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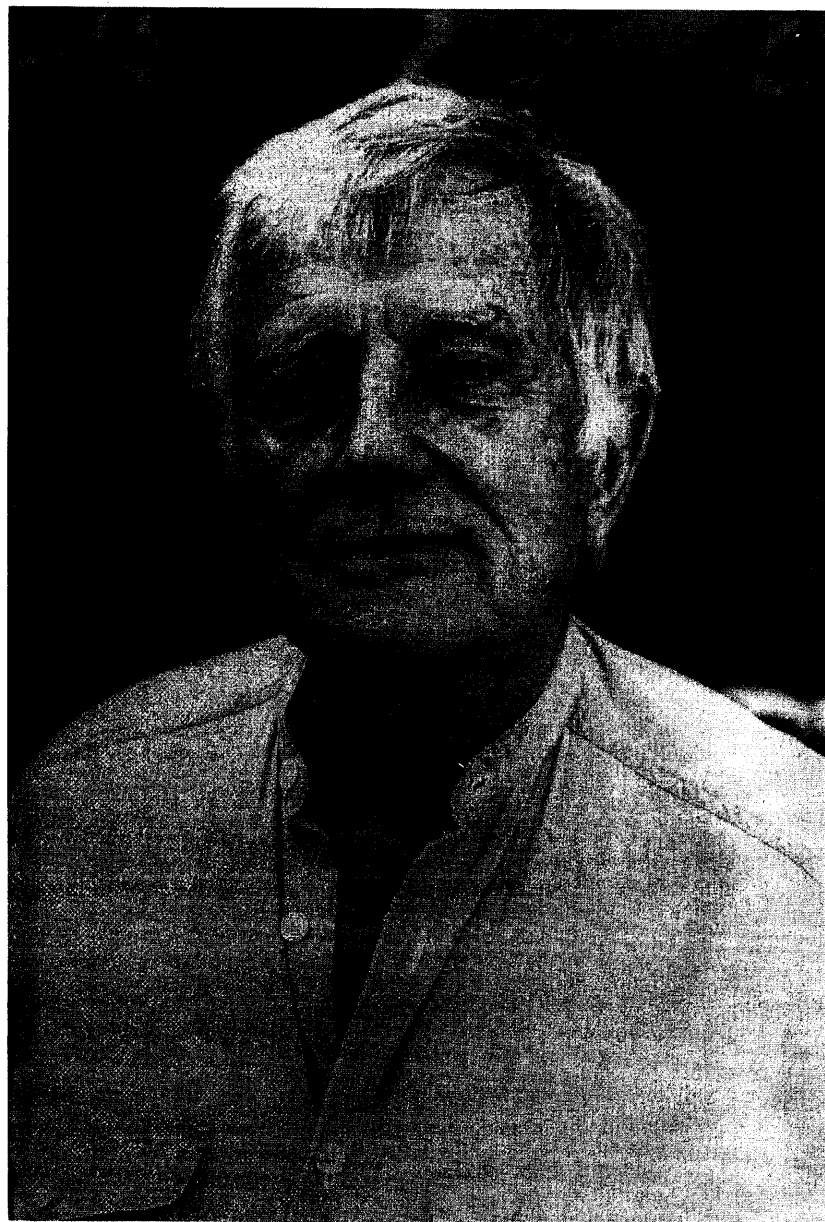
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Perman H55491



Odd Man Out

*A Memoir
of the
Hollywood
Ten*

Edward Dmytryk

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of his life. Kazan writes that after his resignation from the Party, "my relations with my old comrades did not change. . . . I was glad to be *out* and glad to still be *in*. . . . In other words, I continued to think like a Communist. . . . Only I and those like me had the answers. . . . In fact, I still believe a good part of what I believed then" (131–32). And that's the glue.

Only some three years later, while I was in jail and largely isolated from contact with my former associates, was I able to realize the inconsistency of that long-lasting state of mind, but I wondered how noninfected men such as Kenny and Crum could have failed to recognize the tactics of the group's communist members—until it was too late, for them and for me.

