

The Ghost of McCarthyism

By C. L. Sulzberger

PARIS—The young French revolutionary theorist, Regis Debray, has been refused a U.S. visitor's visa under the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act passed by Congress during the peak of McCarthyist red-baiting. This makes little sense for a country that proclaims its open-minded tolerance while the Soviet Union is expelling dissident intellectuals, headed by Solzhenitsyn, simply because it disagrees with their views.

In its younger days the United States felt strong enough to welcome from abroad such known revolutionaries as Kossuth and Trotsky without fearing their presence might shake the Republic's underpinnings. But such self-confidence has waned amid the current tragic sagas of violence and terror. The only trouble is that it cannot be revived if we retreat into a kind of intellectual isolationism.

Many Americans know that the 33-year-old Debray, a slight mustachioed man of deceptively frail appearance, is a friend and admirer of Fidel Castro and fought with Ché Guevara's tiny guerrilla band in Bolivia. But keeping the man away from the U.S.A. while disseminating his ideas is utterly illogical—and I am certainly not advocating that Washington should move toward autocracy by also banning his ideas.

Mr. Debray wants to go to the United States (for the first time since 1967) in order to see his wife, now studying at Berkeley, Calif., and his New York publisher, Random House, which is printing an American edition of his latest book, "La Critique des Armes." This work, continuing his thesis on revolution as developed in Latin America, is certainly more dangerous to established order than Mr. Debray himself.

His wife, incidentally, is Venezuelan. She was once a member of that country's Communist youth movement. She could therefore have been barred by any bureaucratic ninny under the same section of the immigration act as Mr. Debray—Article 212 (a) (28). That specifically designates as undesirable people linked to the Communist apparatus "of any foreign state."

Mr. Debray can legally be excluded under this excessive law for advocating overthrow of organized governments—in his case, Latin American. But he insists he has no desire to use violence against the Governments of France or the United States; only to oppose the expression of U.S. Latin policy.

It is unlikely his presence in the U.S.A. will constitute more of a danger than publication of his works. Certainly, should it so want, the ubiquitous F.B.I. could keep an eye on him. In any case, he assures me he has no intention of practicing or encouraging political action in America during his visit.

From outside looking in—where Washington stupidly wants to keep him—he claims to be impressed by the vigor of American democracy and how well it has managed to absorb the repercussions of Vietnam—as compared with the repercussions of Algeria in France. Hitherto, he says he has believed the U.S. concept of "freedom to think differently."

Although he has worked to demolish allegedly dictatorial regimes in Latin America, he says the present wave of disorganized violence in the United States is "crazy"—such crimes as the kidnapping of Patricia Hearst

or the editor of The Atlanta Constitution.

"I strongly disapprove of this," he told me. "I only support revolutionary violence against dictatorship regimes when there is no other way of opposing them. I don't favor violent action in France, only the use of existing means to change the Government."

He claims he is "definitely not a Communist" but rather "anti-imperialist" and, in French politics, a supporter of François Mitterrand, the Socialist chief who, although he has an electoral alliance with the Communists, "is certainly not the kind of man who endorses terrorism," according to Mr. Debray.

As far as I can figure, the decision to ban Mr. Debray was taken in Washing-

ton because there is such strong sentiment against all violence, especially since the two kidnappings mentioned above. But Debray applied for his visa before either of those terrible acts.

I personally hope the negative decision is reconsidered and reversed and also that the McCarthyist act of 1952 is drastically amended. It is necessary for the United States to uphold its concepts of liberty—including the right to disagree—even during sad and often hysterical moments like the present.

If—thank heavens—a man's vigorous ideas are not censored, why is it logical to try and censor the man himself? Keeping Mr. Debray from his wife and publisher is more consonant with Soviet ideology than our own.