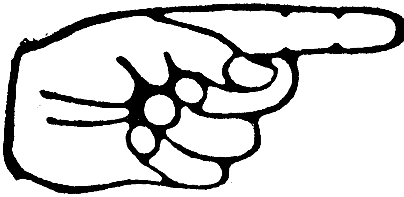


What He Was and What He Did —1

The late Joseph R. McCarthy, a United States Senator from Wisconsin, was in many ways the most gifted demagogue ever bred on these shores. No bolder seditionist ever moved among us—nor any politician with a surer, swifter access to the dark places of the American mind.

The major phase of McCarthy's career was mercifully short. It began in 1950, three years after he had taken his seat in the Senate, where he had seemed a dim and inconsiderable figure. It ended in 1954, when the Senate passed a resolution of censure against him. That was three years before his death at the age of forty-eight. Both his rise and his

fall were accomplished with breath-taking speed. At the start of 1950, he was a jackstraw in Washington. Then he discovered Communism—almost by inadvertence, as Columbus discovered America, as James Marshall discovered California gold. By the spring of the year, he was a towering figure, and from then on, except for a few brief weeks early in that summer, no man was closer than he to the center of American consciousness or more central to the world's consciousness of America. He filled, almost to the letter, the classic role of the corsair of democracy, described twenty-four hundred years ago by Aristophanes, who in *The Knights* had Demosthenes describe the future of an incredulous sausage-seller in whose very coarseness and vulgarity the great connoisseur of both irony and integrity discerned "a promise and an inward consciousness of greatness":

> Now mean and unregarded; but tomorrow
> The mightiest of the mighty, Lord of Athens. . . .
>
> The sovereign and ruler of them all,
> Of the assemblies and tribunals, fleets and armies;
> You shall trample down the Senate under foot
> Confound and crush the generals and commanders.

Through the first part of the decade, McCarthy was all of these things, and then he found the Senate and the generals and commanders rising up against him, and he collapsed. His decline was more difficult to account for than his ascent. He suffered defeats but not destruction. Nothing of a really fatal consequence had happened. He was in a long and sweaty rumble before television cameras in the spring; in the late summer, a Senate committee recommended that he be cen-

sured; and in the winter he was censured—or, in the language of the resolution, "condemned" for conduct that "tended to bring the Senate into dishonor and disrepute." But other Senators, less powerful than he, had been censured and gone on to greater triumphs—among them, an earlier Senator from Wisconsin, Robert M. La Follette, whose son and namesake McCarthy had defeated in 1946. (In the year of McCarthy's death, the Senate voted the elder and censured La Follette one of the five greatest men ever to grace the chamber, the other four being Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, John C. Calhoun, and Robert A. Taft.) Still he had five years on stage, and he was at stage center almost all of that time. He walked, then, with a heavy tread over large parts of the Constitution of the United States, and he cloaked his own gross figure in the sovereignty it asserts and the powers it distributes. He usurped executive and judicial authority whenever the fancy struck him. It struck him often.

He held two Presidents captive—or as nearly captive as any Presidents of the United States have ever been held; in their conduct of the nation's affairs, Harry S Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, from early 1950 through late 1954, could never act without weighing the effect of their plans upon McCarthy and the forces he led, and in consequence there were times when, because of this man, they could not act at all. He had enormous impact on American foreign policy at a time when that policy bore heavily on the course of world history, and American diplomacy might bear a different aspect today if McCarthy had never lived. In the Senate, his headquarters and his hiding place, he assumed the functions of the

Committee of the Whole; he lived in thoroughgoing contempt of the Congress of which he was a member, of the rules it had made for itself, and—whenever they ran contrary to his purposes—of the laws it had enacted for the general welfare.

At the start of 1950, McCarthy was an empty vessel to the general public outside Wisconsin. There he was known as a cheap politician of vulgar, flamboyant ways and a casual approach to the public interest. It is unlikely that one in a hundred Americans knew of his existence. He was a voice making no sound in the wilderness. Then, on February 9, 1950, he made a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, in the course of which he said that the Department of State was full of Communists and that he and the Secretary of State knew their names. Later there was some dispute (there was always dispute whenever he said anything) as to whether he had stated that there were 205, 81, 57, or "a lot" of Communists, but the number was of slight importance alongside what he insisted was the fact that Communists "known to the Secretary of State" were "still working and making policy." A Senate committee was immediately appointed to look into his startling assertions. It was the first of five investigations, held by four different committees, to be concerned exclusively with the problem of whether Senator McCarthy was telling the truth about others or, *mutatis mutandis,* others were telling the truth about Senator McCarthy. In the spring of 1950, only the first question was considered. Through March and April and May, when Communist power in the Far East was being mobilized for the war in Korea, life in Washington, political life in the United States, seemed largely a matter of determin-

ing whether American diplomacy was in the hands of traitors.

Little of importance was learned except that McCarthy had little of importance to say. He had been talking through his hat; if there were Communists in the State Department, he did not know who they were. Nevertheless, he had cued himself in. The lights played over him. Eyes were upon him. The show was his. Within a matter of weeks, his name was known and heard everywhere, and his heavy, menacing countenance was familiar to newspaper readers, to moviegoers, to television viewers everywhere. Henceforth it would be hard to find anyone who was *un*aware of him.

And he became, quickly, an eponym. Barely a month after Wheeling, "McCarthyism" was coined by Herbert Block, the cartoonist who signs himself "Herblock" in the Washington *Post*. The word was an oath at first—a synonym for the hatefulness of baseless defamation, or mudslinging. (In the Herblock cartoon, "McCarthyism" was crudely lettered on a barrel of mud, which teetered on a tower of ten buckets of the stuff.) Later it became, for some, an affirmation. The term survives both as oath and as affirmation—not very usefully as either, one is bound to say—and has far broader applications than at first. Now it is evocative of an almost undifferentiated evil to a large number of Americans and of a positive good to a somewhat smaller number. To the one, whatever is illiberal, repressive, reactionary, obscurantist, anti-intellectual, totalitarian, or merely swinish will for some time to come be McCarthyism, while to the other it means nothing more or less than a militant patriotism. "To many Americans, McCarthyism is Americanism," Fulton Lewis, Jr., a radio com-

mentator and the official McCarthyite muezzin, said. Once the word caught on, McCarthy himself became intrigued with it. "McCarthyism is Americanism with its sleeves rolled," he told a Wisconsin audience in 1952, and, sure enough, there was the eponym, with his hairy arms bare to the biceps. That year he published a book of snippets from his speeches and his testimony before committees, and it bore the modest title of *McCarthyism: The Fight for America.* There is injustice as well as imprecision in both meanings; if patriotism can hardly be reduced to tracking down Marxists in the pastry kitchens of the Pentagon or the bindery of the Government Printing Office, neither is the late Senator's surname to be placed at the center of all the constellations of political unrighteousness. He was not, for example, totalitarian in any significant sense, or even reactionary. These terms apply mainly to the social and economic order, and the social and economic order didn't interest him in the slightest. If he was anything at all in the realm of ideas, principles, doctrines, he was a species of nihilist; he was an essentially destructive force, a revolutionist without any revolutionary vision, a rebel without a cause.

