Honorable Herbert H. Lehman
Senate Office Building
Washington, D. C.

My dear Senator Lehman:

According to newspaper reports Senator McCarthy is planning to move that the Senate cite Corliss Lamont for contempt, for refusal to answer questions put to him by the Senator.

I earnestly urge opposition to the motion.

I have known Mr. Lamont for many years. I do not write this letter, however, because of personal friendship toward him. Nor has it been solicited by him or by anybody in his behalf. I write it solely because there is at stake a large issue of principle that will, I hope and believe, enlist your sympathetic interest.

Mr. Lamont, as you are no doubt informed, was interrogated because the Department of the Army had referred to certain of his writings, much as it might have consulted any book in a library for information relevant to matters under military study. Mr. Lamont has had no connection with the United States Government, as employee, contractor, or salesman. He is, in short, a private citizen who has written books.

Now, I think it intolerable that a person who exercises his right to speak or print his thoughts should thereupon and for no other reason be deemed a fair target of senatorial inquiry. Obviously, his writings are appropriately subject to criticism and condemnation as well as to praise and applause. No one asks for immunity for the
scholar's work. But the work must stand or fall on its own merits, which may readily be evaluated by those who are competent in the field.

In the present instance the record of the Lamont hearing before Senator McCarthy reveals an effort to delve into the research methods, the personal attitudes, and the professional as well as private associations of an author wholly unrelated to governmental affairs. Thus, Mr. Lamont was asked whom he had consulted in connection with the preparation of one of his books. If this sort of political inquest becomes commonplace, the effect can only be to discourage the free dissemination of opinions and information. The difficulties of scholarship are great enough already, without the added threat that the scholar must justify himself and his work before congressional committees.

Let me add only this. Mr. Lamont has at no point sought refuge in the Fifth Amendment. He has maintained that the First Amendment precludes the sort of questioning to which Senator McCarthy has sought to subject him.

I strongly believe that the Constitution forbids the very sort of inhibiting pressures that are suggested by the Lamont episode -- and I hope that you will share this belief.

With cordial personal regards,

Faithfully yours,

Walter Gellhorn