Introduction to “Capitalism’s Threat to Democracy” (1953)

written by Kent Worcester | August 4, 2025

Julius Jacobson was in his early thirties when he penned “Capitalism’s Threat to Democracy” for the May 4, 1953, issue of *Labor Action,* a publication ofthe Workers Party, founded in 1940 as a result of a split within the Socialist Worker Party. *

This issue of *Labor Action* was devoted to a single theme, socialism and democracy, and it retailed for five cents. Alongside Julie’s article were pieces by Herman Benson, Hal Draper, Albert Gates, Gordon Haskell, and Max Shachtman.

The aim of the special issue was to make the case, as Gordon Haskell suggested in his opening editorial, that democracy “requires the active participation in public affairs by the widest possible layers of the people” and that “such participation” is “indispensable as a school through which the masses must go in order to administer the truly democratic society of the future.” It is precisely for this reason that the “fight for democracy and the fight for socialism are inseparable.”

Julie’s contribution, reprinted here, is concerned with the McCarthy-era attack on civil liberties and the concomitant failure of liberals to defend their own program in the face of “the not-so-creeping tide of reaction in America.” Here in the “citadel of world capitalism,” Julie writes, “the fundamental values of political liberalism, freedom of speech, press and conscience are becoming increasingly weakened in real content.” He adds, “The extent to which socialists must take up the defense of liberal values, and the degree to which they have been abandoned by liberals and sold out by ex-radicals, is a telling reminder of the backward movement of political life in America.”

“Capitalism’s Threat to Democracy” addresses themes that Julie would return to again and again in his later writings, from the value of nonconformity and the dangers of the Cold War to the decay of the liberal tradition and the long shadow of Stalinism. It is also one of over two dozen essays that are reprinted in *Third Camp Socialism: A Phyllis and Julius Jacobson Reader*, which has just been published by Brill, with a paperback edition to follow from Haymarket Press in summer 2026.

*The complete run of the newspaper (1940–1958) can be found at the Marxists’ Internet Archive.