It was a very understanding speech which Missouri's Senator Hennings made to the Women's National Democratic Club in Washington. It was full of sympathy for the distraught mood which has gripped so many of us Americans, and yet it was a telling warning against the possible consequences of that mood.

The mood stems out of the burdens of our resistance to totalitarian Communism, he explained; and its great danger is that we may lose ourselves fighting totalitarianism with totalitarian devices.

Senator Hennings was not too alarmed about the economic burden of the cost of the defense against dictatorship. Most of us realize that in defending foreign democracies we are really defending ourselves. This cost is not unbearable, he said, because in spite of high taxes and high living costs, our economy is sound. More people are "better housed, better clothed, better fed, better educated than ever before in our history."

But the Missouri Senator was concerned about the personal anxieties and tragedies which flow out of the sacrifices of the times, "the violent words (which) help us to release our pent-up grievances and disappointments." These irritations are being exploited in support of a serious attack on our liberties.

Loyalty programs, teachers' oaths, abusive legislative investigations, snooping and spying and a growing intolerance of unorthodox opinions all are supported by an appeal to emotion. These denials of democracy have brought the United States into a "ridiculous and contradictory position."

Here is the essence of it:

While we're doing a good job of fighting for freedom of thought abroad, we're doing exactly the opposite at home....We are using the Communist technique in reverse and, I am forced to admit, using it with telling results....We are discouraging freedom of thought on every hand, and doing it in the name of 'security'....Until we lick the hysteria that we've let loose upon ourselves, until we regain some maturity and the perspective we had only a few short years ago, we are in danger of losing....all which our nation stands for.

There can be no denying the truth of this in these days when the McCarthys and the McCarrans are powers in the land. Such men, exploiting fear and emotion, could bring the American people to the brink of disaster. Yet it is hard to believe that the tragedy will really run its full course—not so long as men of courage, men like Senator Hennings, speak out against basely motivated fear-mongering.

We Americans can be scared like anybody else. But we are not so unstable as to believe that the escape from danger lies in suicide. Granted that the contagious fear has reached into some high places, the epidemic will nonetheless subside. The great majority of Americans
will see the danger of the times in its true perspective. They will
be ready to meet it. But in the name of security, they will not destroy
freedom. They will be prudent, yes, but also clear-eyed.

And they will also be, in the end, ashamed of the excesses of the
demagogues, ashamed that these excesses were not more speedily checked.
For this there will be great thanks to Senator Hennings and all those
men who in trying times still keep their heads.