

Mr. Victor Navasky, editor
The Nation
72 Fifth Ave.,
New York, N.Y. 10011

12/27/88

Dear Mr. Navasky,

Of all the miserable business of so many seeking to forward political or other agendas at the expense of Alger Hiss one of the more disgusting is Michael Rogin's gross misrepresentation in his letter of supposed answer to criticisms of his The Nation review of more than three months earlier.

William Rubin, citing Hiss' sworn testimony, stated Hiss "had no friends who, to his knowledge, was a Communist." Rogin distorts this into the statement Rubin and Hiss did not make, ~~and~~ having Rubin say that "Hiss had nothing to do with Communists in the 1930s." This cannot possibly be an accident ~~and~~ it raises substantial questions about almost anything Rogin says.

If this did not raise any editorial hackles, how about Rogin's "the postwar red scare in the United States"? What in the hell did he and you think Congressmen Sam Dickstein, John McCormack, Martin Dies and their many committee colleagues were doing before the war? Or the Clare Hoffmans, John Rankins, Eugene Coxes and others in the House and their likeminded in the Senate?

You let Rogin misuse this and more like it into a wholesale attack on so many who were anti-fascist and not Communists, the typical dishonesty of the right so many of whom in those days were not unfriendly toward Hitler and Mussolini.

How about Rogin's "many on the left (whatever to him this means) are still unwilling to disentangle admirable commitments to social change in the 1930s Communist movement from the endorsement of mass political murder"? If one then was opposed to the enormous social evils or supported trade unions, did this emanate he also "endorsed" mass murder?

Whatever their relationship, are you so ignorant of Washington in those days that you can believe Chambers was Hiss' "most important" friend? Do you know so little about Hiss or Washington in those days? About working in the government or on Senate and House committees in those days? Or do you know so little about what is public about those truly important people who were Hiss' friends whose names abound in the published literature - really "important" people?

If those days of the Great Depression and of political ferment in Washington to which so many of us then young hurried to try and help FDR turn the country around we all had "friends" who were in fact strangers. I never heard of anyone who lacked a pad. Someone always knew somebody in Washington and that someone almost always found a way to help. We didn't run security checks when people were without work and had no place to stay. and yes, we were imposed upon in varying degrees. A personal experience like this of which I had few: I took in a man who stole from me

(a petty theft he laughed about to those with whom I shared that apartment) and he later rose to be chief justice of that state's courts.

How did we live? When I had a one-room apartment I shared it with a man who'd been a reporter with me back home until he and his wife could make their own start. Down that same alley (Yes, it was an alley) lived the curator of the Smithsonian.

My wife still remembers her embarrassment when she'd answer a knock on the door and a stranger would say "Hal told me to come" for either a place to stay or, in the case of two stars of the hit show Hellzapoppin you may be too ^{young} young to remember, for just a good home-cooked meal and a little feeling of friendliness in a home environment. Or the massive union organizer from Pittsburgh who was so very heavy he literally broke out bed we let him have. (I don't remember who sent him, but I was on a Senate ^{rights} labor ^{investigating} ~~organizing~~ committee.)

Alone, when I lived with other young men or after I was married those I helped in varying ways include a man who later won an Emmy for NBC with a show he produced; one who later headed a State Department of Labor (and he helped others when he lived ~~at~~ together with me); this goniff who became a State supreme court chief judge; a man who as of my last information headed a well-reputed conservatory of music; a man who managed a famous symphony orchestra; the ~~boy~~ boyfriend of a girl I ^{know} know, today a millionaire at least; a man who became an eminence in medical journalism; and even one who stoolpigeoned on another to save his own job, the other being the friend along with whom I helped this total-stranger fink. I'm sure if I made a list this would get much longer. I'm just trying to give you an idea of how it really was in those days in Washington. I once even found a brother of one of Mussolini's bodyguards had accompanied another who came to my apartment.

Befriending someone then did not mean that you even liked him, leave alone shared his political views. That was a world in which we helped others who sometimes were complete strangers and in which some of us were helped by those who were complete strangers.

It ^{is} simply is not possible that Chambers ^{was} Hiss' "most important friend." To say this is either to be entirely ignorant of who was then important or to be deliberately dishonest and evil.

In my ~~haste~~ ^{haste} I overlooked ^{something else} what Rogin says, that "the forgery by typewriter is by no means as clearcut as Margaret Halsey would ~~dike~~ like." Nuts. Peter Irons showed me those FBI reports as soon as he got them. The serial number, not assigned until ^{much} later, is absolute proof and whatever Rogin thinks was done or was not done with ~~solder~~ solder is immaterial.

I apologize for my haste and typing. I'm past 75, have only one good eye and I can't use it ^{well} for a while because of recent surgery on it. I think you owe your trusting readers and yourself an apology. Sincerely, Harold Weisberg

