

Letter from Senator Joseph McCarthy to the President of the United States

This letter from Senator Joseph McCarthy, Republican representative of Wisconsin, to President Harry Truman was written three days after McCarthy's famous Wheeling Speech. This speech signaled McCarthy's rise to influence, as he gained national attention by producing a piece of paper on which he claimed he had listed the names of 205 members of the Communist Party working secretly in the U.S. State Department. McCarthy was, at the time of this letter, beginning to exploit national concerns about Communist infiltration during the Cold War. This fear of infiltration was intensified by the Soviet Union's recent development of the atomic bomb and the coming Communist takeover of China. "McCarthyism" however was not yet at its peak. Senator McCarthy here at first encourages President Truman to commit more resources to the war of containment being fought in South Korea, and secondly questioned the legitimacy and effectiveness of Truman's loyalty program, signed into effect by Executive Order 9835 in 1947. This program required the FBI to run checks on almost anyone involved in the U.S. government and subsequently to launch investigations into any government employee with what could be presumed as questionable political associations. The Loyalty Program was not enough to satisfy Senator McCarthy, who suspected that a number of subversives had slipped through the investigation and remained in the State Department. President Truman made it clear that he would not take McCarthy's accusations seriously and that the Senator was "the best asset the Kremlin has."¹⁰⁹

July 12, 1950
The President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

Today American boys lie dead in the mud of Korean valleys.¹¹⁰ Some have their hands tied behind their back, their faces shot away by Communist machine guns.

They are dead today not because they were less brave or had less to fight for than the North Korean Communists who manned those machine guns, but because the program adopted by this Congress to avoid just such a war in Korea, and signed into law by you, Mr. President, was sabotaged.

Last year Congress voted money to fortify South Korea and to help Anti-Communist forces in the entire Asiatic area. One item of \$75 million was

¹⁰⁹ Arthur Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*. (Free Press, 2000), 131.

¹¹⁰ The Korean War started on June 25, 1950, and ended with the signing of an armistice on July 27, 1953. This letter was written seventeen days after the war officially began and sixteen days after U.S. began supporting the Republic of Korea (ROK) in South Korea.

appropriated; another of \$27,600,000; another of \$10,300,000.

As you and all of us know the program for military aid to South Korea was sabotaged to the extent that only \$52,000 worth of wire out of the above millions appropriated was sent to Korea with which to stem the threatened onslaught of Communist planes, tanks, artillery, etc.

While the Russians were sending to North Korea tanks, artillery and planes, our State Department “experts” on the Far East were sabotaging our programs to militarily aid the Korean Republic, and Secretary of State Dean Acheson was announcing to the world that we would not aid the South Koreans if they were invaded. We can assume that not only were the North Koreans listening, but Stalin as well.

Two of those State Department experts, Mr. Jessup¹¹¹ and his super-advisor Lattimore,¹¹² were telling the world that Korea did not count in the Far East defenses of Democracy. Lattimore, as you will recall, Mr. President, publicly stated that our only problem in Korea was to let her fall without having it appear that we pushed her to her doom.

It does not seem improper, Mr. President, to ask at this time why it is that Mr. Acheson could expedite a \$60 million order of guns and bullets for Communist Poland, but did the opposite for the anti-Communist forces in South Korea.

Obviously, as President you must rely on the advice of others. Men, both great and small, have been betrayed by advisers in the past. It is understandable that a President can be betrayed by his political friends. But it is not understandable nor excusable if he keeps those political friends in positions of power after they are exposed as betrayers not only of him but of the nation.

At this time I would like to bring to your attention documented facts showing how your own well-meaning program¹¹³ to clean the subversives out of government, which program was initiated in 1946, was sabotaged by those advisors whom you apparently still trust. In 1946 the attention of Congress was directed to disloyalty in the government when the Carl Marzani¹¹⁴ case was broken. As you know, he was one of the top State Department employees convicted of perjury in connection with his Communistic activities.

¹¹¹ Philip Jessup was a focus of Senator McCarthy’s attacks, and his name was brought up often during the Tydings Committee hearings.

¹¹² Owen Lattimore, an author, scholar of Central Asia, and professor at Johns Hopkins University; Senator Joseph McCarthy accused him in 1950 of being a Soviet espionage agent because of his position as an expert on the Far East in the State Department.

¹¹³ Executive Order 9835, also called the Loyalty Order, was initiated by President Truman to examine the possibility of Communist infiltration in various departments within the federal government. Of the more than three million federal employees investigated, roughly three hundred were noted as risks and asked to leave.

¹¹⁴ Carl Marzani was a member of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) yet concealed his membership while serving in the OSS, the Office of Strategic Services, during World War II.

In response to the growing demand in Congress at that time, you ordered, and Congress later approved, a Federal loyalty program.¹¹⁵ \$11 million was appropriated to put that program into effect.

The proof of how this program was sabotaged is attached hereto in the form of photostats of signed statements from people who were hired by the State Department to assist in the job – people who now come forward with nothing to gain and at least one of whom has a job to risk by giving this information.

One of these individuals now works for the State Department. Another is third-year student at Georgetown University; a third is in private industry; a fourth is presently an FBI agent.

