

An Aesopian Letter

from GIL GREEN

DEAR LLOYD:

Thanks ever so much for your letter. Henry, Gus and I enjoyed it. But pray, why did you refer to us by our first names? Was it carelessness or bravado? Certainly you must be aware that times have changed radically. What may have been correct and proper in the age of B.M. (Before McGohey), is entirely improper now. Today any mention of people by their first names can lead to dire consequences—the charge of participating in a conspiracy.

Don't laugh. Just follow our trial and you will see what I mean. Why just the other day a witness on the stand had the temerity to refer to Gus Hall, whom he knows intimately, by his first name. Medina immediately screwed on his special cross-examination look and asked the witness, "Do you mean to say you call him Gus?" And when the witness answered "Yes," the Judge turned on his own inimitable I-knew-they-were-guilty-all-along expression.

Nor does it make any difference that you've known me for twenty years—or that we have always called each other by our first names. In fact, the only reason this letter does not begin with a "My dear Mr. Brown" salutation is that your carelessness has already fully exposed our clandestine relationship. Hence, the damage has been done. A brand new file bearing your name has been added to the forest of files in the Washington headquarters of the G-Men. This file is located in a special ultra-secret section marked "Extra-Dangerous Conspirators, or Men Who Are Known By Their First Names." (By the way, Lloyd, what in the deuce does the G in G-Men stand for? I've tried everything, but the only word I can think of is Gestapo. I know it can't be that—or can it?)

As I write this, I recall another instance of political naiveté on

your part. Some months ago, just as the trial began, an article of yours appeared in *Masses & Mainstream* mentioning that you first met me at a school organized by the Young Communist League. Tut, tut, Lloyd, how could you? Don't you know that the word school has become a naughty word and strictly *verboten*? If Goering reacted violently to the word culture, his imitators here are most allergic to the word school. And when that word is preceded by the adjective Marxist, they either burst a blood-vessel or go batty *à la* Forrestal. Yes, indeed, Lloyd, mentioning schools was a serious *faux pas* on your part. But enough of this criticism.

It is now exactly three haircuts and four days since my American way of life was abruptly and arbitrarily changed. The reason? I simply expressed my amazement and chagrin when the court ruled out of evidence a particularly germane article. There was nothing contemptuous in what I said, or in how I said it, but apparently His Honor had a guilty conscience. Subsequently, about ten days later, His Majesty—I mean His Honor—saw the light and permitted the self-same article into evidence. One would have assumed that once the article was let in, I would have been let out. But that did not happen. So at this point we're both in—the article in the court record and I in safe-keeping.

MY NEW status has not only changed my way of life, it has also changed my thinking. I've begun to realize that we Marxists are far too materialistic in our outlook. Before my recent experience I used to pooh-pooh men like Stuart Chase who insisted that much of the strife and struggles of our modern world are not to be traced to inherent and irreconcilable contradictions, but to what he so aptly and brilliantly termed "the tyranny of words." I now know better. I can see more clearly that if Henry Ford's workers hate his guts, this cannot be ascribed to such Marxist concepts as "exploitation" or "the class struggle," but to something far simpler. It's because Ford is constantly characterized as a "capitalist," "monopolist," "tycoon" or "boss." These words all have an unhealthy connotation that can only lead to hatred, antagonism and strife. Don't you see, if there were no such words as "monopoly" or "trust," how could anyone be "anti-monopoly" or "anti-trust"?

Perhaps you would like to know how I came to this realization. Let me start from the beginning. As you recall, neither Winston, Hall nor

I was sentenced by His Honor. We were just "remanded." Now at first we thought it was the same thing. But that's only because we underestimated the science of semantics.

To be remanded is quite different from being sentenced. A sentence follows a conviction and a conviction is bad because then you're a convict and when you get out you're an ex-con. However, when you're remanded, you're not convicted, you're only recommitted into custody. So you see there is a tremendous difference between the two and we daily thank our lucky stars that we were remanded and not sentenced.

There are moments after curfew rings and the lights go out at 10:00 P.M., when I lie and ponder this matter. True enough, remand is a much more pleasant word. But had I been sentenced, would I be anywhere else than where I am? And the answer is, yes. Had we been sentenced for contempt we would have gotten thirty days as did Johnny Gates and thus been out of here by now. But then again, who wants to be like John Gates? He was sentenced. He's an ex-con. While we're only remanded.

A change of words can make a world of difference. Let us take the word jail. An ugly word. And the word prison, too. No wonder men object to being taken from their families and friends to be housed in places bearing such names. Words like jail and prison are definitely not conducive to making people feel happy and content. They're not like the word home, for example. And so, presto, we do not stay in a jail, but in a home—a Federal Detention Home. See the difference?—the gentility of it? Now it truly can be said that "Stone walls do not a prison make"—but a Federal Detention Home!

Recognizing the solace to be found in a mere change of words, I tried to be helpful. I decided to refer to the jail—pardon the nasty word—as the Exclusive West Street Men's Club. I thought this more fitting. After all, what kind of a home is it without either a woman or a kid?

But I must admit that this effort on my part has not been too successful. In the first place the men here are very backward—they say that this onion by any other name would smell the same. And in the second place, let me confess, that try as I will I'm compelled to agree with them.

This new-words-for-old movement affects everything. The *Daily*

Worker refers to us as "prisoners." But this is just another Communist exaggeration. Prisoners? Perish the thought! There are no prisoners here—only inmates. And what a difference in morale this makes. Or when the *Daily Worker* says that we travel to and from court each day wearing handcuffs, that too is inaccurate. They're not handcuffs—just stainless steel bracelets.

