"Red Totalitarianism"
Reply—

Dear Sirs: Freda Kirchwey's editorial on the Committee for Cultural Freedom in your issue of May 27 is unfair, confused, and seriously compromises The Nation's claim to be an organ of independent liberal opinion.

She quotes a sentence from an article of mine, totally unrelated to the manifesto of the committee, and on the strength of it attributes a specific social philosophy and political strategy to all signers of the manifesto. She could just as well—but with no more right—have maintained that the Committee for Cultural Freedom is pro-New Deal because its secretary, Ferdinand Lundberg, is the author of "America's Sixty Families"; or that it is critical of the New Deal because of some newspaper columns of Dorothy Thompson, another one of its distinguished signers. Yet the statement of the committee emphasizes that "this commits us as a group to no particular social philosophy—but only to one of the fundamental criteria for evaluating all social philosophies today; namely, whether it permits the thinker and writer to function independently of political, religious, or racial dogmas." It is from this premise, and this premise alone, that the committee's opposition to Hitlerism, Stalinism, and all other totalitarianisms follows.

If Miss Kirchwey suspected that we have ulterior political motives, she could easily have convinced herself one way or the other by joining us, as she was invited to do. To charge us instead with bad faith is, under the circumstances, morally reprehensible and helps the enemies of freedom.

In her criticism of my own position, for which I alone accept responsibility, Miss Kirchwey reveals utter confusion. If the Communist Party is guilty of even some of the disgraceful and illiberal practices which she herself underscores, why, in heaven's name, should decent people not "differentiate" themselves from it? There is not a single weapon in the arsenal of the fascists, from character assassination to physical assault of political opponents, which the Communists have not used. On occasions even anti-Semitism! If you are opposed to all gangsterism, it is neither principled nor strategic to extenuate the crimes of one gang rather than another. The same holds for political gangsterism. If the Communists, as Miss Kirchwey also claims, are for the moment sincere democrats, will she please explain how democracy is to be furthered by methods she herself castigates so severely? These methods help fascism; they do not hinder it. In the same breath in which she accepts them as fellow-travelers, Miss Kirchwey admits "that the Communists have developed a sort of double mental-booking." Precisely, and that is just what one expects from totalitarians for whom intellectual integrity is a "bourgeois virtue". But one does not expect people like Miss Kirchwey to aid them in their protective coloration. Those who genuinely believe in the Bill of Rights do not resort, as do the Communists, to political duplicity or anonymity.

The entire question of the role of the Communist Party in this and other countries is too large to discuss here. Suffice it to say that proofs abound that whether on American soil or in Spain, France, or any country you please, its primary loyalty is to the Kremlin and not to peace, democracy, or intellectual freedom. Miss Kirchwey closes with the advice that "there is virtue in merely refusing to shoot." Agreed. But she has sent her advice to the wrong address. She should send it not to us who have only the weapons of truth but to those who have the guns—to Franco, Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin, and to their agents in this country.

SINDEY HOOK
South Wardsboro, Vt., June 1

And Rebuttal

Without argument, though with a few irrepressible doubts, I shall accept as a basis for my reply to Mr. Hook his assurance that the Committee for Cultural Freedom has no ulterior political motives and that it is opposed "to Hitlerism, Stalinism, and all other totalitarianisms" only as enemies of intellectual freedom. But even reduced to these terms the dispute between us remains much the same. If "Stalinism," in common with other "totalitarianisms," is the enemy of a free culture in America, it can only act through its "agents in this country"—in other words through the Communists. The committee must, then, stand for opposition to the Communist Party and its subsidiaries—along with the Nazi Bund and various fascist groups. So in the end we get back to the point I made, however clumsily, in my article Red Totalitarianism. And I still must plead for peace between the warring factions of the left and deploy the creation of new organs of opposition among them.

