

# University of Penna. Fires a Teacher

By SOL AUERBACH.

SOME are still naive enough to believe that the freedom of speech theoretically guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, that scrap-heap of worn out ideals, is still existent in this country. That belief is the central hobby of liberals who think that they can attain reformist ends by insisting on their civil liberties. Those of us who know better from experiences in strikes and radical activities, are not at all surprised when radicals are put in jail or expelled from unions or bourgeois institutions. It is in the run of things.

I was until a few days ago an instructor in the University of Pennsylvania, one of the most reactionary universities in this country. In a very polite and genteel way I was asked to leave the teaching of the precious young Americans to safer and more staid professors. In the ethics of a university I had committed a crime. This is the story of my crime.

## Visited U. S. S. R.

Last summer I visited the Soviet Union as a member of the American Student Delegation. On April 6 I spoke at a public meeting in Philadelphia, arranged by the Student Delegation, on "The Educational System and the Student in Soviet Russia." Ten days later I was called to a meeting of the professors of the Philosophy Department. They were very polite and considerate. They asked me if I had spoken at this meeting on Soviet Russia. They wanted to know if I did not think that leaflets printed in red ink would not give the impression that it was a Communist meeting. I wanted to know if the professors thought that leaflets printed in green ink would be appropriate advertisement for a klu klux klan meeting. They remarked that an avowed Communist and agitator had spoken on the same platform as I did. They were very curious about my political views—was I connected with any active propaganda or revolutionary organization? How far would I go in my support of the Soviet Union, etc. (My views were already well known to them.) Thruout the whole meeting it was very evident that some higher authorities had ordered this trial, for they continually referred to and quoted from a list of typewritten charges. One of the professors wishing to assert his good faith and give evidence of his impartiality repeated again and again: "Auerbach, I want you to understand that we are not responsible for this; but you are in trouble and we want to help you out." This same professor later said to one of the instructors of the department that they had come to the meeting hoping to fight for me, but that I had struck by my principles and they could do nothing for me. Keep this in mind in view of later developments.

The high point of the conference

came when one of the professors quoted from the "charges" a letter that had been sent to me thru special delivery. I had received this letter a few hours before the Soviet Union meeting on April 6 from Richard Hill, of Lincoln University, a member of the Student Delegation, who was scheduled to speak at the same meeting. In this letter he was sorry that he could not speak since "he had been advised that the meeting was not being held under the auspices of the delegation but under other auspices under which he did not care to speak." The University had a copy of this letter. I did not think that the espionage system had gone this far. Later I wrote a letter to Hill asking him to explain but he only referred me to William Johnson, president of Lincoln University who, he said, had advised him. I wrote to President Johnson on April 26 asking him to explain. I did not expect him to reply and he did not. Since then I have heard from neither of them. I suppose that Hill was forced to write this letter by Johnson if he wanted to get his diploma and then a copy of the letter was sent to the U. of P. Universities, unite to save the world from Communism!

## "Shut Up or Get Out."

To get back to the polite conference with my professors. They thought that my interest in "outside activities" was unhealthy for the University and the morals of the students. The head of the department thought that it would interfere with my teaching. He thought that a teacher should be interested in nothing but detached research, should not allow the practical problems of today to interfere with his philosophy. I pointed out to them that I had in no way neglected my university duties. (In fact, I had been recommended for my work both as a student and a teacher.) But they thought it "incompatible that a teacher should take a public stand on an important issue and at the same time retain the critical state of mind necessary for research and teaching." A teacher must be intellectually secluded. I asked them if they meant that I should shut up or get out. They said yes. I told them that I would not shut up since I thought that what I had to say about the Soviet Union was valuable, especially in view of the public ignorance on that subject and the lies that are broadcasted in the capitalist press. They told me not to be hasty, to think it over. They gave me another week to decide although I did not need it.

## "Activities."

It, however, gave me a chance to write a letter to Professor Singer, head of the philosophy department, which summed up most of our conversation. In that letter I insisted on my right to express myself publicly and that whatever other activities I was interested in did not fall under the jurisdiction of the university. I pointed out that there are other

men on our department who were very active in the religious, business and professional world and who "seem to arouse no doubt as to their capacity to attain that intellectual seclusion. . . ." That there were professors all over the country who were active in public matters. I also said:

"It seems to me that instructors in philosophy should be encouraged to interest themselves in social problems (even practical ones) for the sake of a more complete, vital and comprehensive instruction in a course like ethics, and a more interested and concerned attitude towards the problems of philosophy. Especially do the most vital issues of today such as imperialism, industrial conflict and general social disorganization call for an unflinching criticism of existing social institutions and for the training for a critical attitude in the young men who attend universities.

"As the matter stands I cannot help but feel that I am being dismissed because of my point of view and my opinions."

The following is the answer I received from Professor Singer:

"My dear Mr. Auerbach:

The sentiments of your letter of April 28 are such as from the first we had understood yours to be. We should have been glad had you come to share our view, that other studies might better serve your end, as other students ours. But on this we can insist no further. In the end we are responsible for the future of the department, and can do no better than follow our best judgment in the matter of personnel.

In not recommending your re-appointment, do not believe us to have withdrawn our personal interest in your future. When you quite feel like it, I should be glad to talk over some aspects of that problem—if it is one with you.

Very sincerely yours,  
(Signed) Edgar A. Singer, Jr."

I was fired.  
About a week later Lewis S. Gannett, of The Nation, came to Philadelphia to interview Professor Singer. Singer refused to answer questions and avoided all issues. He gave a written statement to Gannett saying that "Mr. Singer had informed Mr. Gannett that any formal statement of the reasons for a decision must be made from the administrative office."

Some students had learned about it and tried to get Professor Singer's side of the matter. He told them to go to the administration. The administration told them to go to Professor Singer. They went to one of the local papers and gave them the story. A reporter came to interview me. For two days all the local papers carried the story on the front page.

On the second day Prof. Singer issued a statement saying that I had been dismissed because of my irregularity in meeting classes.

(To Be Continued.)