

Letter to the *New York Times* from David North

A reply to article on "Rethinking McCarthyism"

24 October 1998

On October 22 the New York Times published on its correspondence page a letter from David North, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of the US. The letter was written in response to a commentary entitled 'Rethinking McCarthyism' that appeared on the front page of the Times's 'Week in Review' section of October 18. Due to constraints of space, and with the approval of North, the Times published an abridged version of North's original letter. Below is the full text of the letter.

'Rethinking McCarthyism' cites Mr. Ronald Radosh's attempt to justify his support for a positive reassessment of the Wisconsin senator. He states: 'I deal with issues of historical truth. The left's inability to accept this truth is what discredits the left.' One is obliged to ask, 'What truth? What Left?'

That the reputation of Senator McCarthy would profit from an encounter with issues of historical truth is too preposterous a claim to require serious rebuttal. Even were it to be definitively established that one or both of the Rosenbergs were involved in espionage, it would hardly detract from the indisputable fact that McCarthyism was steeped in lies and distortions that have left an enduring and devastating mark on the political and intellectual climate of the United States. For Mr. Radosh to minimize this essential element of McCarthyism speaks volumes about his political agenda.

But even more insidious is Mr. Radosh's intellectually indefensible assertion that the debacle of the American Communist Party has discredited, morally as well as politically, the entire socialist movement. The false premise that underlies this claim is that there existed no left-wing socialist opposition to Stalinism. Mr. Radosh simply chooses to ignore the political fact, of which he

is certainly aware, that prior to the onset of the Cold War anti-Stalinism (as opposed to crude anti-Communism) was associated principally with the socialist left--above all, with the Trotskyists. Long before anti-Stalinism became fashionable among broad sections of liberals who had previously embraced 'popular front' alliances with the Communist Party, the left-wing anti-Stalinists had insisted that the policies of the Kremlin had nothing in common with Marxism or with the socialist program and ideals of the 1917 October Revolution. In the present climate of deepening economic and social crisis it is their political and intellectual heritage, not the long-discredited ravings of McCarthy and his friends, that deserve and require the most thoughtful reconsideration.

See also:

Socialism, historical truth and the crisis of political thought in the United States

A lecture by David North



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