

5 May 1958
New York, N.Y.

Harper & Brothers editor Arnold suggests revisions in King's discussion of communism in his Stride Toward Freedom manuscript.¹ King incorporated all of Arnold's recommendations in the published version.

The Rev. Martin Luther King
309 S. Jackson Street
Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Martin:

Hermine has just sent in the revised Chapter VI; she asked me to raise with you any questions that I may have.² I have made a few suggestions, and have gone over them with her—and she asked me to tell you that she recommends that these changes be made, and is convinced that they clarify, and not distort, your thinking.

As she mentioned in an earlier letter to you, I am writing on the basis of my experience in Boston in turning out a long series of books on controversial public issues.³ I learned what the enemies of freedom and of liberalism can do. Therefore, I made—and am now making—every effort to see that not even a single sentence can be lifted out of context and quoted against the book and the author.

These suggestions may strike you as reflecting excessive care—but I speak from long experience!

Page 4: The next to the last sentence at the bottom of the page can be distorted to suggest that only your initial response to communism was negative; therefore

1. Melvin Luxton Arnold (1913–), born in Portland, Oregon, was a journalist before becoming book editor and publisher for Beacon Press (1945–1956). He joined Harper & Brothers in 1956, becoming president of the publishing company (then Harper & Row) in 1967. In addition to working with King on *Stride Toward Freedom*, Arnold helped arrange the publication of L. D. Reddick's biography of King, *Crusader Without Violence* (1959) with Harper.

2. Arnold refers to the draft of the chapter that would be called "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence." An excerpted version of this chapter was published in the September edition of *Fellowship* magazine; see pp. 473–481 in this volume.

3. In a 15 April letter to King, Hermine Popper said of Arnold's forthcoming suggestions for King's discussion of Marxism: "His experience while head of Beacon press, where he published several books antagonistic to McCarthy, taught him how skillful hostile critics can be at indicting writers with sentences taken out of context. In other words, not only must the whole presentation be balanced, but every sentence must be so written that it cannot be misconstrued."

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I propose that you say ‘my response to communism was and is negative. . . .’

Page 6: The sentence at the end of the paragraph in the middle of the page should, I think, be combined, so that pernicious capitalism is linked to the previous sentence, and not left in a vacuum.

Page 6: The {next} sentence ~~sentence~~ reaches to the heart of the difficulty. Your critics could and would quote your original statement as a flat “yes” to Marxism; therefore I urge that this be made “a partial yes and a partial no.”

Page 7: Fifth line:—“Each represents a half truth.” This suggests that you place Marxism and traditional capitalism on the level of absolute equality—with each representing one-half the truth. Most of your readers—I should think more than 99% of them—will think of actual American capitalism and actual (not theoretical) Soviet communism, and will remember the abuses in each. They will recall, on the one hand, American strikes and lock-outs, and, on the other, Soviet slave-labor camps holding millions, with the extermination of enormous numbers of men, women and children . . . and will wonder at the apparent statement that each represents fifty percent of the truth. That is why I propose “a partial truth”.

Page 7: Sixth line:—You are vastly more at home with theoretical concepts and theoretical terms than 99% of your readers. (That is why, I think, you want to hold on—earlier in the book—to the word “zeitgeist”! Some readers will think that “zeitgeist” refers to an Ogpu, FBI, etc; others will think that you want to show that you know more than they do.)⁴ In any case, I assure you that your readers are not at home with the affirmative use of “collectivism”, and will have in their mind, when they read the word, the image of practical collectivism in USSR—with slaughter, political murders, slave labor camps, etc.—and will not have in their minds a text-book image of theoretical collectivism. Therefore I urgently advise you to use terms such as “social cooperation” instead of “collectivism”—both here and later in the paragraph.

My final suggestion on this chapter is made in the fifth line from the bottom of page 7. You have a splendid sentence: “War, horrible as it is, might be preferable to surrender to a totalitarian system.” I think that it would be very useful—and completely in harmony with your thinking—to make the end of this sentence read “. . . surrender to a totalitarian system—Nazi, Fascist, or communist.” This will be a wrap-up of your treatment of Marxism that will make it completely clear to the reader that you are facing up to the practical world of communism as well as to the theoretical world of Marxism.

I’ve reviewed these with Mr. Exman, and he agrees also, on the importance of making these clarifications of the text.⁵

With all good wishes,

Yours cordially,
[signed] Mel
Melvin Arnold

PS: A reminder—the appendices, preface, and dedication are due.

TALS. MLKP-MBU: Box 118.

4. Ogpu was the Soviet intelligence agency and predecessor to the KGB.

5. Eugene Exman was director of the Religious Books Department at Harper & Brothers.