedom of the press brings the result that 90 per cent or thereabouts, of the daily papers are on one side. They are supporting Landon. This is worth noting, inasmuch as it shows that freedom of the press does not mean freedom of expression for the majority of the population of the country. It means freedom of expression for those people who happen to own certain stocks and bonds that represent ownership of particular newspapers. That is, it is freedom for some particular capitalists to express their interests and the interests of those with whom they are most closely associated.

Another observation about freedom of the press is that freedom of the press today, especially seems to be freedom to advocate and propagandize for the overthrow of the government of a friendly country. I find the largest part of the daily press of the United States is very actively supporting the attempt to overthrow the government of Spain, the duly elected democratic constitutional government of that country; that the press of the United States is a great subversive force for the overthrow of constitutional government, at least in so far as it relates to Spain.

I further found, when I reached Seattle on the 14th of August, just a day after the *Post-Intelligencer* had been closed by a strike, how freedom of the press was interpreted by those who have the exercise of that freedom. It meant the unlimited

authority of the owners of the press to discharge without any review any of their employees that they saw fit, even those who had been for fifteen years and more engaged in one particular job with complete satisfaction to the employer. It meant the right to refuse to a particular section of the population the right to organize, which has been established as a part of the public policy of the country.

As I rode down here today, I clipped from the *New York American* a couple of examples of what freedom of the press means. This leads me more directly into the politics of the election campaign. Here are two items which I give to you not as anything extraordinary but as typical of a great campaign that is being made in this country. Item No. 1, on page 7, headline, "America Being Communized, Says Publisher." Item No. 2, on the editorial page, a cartoon: "Man's Enemy—and God's, Communism on the Rampage."

I give you these two items as typical of the trend of a great body of thought in America today that is expressed in our free press, which we Communists consider the central question of the election campaign. There are two currents of newspaper propaganda: first, the charge that America is being communized through the Roosevelt administration; and second, the campaign against Communism as man's enemy and God's, something that is outlawed, outside the pale, to be destroyed by any possible means. These we consider typical of the first stage of the rise of fascism. This is exactly the propaganda that preceded Hitler's assumption of power in Germany. This is precisely the propaganda that prepared the fascist revolt in Spain. This propaganda, carried a step further in its logical development in America, would call for an attempt by these interests which are responsible for this propaganda to cancel the results of our coming elections if they should prove unfavorable.

I give you this thought for what it may be worth. If you can find evidence in the daily life that you come in contact with to support that thought, it will remain with you. If there is no evidence to support it, I have done no harm in raising the

question before your minds, which recalls to my mind the conversation I had with a certain newspaperman in a city that shall be unnamed and of a paper that we will not mention, who told me what freedom of the press meant for him.

He recently interviewed a big executive of one of the greatest corporations of America. In the course of the conversation he asked, "What will you do in case this administration to which you object so violently is returned by the voters?" This big executive said, "Well, we will not take it lying down." There is being prepared an organized attempt to resist the carrying through of the expressed will of the voters in 1936 if it goes contrary to the will of these big executives of industry.

I asked this gentleman why he didn't publish that interview. He said if he had so much as presented it to his editor he would have been fired, that this kind of thing, while freely talked, is off the record—off the record.

It is the purpose of the Communist Party in this present election campaign to put this issue on the record. We mean to bring this discussion, which goes on so freely in the hotel lobbies and the directors' rooms, if possible into the mass meetings of the voters and into the newspapers and on the radio. We consider this the central issue in 1936: the menace of fascism, the presence in America of a strong and growing body of fascist opinion which has behind it some of the most powerful figures in American finance, journalism and public life.

We see in this a direct menace to the interests and rights of the mass of the population. We see in it a threat to carry America down that same bloody road which so many European nations have already passed. We are not of the opinion that this danger is remote. We are living in a time of excessive speed of historical development. The radio and the airplane have speeded up our political development as well as our communications. The crisis which grips Europe at this moment is not unconnected with this fascist threat in the United States.

We Communists say the central issue before the country is whether it shall allow itself to be carried down this path of

reaction or whether there is still vitality enough in American democracy to protect itself from this threat and find a road which will give at least the rudiments of progress as expressed in higher living standards and democratic rights for the majority of the population.

It is this analysis of the forces and issues of the 1936 elections that caused the Communist Party to declare, in its platform, that the issue of capitalism versus socialism is not the issue in 1936. We have seen that the chief desire of the reactionary forces is to make this the issue. We have examined why this is their desire, why most reactionary forces want to make socialism the main issue, and we have come to the conclusion that they saw in this their greatest opportunity if successful, to demoralize the progressive forces of the country, break up their unity, and guarantee the victory of the reactionaries.

We therefore came to the conclusion that it is not the business of those who really stand for socialism in America, in a condition where powerful reactionary forces are threatening the country and in which the forces of socialism are very weak—it is not the business of those who advocate a new social order to make this socialism the issue of the 1936 campaign and thereby assist the reactionaries in their dishonest attempt to make socialism the issue.

We consider that it is necessary to make the issue, in so far as we are able, the gathering of all forces of democracy and progress into joint resistance to the threat of the reactionaries who would lead our country on the path of fascism. We do not think that this can be done successfully through the instrumentality of any existing party. That is why we are proposing the formation of a Farmer-Labor Party locally, on a state scale, and nationally.

Because it is too late to have a national Farmer-Labor ticket in the field, the Communists put forward their own independent ticket. We use the campaign in order to educate as much of the population as we can reach to the necessity for the building of this new political instrumentality, the Farmer-Labor

Party, which we conceive as a gathering of all the progressive forces of the country.

We consider that the present line-up of parties in America is artificial. It has no relation to the real issues before the country, and cannot last beyond the present election. We are certain that there is going to be such a complete political shake-up in this country that before another Presidential election comes around the Republican and Democratic parties, as at present existing, will not exist. They will be historic memories. We will probably be still carrying out the old American tradition of a two-party system, but in a new form. There may even be a multiplicity of political parties, but they will be grouped into two main alliances. One will represent the reactionaries, those who are driving toward fascism; the other will represent all the forces of progress in the country, the anti-fascist forces, the democratic forces, and in that term I include the Socialists and the Communists.

It is a popular superstition, which it is one of the main tasks of our Party to dispel, that the Communists are anti-democratic. This arises out of a vulgar interpretation of our slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the means of the transition to socialism. The Communists are not and have never been anti-democratic. The Communist program is only realizable through the fullest possible extension of democracy, and the realization of democracy on a scale which has not been dreamed of before in this country.

The Communist Party is not and has not been the advocate of force and violence. Perhaps one of the best historical examples which vividly gives you the true picture of who are the advocates of force and violence is the situation today in Spain. If, in the future history of America, there is a development of large-scale struggles of a violent character, let me declare categorically here that the responsibility will not rest with the Communist Party nor with the working class upon which the Communist Party bases itself in the first instance.

The responsibility for any such possible development in the future course of American politics will rest upon those same

groups and strata of the population which are carrying through this campaign that I spoke of—of America being Communized by the New Deal, and of Communism as man's enemy and God's. These are the people who are preparing violent chapters for American political history. The political camp that they represent, which is gathered around the candidate Landon, and is supported by the du Pont family, Morgan, Mellon and most of the big monopolists of this country, is the camp of Fascism.

*Speech delivered before three hundred Washington correspondents at luncheon of the National Press Club, August 26, 1936.*