Larry Parks was one of the Nineteen. Throughout our first meeting, he had seemed tentative; reluctant to cooperate with the group. He was the image of the skittish nonjoiner, and I couldn't imagine him as a communist. I am now inclined to think it was a clever act, but since Larry was known to seek frequent advice and to consider all facets of a problem with care, those of us who were his friends tended to believe him in his misgivings. When, late in the evening, he took the floor with a proposal, we were ready to support almost anything he asked for.

He was concerned, he said, with the possibility that the Nineteen might succumb to the indecision and lack of unity that plagued many small political groups. He would join the other eighteen only if we agreed that all decisions would be affirmed unanimously, a rule that we had to promise to honor absolutely. If this suggestion had come from John Howard Lawson or Ben Margolis, the noncommunists among us would have been on guard, but Larry Parks? Good fellowship reigned that early in the game, as well as high hopes, and it seemed an easy way to extinguish Larry's apprehensions; we voted to adopt the resolution unanimously.

Years later, Larry told me that he had been urged to press the proposal during a premeeting conversation with Dalton Trumbo, whom he idolized. But I also learned from another member of the group that Lawson and Margolis had initiated the scenario. Perhaps it was too late in the evening for a morning mentality like mine, but I was not aware of the full consequences of our decision at that time; I was soon to learn that with it, we lost any pretense of functioning according to the old democratic principle of accommodation of differences. I had pledged myself to march in lockstep with the communist majority, no matter where it led me.

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"Hollywood Accused: Red Issue Splits Film Industry." So shouted the headlines of the *Los Angeles Daily News* on October 20, 1947. The third, and smaller subhead squeaked, "Vishinsky in Bitter Tirade Against the U.S." Forty-one years later, not one college student in a thousand can identify Vishinsky, but a surprisingly large percentage of those same students are aware of the existence of the Hollywood Ten.

Like a troupe of mummies, the unfriendly witnesses invaded the nation's capital shortly before the hearings began. The group of nineteen writers, actors, and directors—enough to make a number of excellent films or start a small revolution—plus their stable of lawyers and a few wives, holed up at the Sheraton.

The curtain was about to go up on the hottest show in town. Solidly, for the next three weeks and intermittently for the next five or six years, the proceedings that created the Hollywood Ten captured the headlines of the leading newspapers and periodicals, not only in the United States but throughout the world. A public that had grown accustomed to daily reports of world crises during World War II had suffered boring reading for two years. They were hungry for something sensational and eager to lap it up. On opening day, the *Los Angeles Herald Express* plastered its entire front page with headlines, photos, and stories of the testimony being heard in the old House office building in Washington, D.C. With some of Hollywood's best producers taking the stand to be grilled and verbally mauled by members of the committee, even the cold war and Vishinsky had to be content with a story on page two.

The Caucus Room was the largest hall on hand in the Capitol complex for public hearings. Well over four hundred persons waited in line for over an hour to snatch the seats available when the doors were opened. (Throughout the hearings all sessions were "standing room only.") To add to the crush, a battalion of Capitol police was strategically scattered about the room. According to *Hollywood Variety* (Oct. 21, 1947), which called the hearings a "Red Quiz Barnum Show," ninety seats were reserved for the journalists at the press table. Ninety-four showed up, and eight or nine newsreel cameras covered the chamber's various centers of interest. The four major radio networks were also present in force, and crouched at the foot of the crescent-shaped dais, which

spanned the width of one end of the room, twenty-four or twenty-five news photographers faced the witnesses' table, cameras at the ready, waiting to snap the performers of the day in their most awkward poses. All who had been subpoenaed or had volunteered to testify, occupied the choice seats immediately behind the scene of action.

The interrogators would soon take their places. We sat with the curious onlookers, but we were really the actors who had to face an unpredictable audience. "Confidence!" I thought. But how could I be sure? I didn't even have a God to fall back on. Palms sweating, heart beating a ragged tattoo, butterflies trying to escape my stomach, I waited for the show to begin.

Shortly after 10:00 A.M., J. Parnell Thomas sat down on his chair, which was supplemented by a red cushion atop a District of Columbia telephone directory, and gavelled the meeting to order. Three other members of the Committee had already taken their seats; they were John McDowell of Pennsylvania, Richard B. Vail of Illinois, and Richard M. Nixon, the freshman congressman from California. Their chief investigator was Robert E. Stripling.

