

Cooke, Morris L. 221  
1946-52

THE HAY-ADAMS HOUSE  
WASHINGTON 5, D. C.



December 17, 1946

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt  
Hyde Park, New York

My dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

It occurs to me that you may be interested in seeing the enclosed letter which I am sending today to Messrs. Davidson and Kingdon. ✓

Something tells me that you realize the importance of emphatically disassociating ourselves from American Communists and American Communism. I am afraid there is no very gentle way of handling this situation. Unless we can muster the nerve to really attack the problem, in my opinion we will necessarily pay a heavy price in our future activities. ✓

Please do not feel under any necessity to acknowledge this.

Yours very sincerely,

*Morris L. Cooke*

Morris Llewellyn Cooke

MLC:s

Enclosure

Washington, D. C.  
December 17, 1946

Mr. Jo Davidson, Chairman  
Independent Citizens Committee  
of the Arts, Sciences and Professions  
Beaux Arts Apartments  
307 E. 44th Street  
New York, New York

Mr. Frank Kingdon, Chairman  
National Citizens Political Action Committee  
120 E. 16th Street  
New York, New York

Gentlemen:

How that our two organizations are planning to unite, it is time to take stock. The recent election must be interpreted as a catastrophic defeat for the liberal movement which accomplished so much during the Roosevelt Administrations. Stowell, after his crushing failure in Burma, said something like this: "We got an awful beating. Now let's study what we did, correct our mistakes and then go back and lick hell out of them." Among the many causes which led up to the November debacle, I am convinced that our alleged attitude toward American Communists was outstanding. This was falsely represented to the public as near appenement. This handicap in the campaign was wholly unnecessary. If this mistaken interpretation of our policy is allowed to continue it will afford a bar to liberal unity and effectiveness. The programs advocated by the cooperating liberal agencies did not evidence even the slightest un-American influence. The validity of our program is so unanswerable that it cannot be affected by defeat.

But the leadership of nearly all our liberal groups was sufficiently tolerant of the affiliation of American Communists or indifferent as to the damage such associations might cause, as to give a malleous opposition with its preponderant and unwavering press support a wide open opportunity to smear us as "fellow travelers." We did not invite the cooperation of these people, but we realize now that in instances they insinuated themselves into our organizations and a certain baneful aroma was thus quite unnecessarily created. This can and must be corrected.

Our own national interest and world interest demand that American policies be formulated within our own borders, without outside dictation of any sort whatever, whether it be from Downing Street, Moscow or Rome. There is nothing in this to suggest that we should not be as cognizant of the problems of other countries as we are of our own or that we should not be fully sympathetic and cooperative in foreign fields. But the initiation and execution of our own American policies must rest with us. Liberals almost to a man advocate peace and the complete abandonment of war. Liberals generally emphasize the

necessity for learning how to get along with USSR in spite of all the difficulties - some of our own making.

But an American Communist party, or even an individual American Communist, is inconceivable without USSR ties of one sort or another. Resulting "instructions" at times seem macabre and/or pseudo. American Communism is a political faith quite alien to American thought and American institutions because unlike other political faiths such as Republicanism, Socialism and Democracy, it has its roots in a foreign land. Our Constitution wisely gives a hearing at election time to almost any political group so that in some states Communists have a place on the ballot. But even so, it is clear that American liberalism seeking to regain its dominance in American political affairs can have no traffic of any kind whatsoever with American Communism or American Communists.

Fortunately an increasing number of Americans evidence interest in USSR affairs and a desire to be informed accurately as to USSR plans and prospects. As one instance, Congress has recently published "Communism in Action" (79th Cong. 2nd Session, House Document No. 754), an objective study prepared by the Library of Congress. Some of us take a special interest in certain of the experiments in statecraft being tried out in USSR and this without necessarily entertaining any preconceived notion as to their wisdom and chances for success. It is good American doctrine that significant experiments may well be tried out on the State level before being adopted on a national basis. The same philosophy of government may well have an international application. Presumably we in the USA have not arrived at a point where we anticipate no further improvements in our governmental and economic systems. Therefore it may have distinct advantages for us to have other countries do some experimenting. Unless we can remove liberalism and liberals from the area of this all too easy, and all too effective, smear campaign, a highly desirable American interest in USSR affairs will be discredited.

As one who has been associated through the years with a numerous line of liberal organizations battling for improvements in local, State, national and international affairs, the foregoing suggests two necessary lines of action:

1. The Board of the forthcoming organization should issue a forthright statement expressing our abhorrence of any foreign dictation in American affairs but directed more particularly to American Communism and American Communists with whom we have been and desire to remain completely disassociated. This will necessarily imply that we will make every effort to exclude from our councils those who are not diligent in maintaining this attitude before the public. No pussy-footing reaffirmation of our confidence in the USA Constitution will do. The disillusioned voters who defeated us by staying at home on Election Day demand that we put up the sign "American Communists stay out!"

2. In retaining paid personnel we should demand, in conformity with quite common personnel practice, a full record of the applicant's former assignments and connections, including affiliations having political significance. Any applicant having or having had associations with American Communism or its affiliate organizations must be denied employment. This suggests no witch hunt nor does it involve any curtailment either of freedom of speech or in the right of individuals to follow their own political ideals. It does mean that those with past or present American Communist leanings shall not be employed by liberal political organizations. This practice has been followed from the start by the Philadelphia Branch of the ICC. Detailed records are on file for every employee, from the Executive Director down.

Our decision in this matter will largely determine the further participation of liberals in our activities. Liberalism in association with its organized labor allies seemingly faces a long and bitter struggle for the maintenance of decent standards in American life and their improvement. We cannot afford to carry any unnecessary weight.

Yours very sincerely,

Morris Llewellyn Cooke

Hay-Adams House  
Washington, D. C.

MLC:s