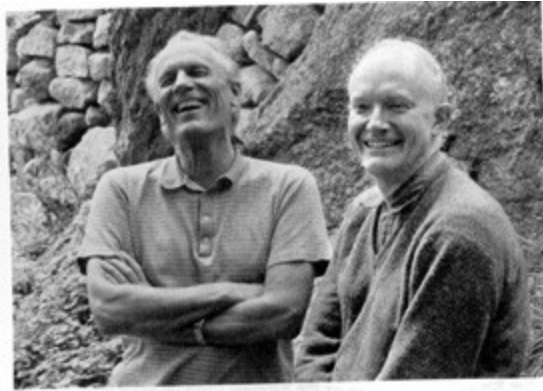


# Junius Irving Scales

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In a time long ago and in a place beneath your feet, a notable person came to his sisters' and brothers' aid during a time of censorship and repression. That man was Junius Scales, that place was Chapel Hill, and that time was the late 1930s to the early 1950s.

Scales was a communist when being a communist meant going to jail. At a time when Soviet communism had been returned to the status of adversary to the United States, following a brief shaking of hands between Stalin and Roosevelt to combat Germany, Scales was viewed by many in North Carolina as the face of the enemy.

Avowedly anti-war, anti-capitalist, and anti-racist, Scales championed the most unpopular of stances among a population still tolerant of the Ku Klux Klan in its midst. Son of a textile mill owner from Greensboro, he moved to Chapel Hill in 1935 to complete high school, and ultimately to attend college at UNC. At Carolina, he took up the cause of desegregating the UNC Law School to admit Floyd McKissick. He organized a chapter of the Communist Party in Chapel Hill that had over 130 black and white members at its peak.

A scion of wealth, Scales chose exile from the culture of his upbringing in the name of equality for all people. He rejected his birth privilege out of a sense of rage at racial oppression and at how corrosive racial caste and racist violence were to souls both black and white. In a 1976 interview recorded for UNC's Southern Oral History Project, Scales explained why his passions were so strong:

"... You just can't imagine the feeling of guilt of anybody growing up in that time. ... It was an absolute horror that you couldn't live with. ... If [blacks] had been second class citizens, that would have been a major step up."

Being communist meant saying unpopular things, like demanding an end to the atomic weapons race and opposing war. As a result of these and other controversial positions, the North Carolina General Assembly passed a law in the '50s symbolically curtailing free expression of certain ideas by banning particular orators from speaking on campus. While an innocuous reading assignment has the current General Assembly indignant over Islamic teachings, decades ago the victims of anti-intellectual attack were Scales and his fellow travelers.

Scales' advocacy for the underdog bought him powerful enemies. Newspapers excoriated him. Business leaders scornfully viewed Scales as a dangerous nuisance, or worse, a dupe of Moscow. His calls for peace were interpreted as subversive propaganda. His work as a union organizer in a Piedmont textile mill (not owned by his father) and his outspoken dedication to ending embedded racial inequality in pay and the dismantling of the racial- and gender-based caste system in employment ensured that Scales remained, in the eyes of North Carolina's elite, one of the most dangerous men in the state.

By the time the FBI got involved in his case, even judges were lining up against him. Durham Judge A.R. Wilson ordered Scales' arrest on charges of "vagrancy" when the young man and his comrades were circulating a World Peace Appeal that opposed atomic proliferation and the war in Korea. Scales appears to have gotten away with vagrancy, but another judge in another court would find him guilty of much more serious charges, namely advocating the overthrow of the government. Simple membership in the CP was practically enough to convict him. With the testimony of a fellow student named Charles Childs, who had infiltrated the peace movement and offered his services as a spy for the FBI, Scales was convicted for violating the Smith Act, which de facto outlawed membership in the Communist Party. He fought his conviction for years, but after the Supreme Court affirmed his judgment, he began his six-year prison term. President Kennedy commuted his sentence, and Scales left North Carolina, and a Chapel Hill which he truly loved, never to return.

Scales repudiated his Communist affiliation after the crimes of Stalin were confirmed. Disillusioned, he retreated to New York City, to writing and to his family. But he never forgot the dedication of his allies from an earlier time. In the 1976 interview, he remembered the sacrifices made by those working throughout the '40s to organize labor, to oppose racism, and to advance peace. "Communists were putting themselves on the line and getting beaten to death," he said, "and they were the most courageous people I knew."

Junius Irving Scales died Monday, Aug. 5, in Manhattan. He was 82 years old. Friends of Junius Scales and others concerned about the continuing issues to which he was so dedicated will gather to remember and to reminisce about his life and times. The public is invited for discussion, meditation, music and refreshments, Friday, Aug. 23, 7 p.m., at the Community Church of Chapel Hill, 106 Purefoy Road.

