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How the Left Uses “McCarthyism”

The term McCarthyism is not just an ordinary word weapon in the language of contemporary political combat. It has a very specific function: it is a scarlet “M” word, used by the Left as a trump card to terminate debate and intimidate adversaries.

We are indebted to two ex-leftists from the sizzling Sixties, Peter Collier and David Horowitz, for dissecting the McCarthyism phenomenon in their book *Destructive Generation* (Summit Books). Collier-Horowitz describe how Joseph McCarthy, who when alive was part of the Right, in death has become the property of the “body snatchers on the Left.”

A Wisconsin Senator during the 1950s, McCarthy achieved fame by exposing Communist sympathizers in government. To counter his mass popularity, the Left coined the term McCarthyism and defined it to mean the sinister smearing of innocent people.

Exotic uses of the term tend to perpetuate this definition. The Tobacco Institute attacked the “McCarthyism” of anti-smoking activists, *Playboy* Magazine condemned the “sexual McCarthyism” of the Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, and those who urge testing for AIDS have been accused of “chemical McCarthyism.”

However, Collier-Horowitz explain that the principal use of the term is not to defend civil liberties but to silence discussion of ideas the Left does not want to debate. Used as a spear to paralyze all opposition to Communism, it has become “Communism’s best friend.”

Collier-Horowitz cite two unrelated 1987 examples of how an incumbent Congressman and then an incumbent Senator were confronted with documented evidence of their Communist activities and affiliations. In both cases, when the scarlet word “McCarthyism” was uttered, that simply terminated media coverage.

The Left regularly uses the very tactics it pretends to disdain as “McCarthyite”: the big lie, the reckless smear, guilt by association, and disregard for due process. One of the Left’s leading journals, *The Nation*, repeatedly smears those who criticize the Sandinistas as “contra hirelings” or “CIA agents,” and viciously smears blacks

who oppose Affirmative Action (such as Thomas Sowell or William Lucas) as “an enemy of the people.”

The Left pitilessly caricatured McCarthy’s questioning of witnesses, “are you now or have you ever been a Communist?”, claiming that this denied due process. But the Left regularly uses the same type of “are you now or have you ever been?” style of interrogation. That was precisely how the Left and the liberal media forced President Reagan to fire John H. Koehler as his communications director because the 56-year-old Koehler had belonged briefly to a Nazi youth group when he was 10 years old.

Collier-Horowitz, who are no defenders of Joseph McCarthy the man, admit that the reason why his question “are you now or have you ever been...?” had to be asked in the first place was because the Communists were engaged in the business of pretending to be progressive while concealing their subversive intentions. According to the authors, “The Communists cynically used liberalism as protective coloration” for their pro-Communist goals and activities.

Collier and Horowitz conclude that McCarthyism is not a term which means the abusive tactics of character assassination or reckless disregard for due process. McCarthyism finally “means anti-Communism itself,” a political objective that the Left finds inherently abusive.

The Left wants to prevent the facts of Communism from being discussed and debated. McCarthyism, “the last refuge of the Left,” has become the primary weapon of the eighties to achieve that objective.

With refreshing candor, Collier-Horowitz admit that the left is not at all motivated by “compassion” but by “the totalitarian Idea.” The Left not only excuses but justifies the Red Terror, and is consistently indifferent to the genocides of Communist conquest in Russia, Eastern Europe, Cuba, Cambodia, Tibet and Afghanistan.

The 20-year evolution of a couple of talented writers from radical Leftists to political sanity makes interesting reading for history buffs. It’s also useful to have their authentic admission of how the Left has consistently covered for the Communists.