— between the Lines —

Think It Over, Mrs. Roosevelt

— by Joseph Starobin —

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Roosevelt? It is contained in another paragraph of her first column last Saturday, in which she says: "Earl Browder has been reprimanded for an attitude which many of us believed had represented the attitude of the Soviet government."

In other words, Mrs. Roosevelt is still laboring under the delusion that when Americans become Communists they are by that token less Americans. The refusal to accord Americans the right to be Communists underline a very basic tenet of our form of government.

If Mrs. Roosevelt is saying that democracy stops when Americans become Communists, then she herself is contributing to a significant exposure of the real essence of what is known as "bourgeois democracy."

Moscow Agent Tale

But to go further. Mrs. Roosevelt is suggesting once again that Communists in any country are agents of the Soviet Union. She asks that the "whole situation of the Communists outside of the Soviet Union shall be cleared up authoritatively." This familiar position undoubtedly explains why she did not bother to read our material at first hand.

This view has a double aspect. It is a direct charge against the Soviet Union of the most serious kind. Whoever makes that charge must remember that it is not original.

Second, it is with equal seriousness an abdication of American democracy. Mrs. Roosevelt is evidently prepared to invite the Soviet Union to intervene in our American internal affairs. She is ready to accord the Soviet Union the right to determine whether Americans can be Communists, a right guaranteed by our Constitution. This would be a serious violation of American sovereignty, if it were seriously pressed.

So in either case—the whole approach toward Communists along Mrs. Roosevelt's lines gets her into serious difficulties. It is high time such an approach were abandoned. The Communists at any rate will defend their rights as Americans.

Authoritative Suppression

Or perhaps Mrs. Roosevelt is suggesting that the United States itself—rather than the Soviet Union—should "authoritatively" consider the suppression of American Communists.

In that case, let me remind her that one of her former colleagues on the Scripps-Howard press—Mr. Westbrook Pegler—has already made the suggestion. It is again, unoriginal. In the Hearst press last Monday, Pegler proposes an all-out drive on the Communists, but in his view the Communists include many members of the former Roosevelt administration, including Henry Wallace.

In other words, while Mrs. Roosevelt makes this suggestion Pegler is already on the spot and proposes to include some of Mrs. Roosevelt's best friends in the anti-Communist dragnet.

Hitler Tried It Before

Isn't this all very familiar? Did not Hitler attempt the very thing, and did he not smash Europe by this very same assault upon Communism which include non-Communist democrats, like Mrs. Roosevelt herself?

Nor does Mrs. Roosevelt help matters by suggesting in her second column on Monday that the fascists, too, are just as responsible as the Communists et-cetera, etcetera. This is a curious afterthought, on Mrs. Roosevelt's part. But it makes matters worse. The fact that Mrs. Roosevelt added this formula as an afterthought only strengthens my conviction that her mind is deep in the grip of those confusions which have disarmed many American liberals in the struggle against fascism.

Yes, the Communists represent a danger to fascism. We are proud of that. We will fight against fascism—whether American or any other kind—to the end. That is what most Americans want to do—including Mrs. Roosevelt, I believe.