Hot on the heels of the chairman's opening remarks, Kenny and Crum claimed the floor. As the *Los Angeles Daily News* put it on October 21:

Chairman J. Parnell Thomas banged his gavel mightily when attorneys Robert W. Kenny and Bartley Crum tried to snatch the ball and run with it.

The attorneys asked permission to present their previously announced motion to quash the subpoenas issued to 19 Hollywood actors, writers, and producers on grounds that the Committee and the investigation are unconstitutional and illegal . . . Thomas silenced Kenny and Crum with repeated blows from his gavel, but not before Crum, a San Francisco Republican, had said sarcastically, "This is certainly an un-American procedure."

The chairman held his gavel like a scepter, but wielded it like an axe. He reminded me of an assistant director I had known who fell in love with a bullhorn. It gave him a sense of superiority and power over a mob of extras. For Thomas, the rod of his office was his gavel. Without it, he was a short, dumpy, very average human being.

Scheduled first was the testimony of the cooperating witnesses. The more I review it now the sillier it seems, although *silly* is hardly the ap-

propriate word when one considers that lives, families, and careers of hundreds of men and women in all branches of the entertainment business were irreparably damaged by the allegations and opinions that followed. An abstraction of the friendly witnesses' performances would paint only an abstract picture, so a brief review of some of the questions and answers are in order.

The first to testify was J. L. (Jack) Warner, the vice president in charge of production for the Warner Brothers studio, in Burbank, California. At the spring subcommittee rehearsals in Hollywood in May of 1947, he had been asked: "Don't you think the most effective way of removing these Communist influences is the pay-roll route? In other words, if the owners and producers cut these people off the pay-roll it would eliminate it much quicker than a Congressional committee on a crusade and so forth."

"Well," Warner had answered, "that definitely would be."

Now, in October, the committee hoped to extract a sworn admission of the desirability of a blacklist. But the knowledge that the world was listening (or some older brother's advice) had had a sobering effect, and this indiscriminately rambling man had reconsidered his position. As usual, he was more than free with his rhetoric (to the tune of about 57,000 words), but he resisted having the onus of a blacklist shifted from the Committee's narrow mind onto his shoulders.

And though he testified he had "never seen a Communist," he was more than willing to identify a few men who had aroused his suspicions.

Mr. Warner. In New York I saw *All of [sic] My Sons*, written by Arthur Miller. . . the play is a good play, but it has all of this stuff in it. In fact, it won the Critics' Award in New York, and was directed by a chap named Elia Kazan who is now at Twentieth Century-Fox as a director. . . Can I say something off the record?

Mr. Thomas. Put it on the record.

Mr. Warner. This fellow is also one of the mob. . . I pass him by but won't talk to him.

While testifying about his efforts to "clean" the studio's scripts of communist propaganda, Warner mentioned Clifford Odets and his script for *Humoresque*, from the novel by Fannie Hurst.

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Mr. Warner. John Garfield played the part of the boy and he was mad at Joan Crawford for romantic reasons and said, "Your father is a banker." He was alluding to the fact that she was rich and had all of the money. He said, "My father lives over a grocery store." That is very, very subtle. . . . But it is not in the film. I eliminated it from the script. Sometimes you eliminate these things and they leave them in because it plays good and everybody is trying to be a Voltaire. All these writers and actors want to "Voltaire" about freedom of press and freedom of speech.

Later in the morning, Congressman McDowell, trying to lead Warner, made an interesting statement and asked an interesting question. He got an interesting answer.

Mr. McDowell. You know, during Hitler's regime they passed a law in Germany outlawing communism and the Communists went to jail. Would you advocate the same thing here?

Mr. Warner. Everyone in this room and everyone in the world knows the consequences of that type of law.

This should have stopped that line of questioning. But a bit later, Thomas slid in more smoothly:

The Chairman. If we passed a law that would be a proper legal procedure, wouldn't it?

Mr. Warner. I, as an individual citizen, naturally am in favor of anything that is good for all Americans.

The Chairman. Are you in favor of outlawing the Communist Party?

Mr. Warner. You mean from the ballot?

The Chairman. Yes; making it an illegal organization.

Mr. Warner. I am in favor of making it an illegal organization.

At the end of the long session, Vail ventured into the scene.

