

Post  
1-19-72

## The Loyalty Incantation

Americans would surely be mortified at any governmental attempt to limit their freedom of movement within their own country for any reason short of violation of the law. They ought to be almost equally mortified at any attempt to put constraints on their travel abroad. It seems particularly unfortunate to find the State Department putting conditions on travel by American citizens at a time when free men have been looking with disdain at the unwillingness of the Soviet Union to permit emigration to Israel by Russian Jews who want to go there. Confinement within a country is an aspect of dictatorship.

It can hardly be doubted that the State Department's insistence on a loyalty oath as a condition for obtaining a passport constitutes an impediment to travel. It's not that most people can't take the oath in good conscience. It's being told to take it . . . or else that somehow seems offensive. Professions of loyalty, like expressions of love, have meaning only when they are unsolicited. They may confirm what is already understood but they do little to convince anyone of what was previously

doubted. Moreover, they're insulting—like the exaction of a promise not to pilfer from the petty cash drawer or a demand that a dinner party guest swear he won't stuff any of the silver in his pocket while at the table.

The rationale for demanding a loyalty oath from passport applicants appears to be that the law says passports shall be granted only to persons owing allegiance to the United States. Of course, all Americans owe such allegiance; whether they will honor the obligation is unlikely to be determined by their recital of a mere form of words, an incantation. It is sufficient, we think, that the State Department should ascertain that they are American citizens, that they are not fugitives from justice and that they wish to go abroad.

A passport is really no more than a form of identification, a letter of introduction from the Secretary of State, bespeaking for the bearer such courtesies as are due an American citizen. It is not a special dispensation to be bestowed by the Secretary of State upon those whom he may wish to honor and denied to those whom he may prefer to keep at home.