

Kennarock, Virginia
June 22, 1954

Dear Peter,

Because I don't expect to find you still at home when we arrive Sunday night, I will send you a few of the uncomfortable, though vague thoughts that I have on the subject of your plans for the month of July. When Mother told me on the 12th that, after all, you were going to Great Barrington, I was too tired and confused to say anything more about it -- and it seemed quite useless. As Mother and Papa can tell you, the plan seemed to me a bad one from the beginning. I will not now explain to you all of my reasons in detail since nothing I can say will alter the arrangements. I would, however, like to give you something to think about as you undertake this month of work.

If, as I understand, you are to be a waiter and "general help", you should expect to be underpaid and overworked. I have heard a good deal about such jobs from students and friends, and I have never heard of one in which the individual concerned felt that he was fairly treated. Having been offered the job as an acquaintance, you will find it more difficult to stand on your rights than if you were nothing more than hired help.

In your time off you will probably have occasion to enjoy yourself with the other people who are there to "enjoy" themselves, and since the woods are small, this enjoyment will probably include little swimming and boating and walking. How much casual love-making it includes I can only guess at -- as I can only guess at your attitude to such trifling with serious matters. To me, a group of people who have nothing better to do than to gossip, play cards, and "make love," all in the vacation spirit of "enjoying themselves" is ridiculous and ugly.

Undoubtedly this social life will include some discussion of political matters, and it is this that I have particularly on my mind. I don't know whether you realize that Enge's parents were Socialists and that the tradition of dissent from the American system of free enterprise has continued, and I believe intensified in Enge's generation. I cannot define the shade of his radicalism, but I suspect that Norman Thomas would consider himself conservative in comparison, and I know that the atheism and materialism at the roots of Enge's thought is incompatible with the religious sentiments on which you and I were brought up.

I have the impression that Enge's friends and the clientele of his camp consist mostly of people with similar opinions to his. In fact, political sympathy is probably one of the most important grounds ~~of~~ ~~for~~ for these friendships. I do not know whether Enge or any of his friends are members of the Communist Party, and I suggest that you not try to evaluate or judge them on the basis of their associations but on their convictions. However, Enge talks very little, and I used to be disconcerted by the fact that I never knew the whole of what he did believe.

If our country were today still as free as it seemed to be ten years ago, you would not need to be concerned about associating yourself with men of such extreme political opinions. Today, as you know, it is different, and no matter how naive, how innocent, or how unsuspecting you are, there will be in this large group of anonymous clients at least one "Whitaker Chambers", who may find it expedient to point his chubby finger at you for having been there, if by this device he can escape the onus of accusations against him. There may come a day when you will find it dishonorable to do anything but sacrifice your future or your safety for an ideal and a purpose in which you really believe. Many brave people living under totalitarian government have had to do this, and although we must be courageous enough at all times, I hope and still believe that it will never be necessary for us to rise to such heroism. I am quite sure that this is neither the time nor the occasion for you to incur such risks, - and I believe they are risks, - for political theories about which no-one there will tell you the truth, and which you would probably reject if you knew the truth about them. Personally, I feel that I know enough about them to reject them.

It may sound strange to you, and to us it sounds so strange that it sometimes sounds almost comical, to consider that next year, when Alex and Jochen may be drafted, their fitness to receive a commission may be weighed, among other things, in the light of Aunt Emily's exodus to Russia and their association with a man of such political leanings as Enge's. How ironic that would be! since neither of them have the least sympathy for Enge's ideas. When Jochen came to Great Barrington to see me, he was so troubled that I had my difficulties in getting him to stay a second day. I hope that when someone attempts to determine your "loyalty" on the basis of your "associations", as is becoming so popular nowadays, the price of your summer job, - which I presume was all you wanted, - may not turn out to be excessive.

I never liked your going to Great Barrington. The least thing, the very least, I think, you can do, is to keep your mouth shut. You see, Enge, or any of his friends, will not be frank with you concerning their purposes, thoughts, or activities, and when you profess to agree with them, they will not give you the slightest idea of what you are agreeing with. Your statements derive most of their significance from the company in which they are made, and a political criticism made in good faith around the dinner table at home, might take on sinister significance around a dinner table where the guests are different in intention from perhaps anyone you know. I think there is nothing laudable about being brave, or rather reckless, blindly and ignorantly.

Considerations like these may be new and confusing to you, but if you tried discussing them outside the family it might cause some misunderstandings. Remember that people do read other people's letters, so don't drop it on the floor with your dirty shirt. Tear it up when you have finished with this letter, but not before you have understood it. You can see why it would be embarrassing to Enge and to you if he learned about this letter, - though not to me. Perhaps we can talk further when I see you.