

LETTERS.

THE COMPANY SHE KEEPS

New York City

I call the attention of *Nation* readers to a misstatement in Susan Sontag's response to the comments on her speech at Town Hall ["Communism and the Left," *The Nation*, Feb. 27]. Miss Sontag writes: "Diana Trilling welcomes me to the ranks of *her* [she supplies the italics] anticommunists (thanks, but no thanks) . . ." I did not welcome Miss Sontag to the ranks of my anticommunists. I precisely wrote: "I welcome Miss Sontag to her new difficult life as an anticommunist." Miss Sontag functions as what is called a radical; she places herself on the "democratic left." Mine has always been a liberal anticommunism. I recognize the difference and took Miss Sontag's self-definition into full account. After all, what is her speech finally about except the fear that in embracing anticommunism she might have put herself in company not of her choice? Just as there has always been reason to fear the association between radicalism and procommunism or neutralism, there has always been ground to fear the association of anti-communism with reaction. And this fear is especially justified today when all around us we see right-wing anticommunism steadily growing in power in the intellectual community as well as in government.

Diana Trilling

SUPPORTING SOLIDARITY

Princeton, N.J.

The *Nation* symposium ["Communism and the Left," *The Nation*, Feb. 27] in response to Susan Sontag's speech at Town Hall was a healthy corrective to a jejune performance. It would be unfortunate, though, if the flurry surrounding Sontag's remarks were to distract from the serious contributions made by E.L. Doctorow, Alexander Erlich, Sam Meyers, Ed Sadlowski, Daniel Singer, Gore Vidal and Ben Zernsky, among notable others, at the February 6 rally.

The meeting sought to mobilize the left in support of the Polish workers movement while exploring how demands for workers' control apply to the condition of American labor. It was precisely the shrill anti-communism of those who are hostile to workers' movements everywhere that we sought to expose and to counter.

In pursuit of our aims, American Workers and Artists for Solidarity has an ongoing program that should be of interest to *Nation* readers (we are sponsored by The Nation Institute and by P.E.N. American Center). A delegation, consisting to date of Gore Vidal, Kurt Vonnegut, Paul Robeson Jr., Ed Sadlowski, Sam Meyers, Dave Skocik and myself, will travel to Warsaw to see detained Solidarity leaders and officials of the regime. We are preparing a list of jailed and detained

people so that corresponding union locals in the United States can pressure for the release of coal miners, steel workers, electricians and members of other trades and professions. Meetings like the recent one at Town Hall will occur in Chicago on April 24, Denver on April 28 and Los Angeles on May 1. Daniel Singer, Ed Sadlowski, Paul Robeson Jr., Gore Vidal and others will appear at these rallies.

We urge support, suggestions and participation for our ongoing work from *Nation* readers. We may be reached at P.O. Box 1205, Princeton, N.J. 08540.

*Ralph Schoenman
American Workers and
Artists for Solidarity*

IS NICARAGUA INDEPENDENT?

Medford, Mass.

I feel compelled to respond to the letter by poets Eugenio Evtuchenko, Allen Ginsberg and Ernesto Cardenal ["Declaration of Three," *The Nation*, Feb. 20], which upholds Nicaragua's independence from both superpowers. "At this moment . . . there is an intent on the part of the people to defend their economic and intellectual independence," they wrote. "Nicaragua is a big experimental workshop . . ."

How then does one explain the small but appalling item in the newspapers recently reporting that representatives from the independent Polish labor union Solidarity were denied admission to Nicaragua on the ground that they were "tools of U.S. imperialism"? Ronald Reagan and his cohorts have an easy explanation; but for those of us on the left who sincerely oppose U.S. involvement in Nicaragua and El Salvador as well as Soviet aggression, the task is far less simple.

I, like others of my generation, fought for years against U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and rightfully so. I do not regret my participation in a single one of the perhaps hundreds of demonstrations against that war that I joined. At the same time, I must admit that our opposition was fraught with some of the same naive illusions about the absolute independence and morality of the Vietnamese that these poets manifest about Nicaragua in their letter. Vietnam did, finally, grant the U.S.S.R. its bases and invade Cambodia.