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Mr. Vail. It would seem to me that this organization [Motion Picture Producers Association] should concern itself with cleaning house . . . through the elimination of the writers and the actors to whom definite communistic leanings can be traced. . . .

Mr. Warner. I agree to it personally, Mr. Congressman, but . . . I can't, for the life of me, figure where men could get together . . . to deprive a man of his livelihood because of his political beliefs.

And for the moment, things looked promising. If Jack Warner, who disliked unions and studio liberals more than anyone in Hollywood, could take such a stand, and if the testimony of Eric Johnson (president of the Motion Picture Producers Association) to our attorneys—"As long as I live I will never be a party to anything as un-American as a blacklist . . . Tell the boys not to worry. We're not going totalitarian to please the Committee"—were indeed meant as an honest promise, the danger of a blacklist seemed to have diminished.

By an odd coincidence, the next two friendly witnesses were both Russian-born. The first of these was Louis B. Mayer, the head of MGM. Mayer was the highest paid executive in the land and certainly the boss with the greatest clout in Hollywood. That meant nothing to the congressman; he was bullied and harried by them and their investigators as if he were the movie capital's buffoon. No doubt some of our group were delighted at the lack of class distinction. But their high spirits were squelched when Mayer made the following statement: "It is my earnest hope that this committee will perform a public service by recommending to Congress legislation establishing a national policy regulating employment of Communists in private industry. It is my belief they should be denied the sanctuary of the freedom they seek to destroy." So much for the lift we had gotten from Jack Warner not too many minutes before.

However, the Committee now had before them the head of the studio that had produced *Song of Russia*. In their zeal to find a modicum of Red propaganda in films, they locked onto the film whose title implied the downtrodden Russians dared to sing. H. A. Smith, who spelled a weary Stripling as inquisitor, was eager to learn if the MGM film, starring Robert Taylor, had included scenes that might mislead its viewers concern-

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ing conditions in the USSR. Mayer wanted to know what scenes Smith was referring to.

Mr. Smith. Do you recall scenes in there at the night club where everybody was drinking?

Mr. Mayer. They do in Moscow.

Mr. Smith. Do you feel that that represents Russia as it is today?

Mr. Mayer. I didn't make it as it is today. I made it when they were our ally in 1943.

Since the studio heads had insisted that no "stuff" had infiltrated their films, the Committee called Ayn Rand, who was also an émigré from Russia. She had no doubts about the presence of propaganda in Hollywood films and stronger feelings about viewers' susceptibilities. As a guest of the Committee, she had viewed *Song of Russia* and noted that the Russians occasionally smiled. In her opinion, the portrayal of such unusual emotion was "one of the stock propaganda tricks of the Communists, to show these people smiling," or, for that matter, to show them living in clean cottages.

Sam Wood, the president of the Motion Picture Alliance, also appeared on opening day. Throughout the hearings, the Committee was hard on studio executives past the point of common rudeness, but they were excessively polite to witnesses from the MPAPAI. Wood's complaint was not that Hollywood portrayed Russian peasants as smiling, but that they showed American bankers and senators as villains. In his own words: "I think it is particularly bad if that is constantly shown. Every night you go to the pictures you see a dishonest banker, or senator, you begin to think that the whole system is wrong." (I wonder what he would think if he were alive today.) And who is responsible for such a state of affairs?

Mr. Stripling. What group in the industry must be watched more carefully than the rest?

Mr. Wood. The writers.

Most of the friendly witnesses felt confident in naming a number of writers as communists, but their identification, based on suspicions, would hardly be considered permissible evidence outside the chambers of

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Congress. When asked if there was any question in his mind whether Lawson was a communist, Wood replied, "If there is, then I haven't any mind."

In typical Hollywood fashion, later witnesses tried to top him. Two days later when questioned about Lester Cale, Morrie Ryskind said that if he "isn't a Communist, I don't think Mahatma Gandhi is an Indian." This gave Fred Niblo Jr. a cue when he referred to Gordon Kahn during testimony the following day: "I cannot prove it [that Kahn is a Communist] any more than Custer can prove that the people who were massacring him were Indians."

