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## HUAC in Retrospect

The vote to abolish the House Internal Security Committee is a clear indication that the times they are a-changing. Less than a decade ago only a few Congressmen argued for abolition of the House Un-American Activities Committee, as it was then called, but in recent times it has been hard to round up enough Democrats willing to accept assignment to the committee.

In some ways, this development reflects the maturation and increasing sophistication of American political society. The country seemingly has grown more tolerant of ideas that deviate from mainstream thought. More importantly, there probably is a general perception that even the most vigorous critics of the U.S. social and economic order are no longer likely to look to the Soviet Union for inspiration. Few people anywhere still harbor illusions about the Soviet system described by Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

HUAC no doubt encountered its most serious and valid criticism at the times in its past when it mirrored the Soviet penchant for scrutinizing personal ideologies and loyalty to the state. Respected civil libertarians with a genuine concern for the survival of American institutions felt the threat to free inquiry was far more serious than the threat of subversion.

But we doubt that either political maturation or the passing of the In-

ternal Security Committee has totally resolved the issue. One of the basic challenges to an open society is to allow the widest possible political and ideological diversity without losing the sense that there is something the entire society must stand for, a central concept that holds it together.

No doubt one of the things that HUAC accomplished in its early days, unintentionally, was to persuade many Americans that as a free people, they do not like politicians trying to root around in their minds. So in a perverse way, the committee in its early days helped strengthen the central concept of American society, the concept of individual political freedom. And in a positive way, the committee also later developed a wealth of important and scholarly data invaluable to anyone interested in understanding other forms of political coercion, from the Soviet style to types that have been attempted here by the Ku Klux Klan, New Left agitators and other such groups.

The House Democratic Caucus vote probably reflects a prevailing attitude that the committee has become an anachronism. But we doubt that this means that Americans have grown tolerant of anyone who would subvert the country's free institutions. Perhaps they have simply become better at determining what constitutes such a threat.