What we must affirm in these complex times, with the United States moving aggressively toward Central America, Soviet troops in Afghanistan and (if we are to believe the Eritreans) Cuban troops dropping napalm on Eritrean freedom fighters, is our opposition to all aggression—without naive illusions.

If Nicaragua were as "independent" as is claimed, it should have welcomed with open arms the representatives of a genuinely

working-class, genuinely independent movement.

As the three poets suggest, it is an important role of the writers of the world to bring forth the truth. They seem sincere in their aspiration that Nicaragua not "become a puppet in anybody's hands." I hope that they turn out to be right.

Susan Schwartz Jhirad

F.B.I. AT HARVARD: UPDATE

New York City

In "Hoover Goes to Harvard" [*The Nation*, Oct. 24, 1981], I asked how high in the Harvard hierarchy the cooperation with Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover reached, and I suggested, on the basis of a letter from Hoover to the Boston F.B.I. office, that it was a "nagging possibility" that it reached the office of Harvard President James B. Conant.

We need be nagged no longer, for the possibility has now become a certainty. On January 7, in response to an order of U.S. District Court Judge Robert Carter, the F.B.I. made a supplemental release of documents in which it restored certain words that had been deleted from the documents as they had first been released. On February 9, 1949, the Boston SAC (Special Agent in Charge) sent a memorandum to Hoover. In the revised document just released by the F.B.I., the last two paragraphs of that memorandum read as follows:

It is believed that the results of the work of the international program and the Russian Research Center can be made available to the Bureau through contact with President James Bryant Conant of Harvard University, who has on occasion indicated his respect for the Bureau's work and his understanding for its many and varied interests in connection with internal security matters. It appears that a presentation of the Bureau's desire to be informed on such matters to President Conant personally would make available the current programs and results of research work of the Center on such basis that the interests of the Bureau would not be revealed to the personnel of the particular program and in that way no possible embarrassment could possibly come as the result of any inquiries being directed in an attempt to obtain material outlines and other items of interest in connection with this matter.

Accordingly, the Bureau is requested to consider the advisability of authorizing this office to discuss this matter with President Conant on a discreet and personal basis to determine his reaction to the suggestions set forth above [Harvard Russian Research Center file, serial #100-360557-15 Emphasis in original.]

In fact, Hoover rejected the suggestion on May 11, 1949, but another document just released by the F.B.I.—an internal Bureau memorandum from L. Whitson to H.B. Fletcher, written the same day—makes it

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Lerner does offer one earnest platitude that may be useful for those who missed the last twenty or so years of American radicalism. He observes that most people have personal problems of one sort or another that the left would be remiss to ignore. The mistake, and it is a grave one, is to imagine that all of the problems that imprison people in private anguish are susceptible to profamily solutions. Battered wives should be able to leave their husbands (and I am sure Lerner would agree) rather than having to wait around for the levels of occupational stress to subside. Spouses whose lives are depleted by sexual boredom ought to be able to consider alternatives to monogamy. Elderly people who are infantilized by their relatives may need, above all, to get away from them. Teen-agers whose parents deprive them of privacy and dignity need safe, nonfamily environments to turn to. And so on. To consign all these problems to Friends of Families' "family-support networks" and the therapeutic bazaar of "American Families Day" would be like sending one of Marilyn French's heroines off to Marriage Encounter. We need, as feminists have been saying for a long time, a supportive infrastructure of community—not necessarily family—institutions.

On one point Lerner and I agree: that it would be a mistake for the left to retreat into economism and cede all the "social issues," as the New Right calls them, to the likes of Phyllis Schlafly and Richard Viguerie. Yet I think the greatest danger of his proposal is not that it will be taken seriously but that it will be taken as an excuse to do just that—to back off from the sticky issues of gender and sex-

ual liberation. If you can convince yourself that the greatest source of personal *angst* afflicting Americans is the "breakdown of the family," and that this in turn is brought on almost single-handedly by the malevolent workings of capitalism, then there is, indeed, no need to deal with other forms of oppression, like male domination and institutionalized homophobia. You could dispense with feminism (except for its narrowest construction as "equal rights") and subsume all noneconomic issues into a pious concern for "The Family." It is this temptation, I fear, that has helped make Lerner's proposal "one of the few live issues" at a time when we ought to have no shortage of more pressing issues to keep us busy.