It is pointless, though, to quarrel with words. They acquire a life and a history of their own, and we have little choice but to accept them and seek understanding. It is simply a measure of McCarthy's impact on our society that he stamped with his name a whole cluster of tendencies in American life—some of them as distant as the stars from any concern or responsibility of his. Once, Brooks Atkinson, the theater critic of the New York *Times,* held McCarthy and McCarthyism

responsible for a bad season on Broadway. He said McCarthy had driven all good playwrights to silence or triviality. And in the New York *Herald Tribune* for May 25, 1952, at the height of that green season in which college boys are in the habit of laying siege to college girls' dormitories, the following headline appeared:

RABBI BLAMES MC CARTHYISM IN COLLEGE RAIDS
He Says Danger of Voicing Dissent on
Big Issues Makes Campus Restless

This was madness, of course, and if it can be said that the Rabbi in question* would have been the sort to blame the rape of the Sabines on the lack of outing clubs, bowling alleys, ceramics classes, and square dances in Alba and Lavinium, it was nevertheless a tribute to McCarthyism's actual force and impact that this divine conceived his extraordinary theory. It was an even greater tribute to it that such a newspaper as the *Herald Tribune* would regard this particular sermon as worthy of notice in its sober pages.

In time, the whole world took notice of Senator McCarthy. "In all countries they know of him, and in all tongues they speak of him," Adlai Stevenson said after a trip to almost all countries. in 1953. In Western Europe as well as in Eastern,

* The story stated that the rabbi "attributed the current dormitory 'raids' by college students to 'McCarthyism,' which, he said, makes serious discussion and dissent on major issues dangerous. 'A vast silence has descended upon young men and women today in the colleges of our country, and they find an expression for their bottled-up energies in foolish and unseemly "raids" upon dormitories.' " And more of the same.

in much of Asia and Africa, in Latin America and the Antipodes, McCarthy and McCarthyism stood for all that was held to be evil in American foreign policy and for much that was found to be disagreeable in American life. In many places, McCarthy was looked upon as being, in and of himself, an instrumentality in the affairs of nations. The *Times* of London, a journal of almost spectacular sobriety, observed once that "the fears and suspicions which center around the personality of Senator McCarthy are now real enough to count as an essential factor in policy-making for the West." Therefore, it went on, with fierce British logic, "McCarthy has become the direct concern of the United States' allies." The *Times* made him sound as though he were nuclear fission or massive retaliation, and it was by no means alone in its estimate of him. Sir Winston Churchill became sufficiently exercised to write an eloquent anti-McCarthy passage into Elizabeth II's Coronation speech.

From a distance, McCarthy may have looked, by some odd reversal of optical principles, larger than life and of greater consequence than he ever really was. But he was large and consequential enough in those years, and he was, in any case, the first American ever to be discussed and described as being himself a menace to the comity of nations and the strength of alliances. He was the first American ever to be actively hated and feared by foreigners in large numbers.

In Washington and in all the country west of Washington, he was a fertile innovator, a first-rate organizer and galvanizer of mobs, a skilled manipulator of public opinion, and something like a genius at that essential American strategy: pub-

licity. He was by no means the first man to use Senatorial immunity or the investigative power of Congress for selfish and unworthy ends, but he was surely the cleverest; he did more with them than any other man had done before him. And he exploited the American party system in brilliant and daring ways—while being himself beyond partisanship, beyond all the established values of the system and all of its established practices. He was a Republican who had started as a Democrat and had made his first run for office as a supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt. He became, *pro forma,* a Republican in 1939 and as such won election to the Senate, seven years and a World War later. He brought himself to national attention in 1950, in the weeks after the Wheeling speech, by accusing the Democratic administration of conniving with and being supported by Communists. ("The Democratic label is now the property of men and women who have . . . bent to the whispered pleas from the lips of traitors . . . men and women who wear the political label stitched with the idiocy of a Truman, rotted by the deceit of a [Dean] Acheson, corrupted by the red slime of a [Harry Dexter] White." I fear I shall subject the reader to a good deal of unpleasant rhetoric.) The Democratic years, he said, when they were almost over, had been "twenty years of treason." Then his own party took office, with Dwight Eisenhower as President. McCarthy proclaimed the end of subversion in government. But intimations, allegations, accusations of treason were the meat upon which this Caesar fed. He could never swear off. He accused the administration he had helped bring to power of a "weak, immoral, and cowardly" foreign

policy, of "appeasement, retreat, and surrender" before Communism, and of having "perpetrated a fraud on the American people." By early 1954, he had extended treason's reign to "twenty-one years."

It tends now to be forgotten that McCarthy was almost as successful in immobilizing the Truman administration as he later was in demoralizing the successor government. Truman denounced McCarthy, though more frequently and more boldly after he had left the White House than before, but he could never ignore him or disregard his large presence on Capitol Hill. McCarthy's attacks on Truman ("The son of a bitch ought to be impeached," he told a press conference in 1951, after Truman's recall of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur from his Far Eastern commands) and on the executive branch under Truman forced the administration into a series of defensive actions that used up vast stores of time, energy, and credit with the public. Dean Acheson, Truman's Secretary of State, spent a large part of 1950 and the ensuing years explaining to Elks, Moose, Women Voters, Legionnaires, Steel Workers, and the rest that he was not corrupt, that he was opposed to Communism, and that he did not hire traitors. To prove its virtue, the State Department hired John Foster Dulles and fired a number of career officers McCarthy had been attacking. When Acheson was not fending off blows before Congressional committees, he was conducting American foreign policy, which became largely a matter of assuring allies and potential allies that McCarthy really wasn't running the show in Washington, despite contrary appearances. It was difficult. "No American official

who has represented this government abroad in great affairs, not even Wilson in 1918, has ever been so gravely injured at home," Walter Lippmann wrote in 1950.

The Truman administration had to be defensive and cautious, for it knew, as the Republicans at first did not, that McCarthyism was a bipartisan doctrine. It penetrated large sections of the Democratic Party and led to much disaffection (or, better perhaps, it fed on an already burgeoning disaffection). "How do people feel about McCarthy these days?" the Republican Senator from Massachusetts, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., asked the Democratic Governor of Massachusetts, Paul A. Dever. "Your people don't think much of him," Dever said, "but I'm afraid mine do." The Gallup Poll once tested his strength in various occupational groups and found that he had more admirers among manual workers than in any other category—and fewest among business and professional people. If the Democratic President, from the relative safety of the White House, could be relatively free with denunciations, many other Democrats found it imprudent ever to join him. Paul Douglas, of Illinois, the possessor of the most cultivated mind in the Senate and a man whose courage and integrity would compare favorably with any other American's, went through the last Truman years and the first Eisenhower years without ever addressing himself to the problem of McCarthy. Senator John Kennedy, of Massachusetts, the author of *Profiles in Courage,* a book on political figures who had battled strong and sometimes prevailing winds of opinion and doctrine, did likewise. Maurice Tobin, Truman's Secretary of Labor, once went to a Veterans of Foreign Wars conven-

tion with an anti-McCarthy speech in his pocket; sensing a pro-McCarthy climate of opinion, he left it in his pocket and talked of other matters.