To a person who sees life in clear blacks and whites the issue is doubtless a simple one. Decent people don't associate with criminals and gangsters or try to extenuate their crimes. One cannot but envy the man who is able to dispatch his social problems so easily. But to me, as to many other non-Communists and unattached liberals, the issue is a confused and troubling one. The Communists display the qualities of most fanatics, qualities that stem directly from Cotton Mather as from Karl Marx. They are intolerant and ruthless, often unscrupulous, often violent and lacking in political judgment. They are also zealous, brave, and willing to put up with hardship and abuse. The Communist Party and its press have "assassinated"—or tried to—many a character, including that of The Nation. But they have also fought for decent conditions for workers and the unemployed, for equality of rights for Negroes, for relief and aid to the victims of the civil war in Spain. They have stood consistently for justice and non-aggression in international relations—so, indeed, has the Soviet government as well. Lacking proof, I must reserve judgment on the story told by M. E. Edson in another column; but it sounds true, and tactics of this sort cannot be excused or forgotten. But neither can one forget that Communists and Communist sympathizers from the United States fought in Spain in numbers out of all proportion to their numbers here; and, it might be added, they fought side by side with Socialists and Anarchists and democrats of all shades, even while political strife between all these factions poisoned the air behind the lines.

The Spanish struggle taught many lessons, of which perhaps the most im-
important was this one. It is not necessary for liberal lambs and Communist lions to lie down together. Enough if they will move ahead toward their common objectives without wasting time and strength in an attempt to exterminate each other along the way. The job of making this country unsafe for fascism calls for tremendous constructive effort as well as defensive strength. If Communists and non-Communists and even anti-Communists could forget their mutual recriminations and concentrate on the major task of our generation, there would be better hope of its successful accomplishment.

FREDA KIRCHWEY

Communist Tactics in Tampa

Dear Sirs: For about a year I have been a regular subscriber of The Nation and have received much enjoyment and inspiration from it, although I have sensed a growing undertone of pro-communism, or pro-Stalinism, that is very disagreeable to me. The article Red Totalitarianism, by Freda Kirchwey, openly expresses the pro-communism that I have long felt to be insidious.

As an active Socialist for more than thirty years I supported Debs and the St. Louis Declaration against entry into the World War, and as state secretary of the Socialist Party in Florida from 1928 to 1934, and state secretary of the Social Democratic Federation in Florida since June, 1936, I have had plenty of experience with the Communists and I know them for what they are.

With misgivings we accepted them in the Committee for the Defense of Civil Rights in Tampa, which sought to secure the punishment of the floggers and murderers of Joseph Shoemaker. It was agreed that none of the participating organizations would issue any statements or publication except through the committee, and all the other organizations respected this agreement, but the Communists issued a leaflet over their own name claiming to represent the victims of the flogging and demanding the punishment of the floggers.

None of the victims of the flogging had ever been Communists, and Shoemaker was a liberal Democrat who had resigned from the Socialist Party more than a year before in order to support and vote for Roosevelt in 1936, but the Communists distributed this leaflet on the streets and even in the courthouse when the trial of the floggers began. It was used by the attorneys for the defendants to prejudice the court and to
They excuse from carrying dishonesty, treachery, and brutality is carrying appeasement too far. Why not fraternize with the Nazis and Fascists? They are at least honest rogues.

If this is to be the continued policy of The Nation I doubt whether I can stomach it much longer.

M. E. EDSON

Seffner, Fla., June 3

Issue of Vital Importance

Dear Sirs: I have just read your editorial on Red Totalitarianism and want to congratulate you on its clear and incisive exposition of an issue of vital importance to all persons "left of center." One need not be a Communist sympathizer to regret the recent outcry against the Communists on the part of avowed Marxists. As you say, the Communists behave in a manner to antagonize those who are not with them yet at the present time the important problem for all radicals is not to accentuate the rift between them but to oppose the common enemy. Certainly the fascists will not bother to distinguish between the various shades of red once they achieve control! I am therefore glad you spoke out so vigorously against these internecine quarrels, and hope that both sides come to their senses.

CHARLES A. MADISON
New York, May 31

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