You will note that the name and other job information contained in the statement of the State Department employee has been blocked out in the photostat. This was [sic] done because this man gave the statement only on the condition that his name not be used and he get no publicity in connection therewith. However, if you will give me your personal assurance that his job will not [be] endangered thereby, I am sure I can obtain his consent to let his name be given to you.

Three of the four innocently, as far as they were concerned, took part in a file stripping operation fully described in the statements. Their statements refer to the files as personnel files. These files became the present loyalty files after the loyalty program was put into effect. They were hired by the State Department and paid with public funds to destroy files which had been built up at tremendous cost and labor in order to protect the security of this nation.

This information is being brought to your personal attention for two specific reasons.

(1) When I started to expose Communists, etc., in the State Department, you condemned my methods and stated that if I had brought the information to you, you personally would have taken the necessary steps to correct the situation.

(2) The following sequence of facts prove that it would be worse than useless to present this information to the Tydings-McMahon committee¹¹⁶ which your Administration selected to do the job of exposing Communists in our State Department.

When I stated that the State Department loyalty files were rifled and that important material was missing, the chairman of the committee held a press conference and answered with a studiously false assertion that the FBI had examined all the files and found them complete and intact.

This was not the truth. With my knowledge of and unlimited respect which I have for the FBI and having knowledge of the extent to which those files had

¹¹⁵ This loyalty program created loyalty boards, ordered the Justice Department to produce lists of dissident organizations as well as possible subversives, and granted authorization to dismiss “security risks” without producing explicit evidence.

¹¹⁶ Subcommittee on the Investigation of the Loyalty of State Department Employees. This committee was convened in February 1950 to investigate the claims of Senator McCarthy.

been denuded, I knew that this statement was not the truth. Mr. Tydings must also have known it.

I attach hereto a photostat of two clippings – one from the New York Times, the other from the New York Herald Tribune, quoting his statements at that time. I could not prove that his statement was false without the document which I now have in my possession. That document is attached hereto. It is a letter from the FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover.¹¹⁷

I call your attention to paragraph two, which reads as follows:

“The Federal Bureau of Investigation has made no such examination and therefore is not in a position to make any statement concerning the completeness or incompleteness of the State Department files.”

Certainly under the above circumstances, no one can honestly claim that the majority members of this committee under the leadership of Senators Tydings¹¹⁸ and McMahon¹¹⁹ are attempting to get the facts. Certainly no one could honestly urge that material as important as that being submitted to you today should be submitted to the Tydings-McMahon committee – unless of course we were willing to follow in the footsteps of that committee and trim the facts to fit the political cloth of men afraid to face the truth.

For those reasons this material is being presented directly to you, Mr. President.

There are those who have made pleas for unity in this time of crisis. I join them in that plea, but I must define that unity to the point where it will have meaning for those we send today to Korea to fight and die.

We must all be unified in our loyalty to this nation. There is no place in a hot war for men with lukewarm loyalty.

There was never a place for them in the cold war. But they were there.

Even in normal times, the information given you would be shocking. Today, however, it is doubly shocking because of the disastrous sequence of events in Asia, which today has brought us to the very precipice of defeat by the Communist half of the world. It reveals the groundwork laid for keeping and protecting people in the State Department who are unfit to serve this country.

Why would the State Department find it necessary to strip the files unless the information, when placed before the loyalty boards, would have caused the removal of those individuals. The stripping was successful to the extent that this nation was and is being betrayed. For proof you need merely look upon the chain of events which have lead to the repeated disaster for the United States and victory for Russia in Asia.

Today Korea is the crisis area. Where will it be tomorrow if the same men act as your advisors and mold your thinking Mr. President?

¹¹⁷ John Edgar Hoover was the Director of the FBI from 1924 to 1972.

¹¹⁸ Senator Millard Tydings, a Democrat from Maryland, served in the Senate from 1927 to 1951.

¹¹⁹ Senator Brien (James O'Brien) McMahon, a Democrat from Connecticut, served in the Senate from 1945 to 1952.

The magnitude of this file stripping operation is better understood when you realize that it took six months to strip the State Department files of information on the disloyal, and bad security risks, the fellow travelers and the traitors, and it took a crew of eight to do the job.

You will note that the statement of one of the young men who took no part in the file stripping job, but who had the task of making out cards on the clean files, shows that he was advised that the State Department employees were allowed to inspect and rifle their own files.

If this was an accepted procedure during the cold war, what is now being done in fraud and deceit and [sic] now that the real day for the traitors to do their work is at hand?

Someone in the State Department ordered the files stripped. Who was he? He must be found, Mr. President. And when found you decide how close he is to the top of the list of those who pledge their allegiance to the Soviet Union. You decide whether he is merely a dupe or guilty of high treason.

There are those who say we should not now spend time searching for those responsible for the disasters of the past few years. Common horse sense dictates, however, that in order to protect America in the critical weeks, months and years ahead we must determine who in positions of trust seek to betray us, and then act to get them out of government. If allowed to remain, they will undoubtedly tip the scales for disaster and against victory for this nation.

Respectfully yours,

JOE McCARTHY