In 1952, there were many people not much enchanted by the Republican Party who favored it on the ground that if the Democrats were maintained in power, they would be forever at McCarthy's mercy. The Democrats would be driven on to further demonstrations of their anti-Communist zeal, and some of these had already been ridiculous. In 1951, for example, in the course of the Senate hearings on Far Eastern policy, Dean Acheson and his immediate predecessor, General of the Army George Catlett Marshall—both of them under savage attack by McCarthy—testified that they would never so much as *consider* the recognition of Communist China or support of its admission to the United Nations. They assured the Senate that the very idea of recognition was so abhorrent to them and to other American diplomats that it was never even *discussed* in the Department of State, which simply was not the truth. Pressed further, they made a pledge, which they were in no position to keep, that the United States would never offer recognition. Deception, stupidity, stubbornness, and a commitment in perpetuity—these were the lengths to which McCarthy and McCarthyism drove these intelligent men.

On this account, many people felt that the threat he posed could be better handled by his own party. "It is this newspaper's hope and belief that McCarthyism would disappear overnight if Eisenhower were elected," the Washington *Post* said on March 24, 1952. The hope and the belief were ill-

founded. Eisenhower was elected, and within two months McCarthy was harvesting surrenders on every hand, and the *Post* was begging the administration to remember "that the voice of McCarthy is not the voice of America." To a degree, though, events did seem to justify the *Post*'s view. In 1953, for example, the administration negotiated an armistice in Korea that the Democrats would almost certainly have been unable to accept—because it would have given McCarthy additional grounds for impugning their loyalty. "I would have been crucified for that armistice," Harry Truman said.

The paralysis Harry Truman suffered, though, was as nothing compared to that which in a short time overcame President Eisenhower, who had to suffer it in silence, at least through his first two years in office. Eisenhower had been forced into a large surrender even before he was elected. He had from the start looked upon McCarthy as a cad, a guttersnipe, and he had planned a small gesture of defiance and dissociation. He would go into McCarthy's Wisconsin and speak a few warm and affectionate words about his old chief and patron, General Marshall, whom McCarthy had all but called a traitor. ("A man steeped in falsehood . . . who has recourse to the lie whenever it suits his convenience . . . [part of] a conspiracy so immense and an infamy so black as to dwarf any previous venture in the history of man . . . [one in whose activities can be seen] a pattern which finds his decision maintained with great stubbornness and skill, always and invariably serving the world policy of the Kremlin.") Learning of Eisenhower's plans to dispute this view of Marshall—and trembling at what they were certain was the prospect of Mc-

Carthy's fury—the party leaders in Wisconsin and half a dozen other Republican politicians pleaded with him to omit that part of his speech, which he did. (In fairness, the President did, on other occasions, stoutly defend General Marshall.) McCarthy's victory was made sweeter by the fact that he himself had played no part in gaining it. He had let it be known that Eisenhower could say whatever he pleased about Marshall and that he, McCarthy, couldn't care less. He even offered to remove himself from the Eisenhower campaign train in Wisconsin if that would make the General feel any better. But so great was the fear of him that Eisenhower gave in, even though McCarthy had magnanimously said that this would not be necessary.

In 1953, the very thought of Joe McCarthy could shiver the White House timbers and send panic through the whole executive branch. I remember once, in about the middle of that year, calling upon one of the President's assistants, a man who seemed to me then, as he does today, to be well above the average in courage and candor. I had gone in search of enlightenment on a number of things, most of them as unrelated to McCarthy as it was possible for anything to be in those days. We had a friendly enough talk and toward the end of it I brought up Topic A—and of course offered the customary assurances that I would not make use of anything he said in such a way as to embarrass him or make his life more difficult than it already was. At the mention of McCarthy, his whole manner and expression changed; though he did not move from his chair or put his palms together, he assumed, figuratively, and on his face quite literally, a sup-

plicating mien. I have no record of the exact words he used, but I have a painfully vivid memory of them. "Don't ask me," he said. "For God's sake, please don't ask me to discuss this. Not now. I'll help you as much as I possibly can, I'll talk about anything else you want. Anything. Just don't press me on this. Don't even ask me why I don't want to talk about it. Maybe someday we can talk it all over, but not now. Accept my word that my reasons are good." I have not before or since seen a grown man in a responsible position behave in such a fashion. I had the feeling that if I had made an issue of it, I might have persuaded him to see what he could do—in exchange for my promise not again to say "McCarthy" in his presence—to get me an ambassadorship or even to declassify the recipe for the hydrogen bomb. The mere mention of the Senator from Wisconsin, the mere possibility of being compelled to discuss him, had reduced this sturdy man to jelly.

McCarthyism rampant managed, for a time, to make politics in America seem almost entirely a matter of idiotic chatter about "loyalty risks" and "security risks." In the early part of the Eisenhower administration, a visitor from another civilization would have been forced to conclude that in the United States the measure of political virtue was the number of unworthy civil servants a government managed to dismiss. The proudest boast the administration's apologists could make was that in the first four months 1,456 federal workers had been dropped under the "Eisenhower security program." Reporting on his first year's stewardship, in his 1954 State of the Union message, the President announced a grander

total—2,200. And the Democrats, instead of raising a standard to which people of elementary common sense and decency might repair, boasted that they had done just as well or better when they were in power. The parties seldom argued over the number of gifted people brought into the government; the test was how many rotten apples each had been able to find. "We're kicking the Communists and fellow travelers and security risks out of the Government . . . by the thousands," the Vice-President of the United States said. It happened to be a fact that not one certifiable Communist had been disclosed as working for the government—though quite possibly there were a few. But this was not the worst of it. The worst was that McCarthy and McCarthyism had led us to think that the health of the state was war against clerks of dubious patriotism.

Back in those melancholy days, many people not easily given to alarm feared that a day might come when McCarthy would not be breaking the laws but proclaiming them. World War II was not far in the past, and comparisons with Adolf Hitler came readily to mind. "When I think of McCarthy, I automatically think of Hitler," President Eisenhower's banker brother, Arthur, once said, to the consternation of the White House. "McCarthy's methods, to me, look like Hitler's," Eleanor Roosevelt wrote. Joseph C. Harsch reported in 1953 that when Germans thought about McCarthy, they found "a release from [their] own sense of guilt about Hitler," and in Düsseldorf, Hjalmar Schacht, Hitler's financial prestidigitator, said to John Emmet Hughes, an adviser to Eisenhower, "Per-

haps now you realize it is not so easy for a people to get rid of a demagogue just by wishing him to go away—no?" The comparisons were natural and not wholly without justice. Like Hitler, McCarthy was a screamer, a political thug, a master of the mob, an exploiter of popular fears. He used the fear of Bolshevism as Hitler used it, with the difference that Hitler described Communism as a revolutionary menace to the state, while McCarthy described it as a conspiracy that had already achieved some of the ends it prized the most. McCarthy was not anti-Semitic, but in his demonology the Democratic leaders, the liberal intelligentsia, and a supposedly decadent Eastern aristocracy played the accomplice role that Hitler assigned to the Jews.

