

11-14-1949

## Report From Britain, 14 November 1949

James W. (James Wesley) Silver (1907-1988)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jws\\_brit](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jws_brit)

---

### Recommended Citation

Silver (1907-1988), James W. (James Wesley), "Report From Britain, 14 November 1949" (1949). *Reports from Britain, 1949-1950*. 10.  
[https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jws\\_brit/10](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jws_brit/10)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the James W. Silver Collection at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reports from Britain, 1949-1950 by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

REPORT FROM BRITAIN  
James W. Silver  
Chairman, Department of History  
University of Mississippi

Aberdeen, Scotland  
November 14, 1949

Last week I was puzzled by the British reception of Russians who came to extoll the supposed virtues of communism. The visitors were treated with every courtesy by a people apparently indifferent to the dangers inherent in the gospel preached.

A Southerner has written me in exasperation to find out whether the British are "stupidly blind" enough to allow red infiltration to the point where it might threaten the very heritage of freedom and democracy they are so proud of. The answer seems to be that the average Briton is supremely confident that future change will follow the evolutionary path of the past. He believes that the radical is far less dangerous on a platform speaking his mind than he would be if driven underground. Where there is no martyrdom there will be few converts, he reasons. Perhaps it all boils down to the fact that the Britisher has a sublime faith in the system under which he lives.

Students, professors, and businessmen, regardless of the hue of their thinking, sooner or later come around to an expression of surprise at certain American habits and customs. To them the communist trials, mob violence of whatever sort North or South, lobbying in the grand American tradition, attacks on academic freedom, and second class citizenship for minority groups, are incomprehensible. One student told me that he could not understand why presidential candidates need vie for the support of a Joe Louis, Bing Crosby, or Bette Davis.

On British soil where personal freedom approaches reality, it is difficult for me to explain why more than half of the American states have special oaths for teachers, why a civics text was recently banned in Houston because it stated the obvious truth that "the United States has some socialism and a bit of communism." The British are extremely polite and insist that they have far too many problems of their own to go meddling into ours, but they are respectfully curious regarding a country which blatantly advertizes its democracy to all the world but does not allow the vote to a large part of its own people.

Several have asked me about the fifty-million dollar endowment of a college in Mississippi which would teach white supremacy and states' rights. At least I have been spared further

attempts to explain that one. Over here free speech is so taken for granted that teachers need not be concerned lest their views fail to coincide with majority thinking of the moment. Principal Taylor doesn't appear to be greatly concerned about the rumored presence of two or three fellow-travelers on his faculty at the University of Aberdeen.

A hard-headed business-man told me that he understood and believed in the religion of free enterprise, but that he found it hard to reconcile the utterances of a people who worship the "American way" while "cowering behind gigantic trade barriers." And, he inquired, "What about these statistics I see occasionally on the American economy which, for all its wealth, hasn't adequately fed or clothed or housed or even kept all its people employed?"

Every thinking person knows that Britain's place in the sun is a precarious one. It is also apparent that the Britisher approaches his problems with a maturity of judgment and lack of hysteria which are too seldom found in the United States. The chances are slim indeed that we shall see an "un-British Activities Committee." Could it be that an examination of the British frame of mind would lead Americans to a greater assurance that their own way of life has the strength to stand on its own merits?

###