And so a semantic revolution is taking place that may in the long run augur of greater significance than a social revolution. Why change things, when you can more easily change words?

NO, LLOYD, I'm not going stir-crazy. What then is all this nonsense about? Simply this. If there is anything that has nauseated me during the course of this lengthy trial, it is the pervading official court atmosphere of two-faced sanctimonious hypocrisy, where words are used to conceal meaning or to convey the opposite of what is meant.

When the Judge for example says to the Defense Counsel, "All right, I will hear you," it usually means, "Talk away for all I care, it will not make any difference anyway."

I'm thinking of such phrases as: "These defendants are cloaked with a presumption of innocence throughout the course of the trial," which everyone in the courtroom knows to mean the exact opposite.

Or, "The burden of proof is on the prosecution. It must prove the guilt of the defendants beyond a reasonable doubt." But is there a single person at Foley Square who believes this to be the case? In our trial the burden of proof is on the defense as His Honor one day inadvertently blurted out.

Or, when the court says, "I am giving the defendants a fair trial," this only means, "I am giving the defendants as fair a trial as I think they deserve."

Or, when the Judge says, "How many times must I repeat that a political party and political doctrine are not on trial, only these eleven defendants," he and everyone else concerned knows that the *only* reason the defendants are on trial is because they are the leaders of a working-class political party with its own political doctrine.

Or, when His Honor meets acquaintances or sees delegations, he invariably puts on an aggrieved martyred look and says, "Oh, you'll never know what I've been going through! But I intend to survive it!"

Imagine the sham and hypocrisy involved! What he's been going

through (!). Is he in the prisoner's dock? Are his liberty and rights in jeopardy? Is he a victim of this heresy trial? Is his political party in danger of being outlawed? And yet this pious humbug dares to talk about what he's going through!

"But I intend to survive it," says he, as if there were any doubt on that score, or as if someone was trying to prevent this. Of course, he'll survive it. Why shouldn't he? He wouldn't give this trial up for anything. He glories in it. Overnight he has achieved "fame." He has become the darling of every reactionary force in the country. A few reactionary newspapers have even had the effrontery to mention his name in connection with the vacancy in the Supreme Court.

Survive the ordeal! What ordeal? He loves it.

Of course, not everything is as he would like it. There are unpleasant and embarrassing moments. The defendants and their attorneys are rude and uncouth rascals. They have a most annoying way of constantly talking about democratic rights. They persist in accusing their accusers. Why can't they be good boys and submit quietly and gracefully to this legal raping? And the fact that they do not, is this not sufficient proof that they are "deliberately and wilfully obstructing the administration of justice"?

It is no accident that it is Medina, the Judge, and not McGohey, the Prosecutor, who has become the central "hero" of the trial for the reactionary press, including the Hearst papers. And yet, it is McGohey who represents in the courtroom the direct and open assault of reaction against the Communist Party.

Why then is not McGohey the main "hero" of these forces? Because in the present stage of reaction in the United States a McGohey is completely helpless without a Medina. A famed Cuban jurist, after visiting the courtroom at Foley Square, aptly observed that in this trial there were two prosecutors but no judge. But the important thing to note is that not even a dozen prosecutors would suffice if there were not one wearing the "fair," "objective" and "impartial" robes of a judge.

That is why the reactionaries in and out of Congress were so incensed against Judge Kaufman of the Hiss trial. They sought to impeach him because his rulings did not guarantee a conviction. For them a judge's role is to pretend to be impartial, to put on an act of being fair, while in effect being the opposite. In other words, their model of a judge is Medina.

Of course, Medina has no easy task. To pretend to be unbiased and fair and at the same time to *guarantee* a conviction in a frame-up as clumsy and monstrous as this one, is a truly Machiavellian task. And that is why the reactionaries everywhere sympathize with him and publicly defend him as a paragon of patience and virtue. And that is also why His Honor is most sensitive of all to criticism of his judicial conduct, especially public criticism. For if the public ever gets to realize that the black robe of judicial purity is only worn to conceal the soiled clothes of prejudice, this trial will stand exposed for the ghastly mockery of justice that it is.

A trial such as ours can only be gotten away with so long as the vast majority of the people still think that we're at least getting a fair trial and that justice will be done. The very length of the trial itself is used as an argument to "prove" that in the United States even Communists can get a fair trial and that therefore the Constitution and its Bill of Rights are still sacred, inviolable documents, nowise threatened by reaction. But what has a few months more or less got to do with it? Had the trial lasted but a single day, and the indictment thrown out on that day, that would have truly constituted the fairest trial of all!

THE important thing to realize is that Medina is more than a judge in a particular trial. He has become a symbol of the present stage of reaction in this country. This is a stage in which open, bald-faced pro-fascist reaction cannot hope to be successful in any direct appeal to the people. The people are opposed to witch-hunts, spy-scares and heresy trials. They want civil rights, democracy, peace and economic security. Reactionary anti-democratic attacks can be gotten away with only when dressed up in democratic garb. To tear off the mask of two-faced hypocritical demagoguery, whether of a Medina or a Truman, is the key to exposing and blocking the path of growing reaction in the United States.

I had to get this out of my system, Lloyd. I'm sorry you had to be the victim. My best regards to Lily and my love to your two beautiful daughters. Regards from Henry and Gus.

Until we meet again,

GIL