To be sure, there were points, and crucial ones, at which contrast was more striking than comparison. Hitler had a program for the coming millennium; McCarthy had no program for tomorrow morning. Hitler's aim was to win control of the machinery of the state; it is still arguable as to whether McCarthy was up to anything of quite this magnitude. He never encouraged direct action by his followers; he did not organize uniformed groups or even raggle-taggle street fighters. Politically, he never tried to organize outside the existing party structure, and there are reasons for supposing that he never intended to do so. But he built within the system a large and dedicated following. It was larger than that of any demagogue of the past and the first movement of its kind ever to be national in scope. Though this country has produced many demagogues of proficiency, none of them, before Mc-

Carthy, had more than a regional or sectarian power.* Huey Long of Louisiana seemed on the verge of winning a national following when Dr. Carl A. Weiss's bullet found him in 1935, and Father Charles E. Coughlin of Michigan might have led a formidable movement if he had not been silenced by his ecclesiastical superiors at the start of the war. But neither of them made it, and neither of them had anything like McCarthy's influence on American life and institutions.

Because McCarthyism had no real grit and substance as a doctrine and no organization, it is difficult to deal with as a movement. Adherence was of many different sorts. There were those who accepted McCarthy's leadership and would have been happy to see him President. There were others who were indifferent to his person but receptive to what he had to say about the government. There were others still who put no particular stock in what he had to say and even believed it largely nonsense but felt that he was valuable anyway.

McCarthy drew into his following most of the zanies and zombies and compulsive haters who had followed earlier and lesser demagogues in the fascist and semifascist movements of the thirties and forties. At a typical McCarthy rally, there would be, seated in the front rows, thanks to early arrival,

* In *The American Democrat,* published in 1828, James Fenimore Cooper wrote as if a demagogue was almost by definition a spokesman for a local interest against the common good. The only types he discussed—in a generally brilliant essay—were "the town demagogue" and "the county demagogue."

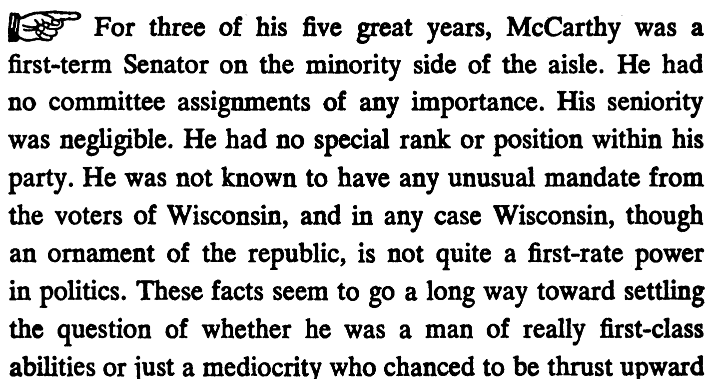
numbers of moon-struck souls wearing badges or carrying placards identifying them as Minute Women of the U.S.A., Sons of I Shall Return, members of the Alert Council for America, the Nationalist Action League, We the Mothers Mobilize, the Republoform, and so on. They knew all the words of "Nobody Loves Joe but the Pee-pul," and if this anthem was sung, their voices, generally on the shrill or reedy side, would be heard above the rest. But this was really the least part of it. McCarthy went far beyond the world of the daft and the frenzied—or, to put the matter another way, that world was greatly enlarged while he was about. Into it came large numbers of regular Republicans who had coolly decided that there was no longer any respectable way of unhorsing the Democrats and that only McCarthy's wild and conscienceless politics could do the job. He built, as Samuel Lubell pointed out in *Revolt of the Moderates,* a coalition of the aggrieved—of men and women not deranged but deeply affronted by various tendencies over the preceding two or three decades: toward internationalism, and, in particular, toward closer ties with the British; toward classlessness; toward the welfare state. There were Roman Catholics, particularly those of Irish descent, who saw in this aggressive Hibernian the flaming avenger of their own humiliations of the past and who could not believe that the criticism he provoked was based on anything but hatred of his Church and his name. To these and many others he was a symbol of rebellion. And beyond all this, he simply persuaded a number of people that he was speaking the essential truth; he sent

up such vast and billowing clouds of smoke that many men and women who were not abnormally gullible became convinced that there must be a fire beneath it all.

In his following, there were many people who counted for quite a bit in American life—some because of wealth and power, some because of intelligence and political sophistication. He was an immediate hit among the Texas oilmen, many of whom were figures as bizarre and adventurous in the world of commerce and finance as he was in the world of politics. They liked his wildcatting style, and they liked him, and they hurried to contribute up to the legal limit to any campaign he approved, to shower him with Cadillacs and other baubles, and to compete for his presence at their parties, their hunts for white-winged doves, and other exotic entertainments favored by people whose income for a week may exceed that of many men for a lifetime. And there were intellectuals and intellectuals *manque* whose notions of *Realpolitik* had room for just such a man of action as McCarthy. Some of them, like James Burnham, John Chamberlain, Max Eastman, and William F. Buckley, Jr., were far from being fools. (Buckley, the editor of the *National Review,* linked the worlds of money and intellect; his father was in oil, and he was in writing, and in a book that makes an interesting souvenir of the period, *McCarthy and His Enemies,* which he wrote with L. Brent Bozell, he and his co-author made the breath-taking assertion that "McCarthyism . . . is a movement around which men of good will and stern morality can close ranks.") At any rate, the fools and the non-fools contributed mightily to his following, which *was* mighty, and there was a time when just about

everyone who depended upon the favor of the people lived in fear of him because they believed that a hostile word from him would be a marching order to millions.

In January 1954, when the record was pretty well all in and the worst as well as the best was known, the researches of the Gallup Poll indicated that 50 per cent of the American people had a generally "favorable opinion" of him and felt that he was serving the country in useful ways. Twenty-one per cent drew a blank—"no opinion." The conscious, though not necessarily active, opposition—those with an "unfavorable opinion"—was 29 per cent. A "favorable opinion" did not make a man a McCarthyite, and millions were shortly to revise their view to his disadvantage. But an opposition of only 29 per cent is not much to count on, and it was small wonder that his contemporaries feared him. It was a melancholy time, and the Chief Justice of the United States was probably right when he said that if the Bill of Rights were put to a vote, it would lose.



For three of his five great years, McCarthy was a first-term Senator on the minority side of the aisle. He had no committee assignments of any importance. His seniority was negligible. He had no special rank or position within his party. He was not known to have any unusual mandate from the voters of Wisconsin, and in any case Wisconsin, though an ornament of the republic, is not quite a first-rate power in politics. These facts seem to go a long way toward settling the question of whether he was a man of really first-class abilities or just a mediocrity who chanced to be thrust upward

by a current of the times. What power he had in those first three years, he generated, it seems to me, almost wholly within himself. He was not the only man riding that current; there were a half-dozen others in the Senate and a great many more outside it. But it was McCarthy who had mastered it and given it his name *before* he had any significant power in government or in party affairs. More or less on his own, he was able to make himself a central issue in the 1952 Presidential campaign, to make himself known on every continent, and even to make the New York *Herald Tribune* mistake him for a force of nature.

On January 3, 1953, his own party took office, and he found himself, technically and temporarily, a member of the government rather than of the opposition. From then on, the situation became slightly more complicated.