Although the witnesses had no valid proof for their identifications, the Committee did. They could have ended the hearings in a hurry, especially since their efforts were creating more amusement and grounds for criticism than public heat. But they had not yet called on their first-line troops, and they decided to let Hollywood names carry the ball a little longer. The headlines in the *Los Angeles Examiner* of October 21, 1947, stated in bold letters, "Film Leaders Tell Red Menace to Hollywood" and "Military Experts Urge U.S. Start Training Now." The juxtaposition of the headlines were indeed food for thought.

On October 21, 1947, the second day of the hearings, the MPAPAI witnesses were Adolphe Menjou, Rupert Hughes, and John Moffit. Moffit, a screenwriter, reported on a communist undercover man who posed as a literary agent. He succeeded, Moffit said, in obtaining the secret of the military's latest supersonic plane from one of its test pilots, but the FBI could find no evidence of such a Communist Party coup.

Rupert Hughes, the uncle of Howard Hughes, wrote short stories for ladies' magazines. He also wrote the first biography debunking George Washington, which seemed an odd accomplishment for a man sworn to preserve American ideals. At the preliminary hearings in May, Hughes had come out against the "Four Freedoms" on the grounds that "they would rob the American people of the stimulus of fear and poverty." But he went a little too far, even for the chairman. The *Los Angeles Examiner*, on October 22, 1947, reported: "The author clashed with Chairman Thomas . . . when the witness called the University of California at Los Angeles a 'Communist dominated' institution. Thomas ordered the testimony stricken from the record."

That suave, fastidiously dressed actor, Adolphe Menjou, proved to be one of the most loquacious and well-informed witnesses of the week. Under oath, he said he had read over four hundred books on Russia and over one hundred fifty books on communism. He recommended a read-

ing list of thirty-five books to all who really wanted to understand the Red menace, and he instructed anyone who cared to listen on the methods of recognizing party members and "pinkos," although he admitted he could not positively identify any of Hollywood's Reds. Suspicions, however, he had in plenty, but his most telling contribution was his disclosure of the methods by which communist actors could insinuate party propaganda into films: "I believe that under certain circumstances a communistic director, a communistic writer, or a communistic actor, even if he were under orders from the head of the studio not to inject communism or un-Americanism or subversion into pictures, could easily subvert that order, under the proper circumstances, by a look, by an inflection, by a change in the voice. I think it could be easily done. I have never seen it done, but I think it could be done."

Testimony of this kind was offered and accepted with gratitude throughout the week. My mind was in a continuous haze. I had only to close my eyes and picture myself as a masculine Alice in Wonderland—it was just as ridiculous and almost as funny. But it was also humiliating. I had never realized Hollywood's bigwigs (whom I never knew socially) could be so unwittingly stupid in their defense of the American way of life. For a few days, I could almost accept *Time* magazine's supercilious attitude about the town I lived in and the people I worked with. But, apparently unheeding of reactions such as mine, the friendly witnesses carried on regardless.

During the May rehearsals in Hollywood, Lela Rogers had testified that the phrase "Share and share alike—that's democracy," which was spoken by her daughter in my film *Tender Comrade*, was subversive, dangerous, and clearly communist propaganda. But at the time the film was made, Ginger was a powerhouse at RKO, and although apparently less doctrinaire than her mother, she was never bashful about expressing an opinion or voicing an objection. Yet neither Ginger, Lela, nor anyone else at the studio objected to that line of dialogue when the film was shot or when it was released, which is perhaps why Lela did not repeat the charge in October. But to add zest to her testimony, she did identify Clifford Odets as a communist. When questioned about her source of information, she replied she had read it in O. O. McIntyre's column, which appeared on January 8, 1936.

I knew one of the witnesses who testified on October 23 quite well. I had edited several films for Leo McCarey in the 1930s, and we had become good friends. Two eminently successful classics, *Going My*

Way and *Bells of St. Mary's*, had made him a wealthy man, and though I understood that one must be forgiven for defending one's property against the most visible enemy, I was not happy to see him take the stand. Leo now hated the IRS, and like Sam Wood, he resented the way bankers and the rich were portrayed in films. He warned that leftist directors "can cast a character so repulsive when you take one look at him you don't like that man who is portrayed as a capitalist, a banker, or whatever part he is portraying." Perhaps he had forgotten, but Leo failed to mention that he, no leftist, had cast the ugly, greedy scoundrel who had tried to repossess Bing Crosby's church in *Going My Way*.