Perhaps the lesson in all this (because there ought to be some redeeming lesson) has to do with how easy it is to lose our bearings in the face of a political solecism like the Moral Majority or a legislative indecency like the Family Protection Act. I think we need to have a little more confidence in our long and honorable tradition of political dissidence. American radicals and feminists, at best, share a vision of community that transcends family and race, and a vision of morality that transcends patriarchal "virtue." It is a vision that affirms individual desire and imagination because we believe they are not disruptive or selfish, but prefigurative of a happier world. And it is a vision that affirms our responsibility to the "sisters" and "brothers" we will never meet as well as to those we know. It's a strenuous vision and not easily boiled down to one-liners, but I would like to think it's worth holding on to—maybe even elevating to a family tradition. □

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clear that the reason for the suggestion was that it was unnecessary to trouble Conant about a matter that could be handled in other ways: "In the event that certain members of the Research Center become subjects of subsequent investigation, it may then be desirable to secure their original efforts for inclusion in their files, but it does not appear that procuring the complete work of the Center is necessary." (Harvard Russian Research Center file, serial #100-360557-16.)

One month later, the *Harvard Crimson* of June 23, 1949, reported that Conant, speaking at a meeting of the Harvard Fund for Advanced Study and Research, had said that "as long as I am president of the University I can assure you there will be no policy of inquiring into the political views of members of the staff and no watching over their activities as citizens." Sigmund Diamond

FOR A FREER ISRAEL

Brooklyn, N. Y.

The open letter on civil liberties in Israel that appeared in all Israeli newspapers and was

reprinted in the Letters column of *The Nation* ["'Haaretz' Declaration," Jan. 16] has generated an outpouring of letters to its signatories from readers of *The Nation* (as well as from hundreds of Israelis). The letter, signed by the Temporary Action Committee, expressed a desire to organize Israelis who are concerned about the direction of Israeli policy and who wish the nation to return to the ideals of political, racial, sexual and religious liberty and equality set forth in the Israeli Declaration of Independence.

A support group, the American-Israeli Civil Liberties Coalition (A.I.C.L.C.), has been organized in the United States, and the Temporary Action Committee has responded to expressions of interest from Israelis by organizing itself as Kol Koreh. With the support of American contributors, Kol Koreh is establishing a legal aid office in Jerusalem and is currently preparing test cases to bring before Israeli courts. The first cases will involve religious liberty, sexual equality, Palestinian rights and freedom of information. They will be supervised by a litigation committee chaired by Dean Amos Shapiro of Tel Aviv University Law School.

Both A.I.C.L.C. (a nonprofit organization incorporated in New York) and Kol Koreh are nonpartisan groups dedicated to the protection of the civil liberties of Israeli citizens and residents of Israeli-controlled territories. The initial organizers of A.I.C.L.C. include Nat Hentoff, Ellen Feingold, Rabbi Balfour Brickner, Jeremiah Gutman, David Carliner, Arthur Kobacker, George Slaff, Roger Herz and Rachel Eytan-Fishman. We welcome the participation of all and feel we can be particularly effective in providing a vehicle by which Americans too disenchanted with Israeli policies to join mainstream organizations can combine to support a more libertarian and egalitarian Israel. As Chaim Weizman wrote in his autobiography, "the very life-blood of a stable society is justice. . . . Our security will to a great extent depend not only on the armies and navies which we can create, but on the internal moral stability of the country."

Readers of *The Nation* who would like further information are invited to write to the coalition at 124 West 79th Street, New York, N.Y. 10024.

Philippa Strum
President, A.I.C.L.C.

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