When the Republicans organized the Senate, McCarthy, who was just beginning his second term, became chairman of the Committee on Government Operations and of its Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. Thereafter, the chairmanship was the principal pinion of his power, though far from its principal source. The Committee had broad statutory power to investigate the functioning of every part of the executive branch. McCarthy would doubtless have seized the authority anyway, but it was better and easier to have the law on his side, and, also, the Committee had a staff and appropriations, which he was able to use effectively.

One of his most striking instruments was a secret seditionist cabal he had organized within the government. This was a network of government servants and members of the armed

forces ("the Loyal American Underground," some of the proud, defiant members called themselves) who, in disregard of their oaths of office and the terms of their contracts with the taxpayers, reported directly to McCarthy and gave him their first loyalty. There were members of the State Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Civil Service Commission, and other agencies who supplied him with information they had withheld from those to whom they were by law responsible. There were Army officers who acted upon his instructions rather than upon those of their superiors and their commander in chief, the President. Promised McCarthy's protection, they ran the risks of court-martial, and these were sometimes large. In one well-documented case, the subject of reams of testimony in the Army-McCarthy hearings of 1954, an officer in Army Intelligence, or G-2, turned over to McCarthy parts of a communication from the FBI to G-2 relating to security matters in the Army Signal Corps radar laboratories. On the face of it, this was a violation of the espionage laws, which make it a crime to deliver such information to unauthorized persons and a crime, too, for unauthorized persons deliberately to receive such information. During the hearings, an ingenious effort was made—not by McCarthy, but in his behalf—to prove that he was, by virtue of his position as a Senator, an authorized person, but the argument had more ingenuity than soundness, and at all odds he had turned the material over to members of his staff, two members of which had sought and been refused clearance to examine classified material.

McCarthy himself was unconcerned with the question of

whether he or his informant had violated the laws. His interest was in keeping his organization intact, and he was able to make good on his promises of protection. So far as is currently known, no one was ever betrayed by him, or by anyone connected with him, for the delivery of information. In the hearings this colloquy took place:

SENATOR DIRKSEN [Everett Dirksen, of Illinois]: Senator McCarthy, is it unusual or extraordinary for confidential documents to come to you either as chairman of the Senate Permanent Investigation Subcommittee or as an individual Senator?

SENATOR MCCARTHY: It's a daily and nightly occurrence for me to receive information from people in government.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: And that's true of many agencies of government?

SENATOR MCCARTHY: That is true. Very true.

Nothing was ever true merely because McCarthy said it, but for this boast there was ample confirmation. And beyond this, McCarthy, now openly the seditionist, said:

I will continue to receive information. . . . That will be my policy. There's no power on earth can change that. Again, I want to compliment individuals [who] give me information even though some little bureaucrat has stamped it "secret" to defend himself. . . . None of them, none of them will be brought before a grand jury because of any information which I give. . . . I would like to notify two million federal employees that it is their duty to give us the information they have about graft, corruption, Communists, and treason, and that there is no loyalty to a superior officer that can tower above their loyalty to their country. . . . I just will not abide by any secrecy directive of anyone.

L'état, c'est moi, legibus solutus, and I Am the Law. He and the country were one and the same, synonymous and interchangeable, and not in his view only, but in that of many people who had been given sizable public trusts. In the McCarthy years, the United States government often seemed, as Senator Stuart Symington, of Missouri, once said, "a bloody sieve."

It may well be that the Communists, who provided an excuse and a putative adversary for the McCarthy underground, had at one time a network larger than his and of even darker intent. But his was unique in our time and perhaps in all our history for the loyalty it gave one man.*

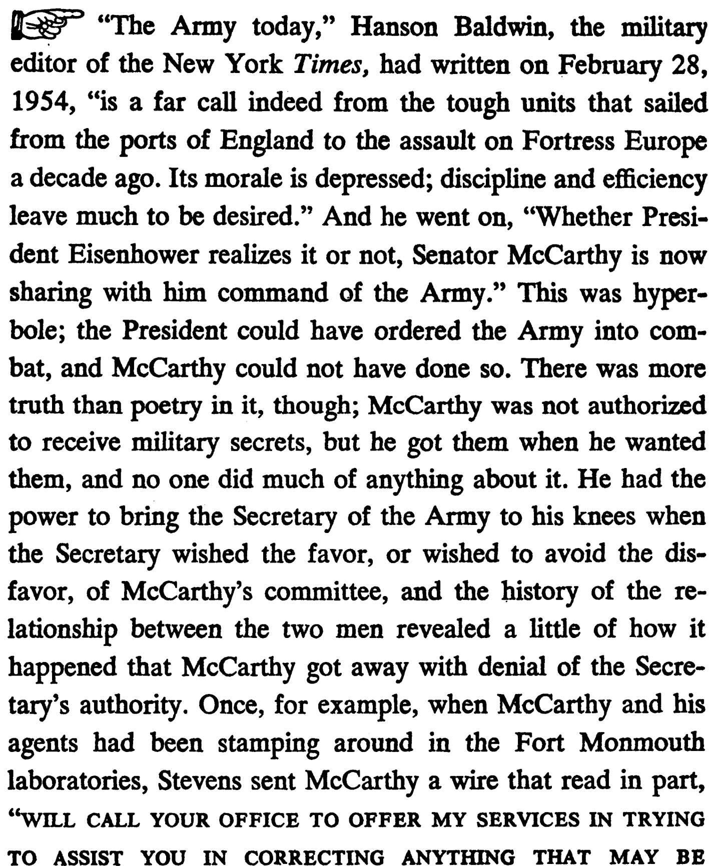
"I just will not abide by any secrecy directive of anyone." Of course he would not, for there was no authority outside himself. No directives on secrecy or anything else had any force in his system of non-values. Men might be duly elected or appointed to fulfill responsibilities fixed by the Constitu-

* "Loyalty" is not, perhaps, the word to be applied to every one of his collaborators. Some undoubtedly were malcontents, injustice-collectors, who tattled to him in order to get revenge on certain colleagues. And fear was the spur in some cases. That is to say, there were people feeding McCarthy information who were not, properly speaking, McCarthyites but who felt that co-operation was a kind of job insurance. Some had seen how weak the executive agencies were in protecting themselves against McCarthy's offensives, and they reasoned, as bureaucrats will, indeed as human beings of almost every sort will, that discretion was the better part of valor—or that collaboration was better than valor. As James Reston of the New York *Times* wrote, government officials are accustomed to "identifying themselves with the people who protect them, and if they cannot count on protection from the heads of their own departments, they seek it through association with the McCarthys."

tion or by statute; their credentials might be in perfect order; they might be empowered by the President of the United States to speak in his behalf—but to McCarthy they had no power save that which he chose to accord them or that which they were able to wrest from him. At the start of the Army-McCarthy hearings in 1954, it suited his purpose to contend that the Secretary of the Army, the Counselor to the Department of Defense, and the Counselor to the Department of the Army pretended to an authority they did not have. Before the first witness had been called, he raised his first "point of order," which was that the brief that had been described as "Filed by the Department of the Army" was falsely labeled. It was only, he said, the work of a "few Pentagon politicians attempting to disrupt our investigation [and] naming themselves the Department of the Army. . . . The Department of the Army is not doing this. It is three civilians in the Army, and they should be so named." He did not contend that someone other than Robert Ten Broeck Stevens was the true Secretary of the Army or that the President's appointment of Stevens had been in some way nullified; he simply stated that the fact that a man holds his position by the designation of the chief magistrate, with the concurrence of the Senate, which is the way it is prescribed in the basic charter of American liberties, was a matter of no concern to him. He said:

> I maintain it is a disgrace and a reflection upon every one of the million outstanding men in the Army to let a few civilians who are trying . . . to hold up an investigation of Communists [there was no such investigation taking place] label themselves as the Department of the Army.

