

THE "RED MAIL" QUESTION

(A Special Statement by Rep. Morris K. Udall)

Since many of my correspondents have been asking how we might stop the flow of Communist propaganda in this country, I want to use this means of providing a more complete answer than I could in individual letters.

At the outset I want to say that I favor any effective means which will advance the cause of freedom in the world and deter the progress of communism. The question is: what measures consistent with our democratic traditions will accomplish these purposes?

Would it be right, for example, to subject your letters and mine to censorship in order to catch possible internal mailings of Communist literature? I'm sure you would agree such a measure would be far too extreme.

As it passed the House the postal rate revision bill, H.R. 7927, contained an amendment empowering the Attorney General to identify "Communist political propaganda" and forbid its passage through the mails. The matter is now up to the Senate.

I don't know what form the bill will finally take. However, Rep. Francis E. Walter, chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee, has said of this amendment that it is "so vague and ambiguous as to render it incapable of a meaningful legal construction." Further-more, he has expressed "substantial doubts as to its constitutionality."

Any such program, he told the House last September, "would create the false impression that the American people are so naive and gullible that they cannot be exposed to Communist propaganda without the danger of their being adversely influenced or corrupted by Communist doctrine."

As to the cost of delivering mail from Communist countries the Post Office Department reports that under the Universal Postal Union, established in 1874, we currently are dispatching more mail overseas (where it is delivered free) than we receive from other countries (which we deliver free). The same favorable balance prevails with respect to the Soviet Union and its satellites.

Most of the mail we receive from Communist countries comes by subscription to government agencies like the Central Intelligence Agency, to research libraries, and to the embassies and legations of those countries. Some of it is personal correspondence between relatives. How much is unsolicited "propaganda" I don't know; when I broadcast an appeal to Arizona and other areas, published in the press and on radio and television stations, asking for examples of unsolicited Communist propaganda last year, I received almost no response. While there undoubtedly is such literature being delivered in this country to unsuspecting recipients, I would say the volume is not particularly significant.

There is a further factor which deserves some attention. American families regularly ship food packages, medicine and other gifts of mercy to people trapped behind the Iron Curtain. A cancellation of our reciprocal mailing privileges would bring all of this to an end and would leave these poor people without any contact with the outside world.

The statement is often made that the United States formerly had an effective program to keep out Communist propaganda. Actually, the only mail affected by this abandoned program was approximately 5 per cent of the unsolicited printed matter arriving at our ports of entry. All other mail was allowed to enter.

I don't think we can afford to ignore the mail coming into our country from abroad, especially from Communist countries, but I believe whatever measures we take must be effective and consistent with our democratic traditions.