

FOLLOWING PAUL ROBESON INCIDENT AT PEEKSKILL

Freedom House Gives 13 Rules For Dealing With Communists . . . 'To Debilitate The Attack on Freedom'

(Selections from a pamphlet published by Freedom House following the Peekskill riots 5 or 6 years ago.)

It is suggested readers keep in mind the thought that these rules would apply to any civil disturbance and that, where the word "Communist" is used they add, in their minds, the phrase "or seditious, disloyal, intolerant, fanatical", whichever suits the case. (Ed.)

A nation's character, its maturity and judgment are determined only under stress. The depth and intensity of its democratic practice are visible only when democratic procedures are challenged. If no one were saying foolish, unpopular or inflammatory things, there would be no necessity for protecting freedom of speech. Our basic rights are in essence designed for the essential protection of those whom we dislike.

The Communist knows these things well and they irritate him. He must demonstrate to himself and to others that they are untrue, that we don't mean what we say when we boast of our free society and that we are unsure of ourselves when our free society is challenged.

Riots Badly Handled

Paul Robeson and his fellow members of the Communist Party

won a victory in Peekskill, New York. They attracted the attention of more people than they had bargained for. They disrupted lives and the customs of more people than they could have hoped for. Had their meeting been completely prevented, their victory would have been complete. Their objective is martyrdom, their strategy provocation, their technique violence. In their wake in the area surrounding Peekskill they have left the social bacteria of insecurity, anti-Semitism, fear and hatred for the colored people.

This victory elsewhere must be prevented, less to cry over yesterday's spilled milk than to cry over tomorrow's spilled blood. Freedom House offers a set of principles and rules for those American communities in which the Communist will seek to repeat his provocation and disruption. Our concern is a double one: to preserve and enrich our democratic stature, to debilitate the Communist and his attack on our freedoms.

"He whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad."

1. The cardinal principle for success in your community objectives and for the preservation of your dignity and your democratic practice is: do not be provoked. Don't let the lies, the distortions, the names and the ugliness prior to a scheduled Communist Party meeting disturb you. Recognize the psychological warfare for what it is and remain adult. There is nothing more disturbing to the neurotic who finds a frustrated security within the ranks of the Communist Party than your community's dignity.

2. Don't prevent the use of a paid meeting hall contracted for by the Communist Party, whatever convenient label it operates under at the moment. A meeting hall is in the nature of a public utility. If community practice is in the habit of making it available to community groups of varying views, there is no valid reason for its non-availability to the Communist Party. Bear in mind, too, that if the hall is closed to them, the broad outdoors are not, and your refusal will have enlarged the crowd.

Free Speech Upheld

3. Avoid any interference, or even the appearance of interference, with the right to speak or sing.

4. Public school auditoriums or other public buildings cannot be refused if other political groups are given access to them. Wisdom in your community might in-

clude the desirability of not giving such access to any political group.

5. Adequate police protection and supervision should be provided outside the meeting. But even more important than the numbers of the police, is the instruction they should receive. The police may provide, if well instructed, a sedative effect, or can themselves be the first to be provoked. They should be cautioned to be polite, calm, indifferent to provocation and firm but not violent.

6. Don't build up the Communist meeting. Had there been no initial resistance to the first of the Robeson meetings in Peekskill, it would have attracted two or three hundred people and passed without impact upon the community or advantage to the Communists. It was the first mistake which guaranteed a nation-wide attention and attendance of thousands.

7. Discourage curiosity seekers from gathering around the meeting place. A number count does not distinguish between the curious and the faithful.

8. Instruct the parents to keep the children at home. This applies particularly to teen-agers.

9. Encourage local newspapers not to sensationalize the meeting or stimulate additional interest by flamboyant editorials or headlines. Of course, coverage appropriate to the actual size of the meeting must be given, but it must not be exaggerated.

Commies Eager For Violence

10. Above all, recognize the essential Communist strategy. They want you to build their attendance with screaming headlines, irate veterans, insulted minorities and aroused tempers. They are eager for scenes of violence and disorder. They will, and know how to, magnify the most minor disturbances. They want you provoked and civil rights disturbed.

11. Once you decide on your strategy, let the community know what it is.

a. Firmly identify the character of the meeting and outline what it is they seek.

b. Emphasize the importance to your community of the protection of civil and legal rights.

c. Make it a point of community pride to remain calm.

d. Cooperate with the various interracial groups and religious organizations to maintain unity of the community.

12. It is generally not wise to set up a community organization to combat the meeting. It magnifies its importance enormously and tends to arouse fear and antagonism. However, every community should have its permanent organization of community leaders to handle problems of this kind and to help resolve what-

ever racial, political and social frictions may develop from time to time. Such a council should consist of the town's leading clergymen, editors, businessmen, labor leaders, youth group leaders, parent-teachers' association officers, town officials.

13. It is almost always bad to form a counter demonstration. It invariably increases the size and importance of the original disturbance. It raises tempers and can build toward the explosion you seek to avoid.

14. Certainly don't do it unless your community meeting is guaranteed to be far larger in interest and attendance.

b. It must be separated geographically without any opportunity for the groups to meet before, during, or after the meeting or demonstration.

c. It must have an affirmative theme and is best if it doesn't even mention the opposition meeting. And if there is such an opposition meeting, it is important to exclude every neo-Fascist and Racist group or element.

15. Above all, whatever happens, whether there is or is not an opposition meeting, should there be any violation of the law, any violence, any actual disturbance of the peace, there must be prompt, unemotional and equal

punishment of law breakers. This vigorous enforcement of the law must include any violation participated in by the police.

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