And such was the power of this subversive that Senator Karl Mundt, of South Dakota, ruled that the question of whether the Secretary of the Army could speak for the Department of the Army might properly be set aside until the Secretary took the witness stand.



☞ "The Army today," Hanson Baldwin, the military editor of the New York *Times,* had written on February 28, 1954, "is a far call indeed from the tough units that sailed from the ports of England to the assault on Fortress Europe a decade ago. Its morale is depressed; discipline and efficiency leave much to be desired." And he went on, "Whether President Eisenhower realizes it or not, Senator McCarthy is now sharing with him command of the Army." This was hyperbole; the President could have ordered the Army into combat, and McCarthy could not have done so. There was more truth than poetry in it, though; McCarthy was not authorized to receive military secrets, but he got them when he wanted them, and no one did much of anything about it. He had the power to bring the Secretary of the Army to his knees when the Secretary wished the favor, or wished to avoid the disfavor, of McCarthy's committee, and the history of the relationship between the two men revealed a little of how it happened that McCarthy got away with denial of the Secretary's authority. Once, for example, when McCarthy and his agents had been stamping around in the Fort Monmouth laboratories, Stevens sent McCarthy a wire that read in part, "WILL CALL YOUR OFFICE TO OFFER MY SERVICES IN TRYING TO ASSIST YOU IN CORRECTING ANYTHING THAT MAY BE

WRONG." He who abdicates is lost when there is a McCarthy about. In McCarthy's most celebrated campaign of harassment, when he was trying to make a patsy of Brigadier General Ralph Zwicker, an old comrade-in-arms of the President, former Chief of Staff of the Second Infantry, and one of the heroes of the Battle of the Bulge, McCarthy forced Stevens to change his position from the bold declaration that

> I have directed [General] Zwicker not to appear before Senator McCarthy on Tuesday in New York. . . . I cannot permit the loyal officers of our Armed Forces to such unwarranted treatment

to

> If the Committee decides to call General Zwicker . . . General Zwicker will be available.

The "unwarranted treatment" to which Stevens decided to subject General Zwicker after all was such talk as this by McCarthy:

> You are a disgrace to the uniform. You're shielding Communist conspirators. You're not fit to be an officer. You're ignorant. You are going to be put on public display next Tuesday.

Between his first and second statements, Stevens—the holder of a proud office, graced in the past by James Monroe, John C. Calhoun, Lewis Cass, Edwin M. Stanton, Ulysses Grant, Elihu Root, William Howard Taft, and Henry L. Stimson—had lunched with McCarthy, the Vice-President, and several other Senators. "Stevens," McCarthy was reported to have said later, "could not have given in more abjectly if he

had got down on his knees." (Under oath, at the Army-McCarthy hearings, he denied ever having said this. His denials were as meaningless as his avouchments, and reputable journalists heard him.) The *Times* of London, when it got word of this affair, echoed Hanson Baldwin. "Senator McCarthy," it said, "achieved today what General Burgoyne and General Cornwallis never achieved—the surrender of the American Army."

It went on all the time in 1953 and early 1954. McCarthy had the Chief of Intelligence, Major General Richard C. Partridge, before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, and in an executive session, with McCarthy the only Senator present, questioned by the Chief Counsel, Roy M. Cohn. (They wanted to know why someone in Partridge's office had listed a book by Corliss Lamont, a writer sympathetic to Communism, in the bibliography of a G-2 study of *Cultural and Psychological Traits of Soviet Siberia.* They also wanted to know on what authority the author had said that the Siberian masses were not likely to become anti-Communist soon.) The General displeased McCarthy and Cohn, which was a way most generals had at the time; McCarthy said he was "shocked beyond words" (words were one thing he was never shocked beyond) by the way the officer had testified and that he considered him "completely incompetent" for the job. Robert Stevens was at the hearing, and General Partridge shortly thereafter found himself a divisional commander somewhere in Europe.

On the other side of the gleaming coin, there was Major General Kirke Lawton, commandant at Fort Monmouth,

New Jersey, a Signal Corps installation that McCarthy had been investigating. General Lawton co-operated with McCarthy. Stevens had been considering a change of post for General Lawton. He asked McCarthy if this would be agreeable to him. McCarthy said no. General Lawton kept his post.

The President shared with McCarthy the command of many parts of the government, and the President did realize it. In the first few months of 1953, three heads of the International Information Administration came and went because McCarthy wished it so. In June of that year, he sent Roy Cohn and G. David Schine, a youth with a vast fund of ignorance of Communism and many other subjects who became the Committee's "Chief Consultant," to Europe to inquire into "subversion" in American agencies there, and after that the agencies wore a very different look. The President appointed John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State; McCarthy appointed Scott McLeod as the State Department's Personnel and Security Officer; and in the early days it was pretty much of a tossup as to whether Dulles or McLeod, who had prepared for a diplomatic career as an FBI agent in Manchester, New Hampshire, and had worked briefly in the Washington office of Senator Styles Bridges, had more influence in departmental affairs. Dulles was free to write speeches warning the Russians to behave themselves; he could hold all the conferences he wished with Chiang Kai-shek; but when it came to appointing ambassadors and hiring and firing Department officers, he cleared everything

with McLeod, who cleared everything with McCarthy. This was particularly the case after McCarthy had objected to the appointment of Charles E. Bohlen as United States ambassador to the Soviet Union. McCarthy claimed that Dulles and the President had gone over McLeod's head in giving this job to Bohlen. The President and the Secretary very much wanted Bohlen's confirmation by the Senate, so Robert A. Taft, of Ohio, still at that time the most influential Republican on Capitol Hill, got the confirmation through for them—but only after arriving at an understanding that there would be no more appointments offensive to McCarthy.

When McCarthy had a mind to, he constituted himself an agency for the conduct of foreign relations. On March 28, 1953, he announced that he had, in his capacity as chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee, "negotiated" an "agreement" with Greek shipping interests that would result in depriving Communist nations of goods that had up to then been delivered to their ports by two hundred and forty-two freighters and thus would "have some of the effects of a naval blockade." He also announced that he was moving toward another agreement with certain other shipping interests in London. He said he had made his first agreement without the consultation or advice of anyone in the State Department because "I don't want interference by anyone." When Harold E. Stassen, then head of the Foreign Operations Administration, complained that this sort of thing "undermined" the authority of the Secretary of State and other qualified officials, which it patently did, the President

said that Stassen was certainly entitled to his opinion but that he didn't share it. (The President took refuge in a nicety of diplomatic theory. He told his news conference that McCarthy could not have been "negotiating" because he had nothing to negotiate with—nothing to cede, nothing to withhold. He overlooked the fact that McCarthy could, and did, negotiate with the power of investigation. According to one of his committee colleagues, Senator Mundt, the shipowners had thought it better to give McCarthy his triumph than to be "hauled down here and have the whole thing ventilated.") The jubilant McCarthy thereupon lunched with the Secretary of State—there was always a lot of lunching to be done—and after coffee they issued a joint statement in which the two agreed that what McCarthy had done was "in the national interest."

And so things went in those days. McCarthy made the rules himself, and nothing delighted him so much as demonstrating this. "Wasn't that a classified document you were reading?" a reporter once asked. "It *was*," McCarthy said. "I declassified it." One day, when he was displeased with the way things were going in a hearing of the Senate Appropriations Committee, he seized the gavel from the startled chairman and carried on for the rest of the session. The chairman did not protest. In the Senate in the early fifties, hardly anyone ever protested against anything McCarthy did. Hardly anyone dared refuse approbation. In February 1954, there was exactly one man in the Senate, William Fulbright, of Arkansas, who found it possible to cast a vote against an appropriation of $214,000 for the Permanent Subcom-

mittee.* Everyone then knew that the Subcommittee had destroyed much and accomplishd nothing of value. Both McCarthy and his enemies outside the Senate insisted that the vote on appropriations be regarded as a vote of confidence. Though it is doubtful if there were more than three or four men in the Senate who had any confidence in him or felt toward him anything but distaste, distrust, and fear, eighty-five members of that great deliberative assembly voted "Yea" on the motion to give him what he wanted in the way of money.

The truth is that everyone in the Senate, or just about everyone, was scared stiff of him. Everyone then believed that McCarthy had the power to destroy those who opposed him, and evidence for this was not lacking. Evidence was not conclusive either, but politicians cannot afford to deal in finalities and ultimate truths; they abide, by and large, by probabilities and reasonable assumptions and the law of av-

* Senator Fulbright's "Nay" took courage. Seen from this vantage point in time, it also illustrates one of the basic rules of politics. Foı in 1957, when Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas defied the Constitution and the Supreme Court by using the National Guard to keep Negro children from Central High School in Little Rock—an act of which Fulbright could not possibly have approved—he did not speak up against Faubus. Coming from Arkansas, Fulbright was about as safe as a man could be from McCarthy. Great as McCarthy's fame was, it had probably not spread very wide in Arkansas, where outsiders in general are seldom thought to be very interesting or impor·· tant. But Fulbright could have been hurt by an Arkansas demagogue, and he was as quiet about Faubus as most of his colleagues had been about McCarthy three years before. The rule seems to be that there is a demagogue for everv man to fear

erages, and there was nothing unreasonable, in 1954, in assuming that McCarthy held enormous power in his hands when it came to the question of deciding who should and should not sit in the United States Senate.

In 1950, just a few weeks after McCarthy's Wheeling speech, Millard Tydings, of Maryland, had accepted the chairmanship of the committee that was to inquire into McCarthy's charges against the State Department. Tydings was a titan in the Senate; no man seemed better established there than he, a Maryland patrician, a man of enormous wealth, a member of the inner circle of the Senate. In 1938, Franklin D. Roosevelt, then at the very apex of his career, had tried to get Tydings, a reactionary, as Roosevelt saw it, defeated. Roosevelt failed wretchedly. But McCarthy, a nobody in 1949, threw his weight against Tydings in 1950, and, lo, Tydings lost. (Of course, the methods were somewhat different. Roosevelt went into Maryland and tried to persuade the voters to choose another man. McCarthy stayed in Washington and sent agents into Maryland spreading the word that Tydings was pro-Communist.) That same year, McCarthy went gunning for Scott Lucas, of Illinois, the Democratic floor leader. Lucas was defeated. Tydings' role as McCarthy's chief adversary passed to William Benton, of Connecticut, who had placed before the Senate a resolution calling for McCarthy's expulsion. McCarthy was not expelled; Benton was, though, by the voters. With Lucas gone, Ernest MacFarland, of Arizona, became the Democratic floor leader. McCarthy campaigned against him. MacFarland was defeated.

There were other examples, every one of them impressive.

After the 1952 elections, it was believed in the Senate that McCarthy was responsible for the presence there of eight men—which meant that he was responsible for the absence of eight others. It was not merely a question of his political force, his ability to rally opposition and support; he drove one man—Raymond Baldwin, of Connecticut—out of active politics simply by pouring upon him more abuse than he felt called upon to bear.

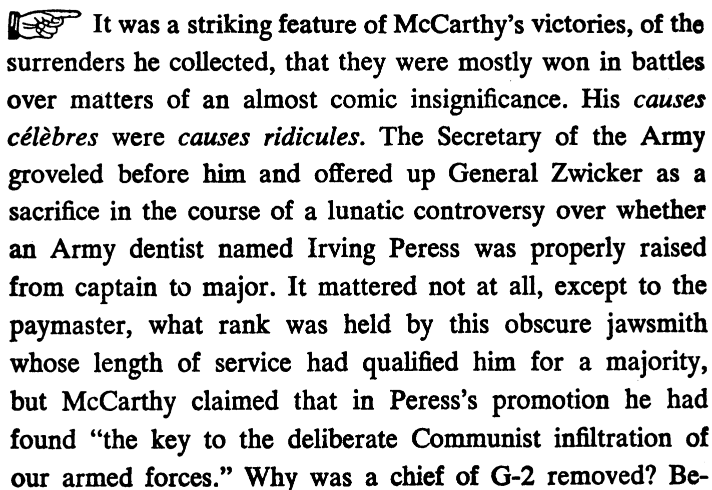
McCarthy himself was re-elected in 1952—as it happened, by a quite unimpressive majority—and when he took his seat on January 3, 1953, it had been borne in upon all his colleagues that he was a bad man to cross.

The Senate on that day might have saved itself a good deal of grief—or it might have caused itself a good deal more—by refusing to seat him or by questioning his right to be seated. For either course, there were ample grounds. In 1952, the Rules Committee's Subcommittee on Privileges and Elections, in pursuance of the resolution Senator Benton had submitted, had looked into certain aspects of McCarthy's private and political conduct and had come up with data which created an almost overpowering presumption that he was a crook as well as a rascal. Substantial sums of money he had collected for "the fight for America" had gone into a personal checking account and had gone out again without ever purchasing any sinews for the struggle against Communist subversion; some of it was traced to an Appleton brokerage firm which had bought soybean futures for McCarthy, and some of it was traced to the account of an assistant to McCarthy, Ray Kiermas, who refused to say where

it had gone after that. He would not say whether some of it had gone back to McCarthy. While a member of the Senate Banking Committee in 1948 and of a Joint Committee on Housing, McCarthy had accepted $10,000 from the Lustron Corporation, a fabricator of prefabricated houses, which was a steady petitioner for funds from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. The fee was paid by the president, Carl Strandlund, who covered some of McCarthy's race-track bets, and the $10,000 was said to be compensation for an article McCarthy had signed in a brochure published by Lustron; McCarthy wrote parts of the Housing Act, one of the provisions of which gave the RFC additional funds and authority to make a loan of $7,000,000 to Lustron early in 1949. McCarthy invested the $10,000 from Lustron in the common stock of Seaboard Airline Railroad, which was also indebted to the RFC. In time, the RFC disposed of its Seaboard Airline Railroad holdings, and the stock rose sharply, with McCarthy the gainer by $35,000. He was on a sugar subcommittee of the Banking Committee. The Pepsi-Cola Corporation wished extra sugar, which was then being rationed. McCarthy had an unsecured loan of $20,000 from the Washington lobbyist for Pepsi-Cola. The day after he accepted the loan, McCarthy denounced the rationing that prevented the company from going into full production. And there was much more; there seemed fairly clear proof of violations of tax and banking laws and of regulations on commodity trading, and of bribery.

Perhaps these matters and several others could have been explained away, but whenever the Subcommittee made an ap-

pointment with McCarthy to come in and explain, he failed to show up. He refused on five separate occasions: "I don't answer charges, I make them," he said. He said the Subcommittee was a tool of the Communists. He insulted three successive chairmen of the Subcommittee. (That chairmanship was easily the least sought-after in Senate history.) He was technically as well as morally in contempt of Congress. It was thought by some that on the opening day of Congress in 1953, there might be one man in the Senate willing to come forward with the suggestion that McCarthy just had no right to be there. The decisive moment came. McCarthy entered the chamber with the senior Senator from his state, Alexander Wiley; the clerk announced him. The Vice-President stood ready to swear him. No voice was raised. He was sworn.



It was a striking feature of McCarthy's victories, of the surrenders he collected, that they were mostly won in battles over matters of an almost comic insignificance. His *causes célèbres* were *causes ridicules.* The Secretary of the Army groveled before him and offered up General Zwicker as a sacrifice in the course of a lunatic controversy over whether an Army dentist named Irving Peress was properly raised from captain to major. It mattered not at all, except to the paymaster, what rank was held by this obscure jawsmith whose length of service had qualified him for a majority, but McCarthy claimed that in Peress's promotion he had found "the key to the deliberate Communist infiltration of our armed forces." Why was a chief of G-2 removed? Be-

cause of a bibliographical citation in a study of Siberian folk-ways, which the chief of G-2 had never seen. Why did heads roll in the International Information Administration and the Voice of America? Because a pair of callow, shallow youths named Cohn and Schine found on I.I.A. library shelves such items as detective stories by a pro-Communist writer and because a young woman employee of the Voice of America testified that she had received from a fellow employee a suggestion for a weekend's recreation that seemed to her not altogether wholesome.*

Yet the antic features of McCarthyism were essential ones. For McCarthyism was, among other things, but perhaps foremost among them, a headlong flight from reality. It elevated the ridiculous and ridiculed the important. It outraged common sense and held common sense to be outrageous. It confused the categories of form and value. It made sages of screwballs and accused wise men of being fools. It diverted attention from the moment and fixed it on the past, which it distorted almost beyond recognition.

The reality it fled, while madly professing to be the only doctrine that faced it, was a terrible one. Only a Communist or an idiot could have denied that the Communist threat to the United States was real and great. The whole Western world was imperiled, in those days as in these, by the thrust of Soviet power, which, just before McCarthy erupted, had been augmented by the emergence of China as an ally of the

* What dire offense from am'rous causes springs,
What mighty contests rise from trivial things!
—Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock,* 1714.

Soviet Union and by the Russian mastery of nuclear weapons In the early part of the decade, the threat seemed more directly a military one than it does today, and within a few months of McCarthy's first appearance as a national figure, it was established by shellfire and tramping armies in Korea that Communism was willing to risk military aggression and war. Communist power in the world was the central reality for the United States in early 1950. The problem we faced, as the most powerful anti-Communist nation in the world, was to form and lead an alliance capable of resisting the Soviet thrust and to find strategies of resistance that would not lead to general war and universal destruction.

McCarthyism ignored this reality and fostered the illusion that what was at most an aspect of it was the whole of reality. "There is only one real issue for the farmer, the laborer, and the businessman—the issue of Communism in government," McCarthy said in a campaign speech in 1952. He even insisted that the struggle against world Communism was a diversion from the struggle against the domestic conspiracy. Speaking, in 1951, of our intervention in Korea, he said, "So the administration which would not fight Communism at home undertook to prove to the American people that it was willing to fight Communism abroad." This sort of talk would have been nonsense at any time; in 1951 and 1952, it was asinine. In the thirties and early forties there had been a formidable Communist movement in this country and a Communist apparatus within the government. It was unquestionably the government's business to break up the apparatus and to combat the movement. By 1950, this had been

fairly effectively done—if, in fact, it had not been overdone. Alger Hiss was convicted in 1950 for committing perjury about his activities thirteen years earlier. He had been out of the government since 1946. The atom spies had mostly been apprehended by the late forties. An employee-security system had been in operation since early in the war, and it had been considerably tightened up under the Truman administration. The FBI had just about abandoned its concern with bank robbers and white slavers to turn its full force on Communism. The Communist Party, moreover, was in an advanced state of disintegration—partly because of a spreading disillusionment among its members, partly because the government was locking up its leaders. If the conspiracy was still in any way effective, its effectiveness eluded McCarthy, who, with all his helpers in the FBI and his agents in G-2 and his Loyal American Underground, could find nothing more exciting than a Major Peress, a citation of Corliss Lamont in a bibliography, a girl who had heard talk of unwedded bliss in a propaganda agency, a novel by a Communist on a library shelf, and an ex-Communist here and there in some minor agency. He did no better than that.

Probably its effectiveness *did* elude him. Here and there, no doubt, there were, and in all likelihood still are, Communist agents in the government. Communism is, after all, an international conspiracy, and it has managed in the past to penetrate even such security-obsessed governments as those of fascist Germany and imperial Japan. It would be astonishing if a government employing two or three million people harbored no Communists at all. But the damage that

agents can do is limited in any case, and in our particular case steps had been taken long before McCarthy came along to uncover as many agents as possible and further to limit the damage any remaining ones could do. If McCarthy uncovered any additional ones, he seemed unaware of the fact himself, and he certainly did nothing to restrain any that remained.

But even if McCarthy had done far better, McCarthyism would still have been trading in dangerous illusions. It was insisting, as Philip Rahv once pointed out, that Communism was a danger, not *to* the United States, but *in* the United States, when in truth it was just the other way about. It was focusing attention on the spy rather than on the power for whom the spy spies, on the Communist or ex-Communist dentist in the United States Army rather than on the Red Army, combat-ready and nuclear-armed. Indeed, most of its votaries opposed all reasonable efforts to deal with these matters. Not Stalin and Khrushchev with their legions and their satellites and the billions of souls within their empires, not the gathering economic strength of Communism, not the devastating appeal of its propaganda in those parts of the world where bread is still scarce and there are no pop-up toasters at all—not any of this were we to dread but Irving Peress and his promotion to major. At the time when 50 per cent of the American people were said to look upon him with favor, his rallying cry was "Who Promoted Peress?"

It had to be this way, for the demagogue, the seditionist, the master of the mob needs his enemy close at hand, familiar, manageable. McCarthyism could never have hoped

to score off Stalin or Khrushchev, but it could stick pins into Major Peress, General Zwicker, and Robert Stevens. Hitler was once asked if he wished the destruction of the Jews. This was in the days before he succumbed utterly to desperation and madness. "No," he said, "it is essential to have a tangible enemy."