The testimony of two of Hollywood's leading actors was hardly earthshaking, but it is probably worth a brief mention. The first, on October 22, was Robert Taylor.

Mr. Stripling. You would refuse to act in a picture in which a person whom you considered to be a Communist was also cast; is that correct?

Mr. Taylor. ... if I were even suspicious of a person being a Communist with whom I was scheduled to work, I am afraid it would have to be him or me, because life is a little too short to be around people who annoy me as much as these fellow travelers and Communists do.

Actors may have been apprehensive, but not one writer felt endangered by Taylor's watchful eye. He had just finished playing in *The High Wall*, written by Sidney Boehm and Lester Cole. Almost anyone interested in politics considered Cole a communist, and Cole would have been the last to deny it.

On the following day, October 23, Gary Cooper foreshadowed the future with a statement that was echoed frequently in the next few years. When asked whether he thought communism was on the increase or on the decrease, he gave a considered answer: "It is very difficult to say right now, within these last few months, because it has become unpopular and a little risky to say too much. You notice the difference. People who were quite easy to express their thoughts before begin to clam up more that they used to."

The fourth day of the hearings was coming to a close. The statements

of Ronald Reagan, president of the Screen Actors Guild, and two ex-presidents, Robert Montgomery and George Murphy, were nearly carbon copies of each other. None had seen any sign of propaganda in his scripts, none felt the communists were a menace to the guild. Although they engaged in no bitter attacks on Hollywood writers, all three were congratulated as good and articulate witnesses. But there was one slight hitch in Reagan's testimony; as was his wont, he quoted Thomas Jefferson as saying the American people, if acquainted with the facts, would not make a mistake. Chairman Thomas sensed a subtle aspersion on the Committee and attempted to set Reagan straight: "That is just why this committee was created . . . to acquaint the American people with the facts. Once [they] are acquainted with the facts there is no question but what the American people will do a job . . . to make America just as pure as we can possibly make it." Mr. Reagan was not cowed; he still thought that "democracy can do it."

On that high note, four days of testimony ended. Besides the testimony of the Hollywood executives and artists, there had been numerous skirmishes with Crum and Kenny, as well as with Paul V. McNutt, Eric Johnson, and Maurice Benjamin, the high-powered representatives of the studio heads and the Motion Picture Producers Association. Showing no partiality, the chairman shouted and wielded his gavel with great vigor regardless of the lawyers' political coloration. The newspapers made due note of Thomas's near-maniacal behavior. Their sympathies were largely with those who were being so casually and illegally attacked by the Committee, as was the goodwill of the great majority of the audience. Anyone sitting through the first five days in the Caucus Room could easily have prescribed the tactics needed to defeat Thomas and his bullyboys. Unfortunately, as I was to learn the following week, our tactics were being laid down by people who had never seen the Caucus Room, the Committee, or most of the Nineteen.

Will it ever end department: More than four decades ago, MGM placed Robert Taylor's name on one of their white, three-story office buildings in gratitude for the millions of dollars and the untold wealth in prestige he brought to the studio. Early in 1990, two producers for Lorimar, Stan Zimmerman and James Berg, collected about fifty signatures (mostly from writers, who never stop screaming for their right to speak) demanding the removal of Taylor's name from the building because, in 1947, he took advantage of *his* right to speak while cooperating with

the House Committee on Un-American Activities—about two generations ago. And Lorimar (who owned MGM) buckled. ("Who's Blacklisting Now?" asked an editorial by Eric Breindel in the *New York Post*.) Obviously, the pendulum has swung the other way, and a new generation, with nothing to write, seeks to perpetuate the age-old prejudices and bigotries against people about whom they know little or nothing at all.

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such an army of powerhouse personalities to aid them, victory for the Nineteen was in the bag. The phrase was probably not yet in the common language at the time, but the first unfriendly witnesses to take the stand promptly gave a new meaning to the words *self-destruct*.

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Mr. Crum.

May I request the right of cross-examination? I ask you to bring back and permit us to cross-examine the witnesses, Adolphe Menjou, Fred Niblo, John Charles Moffit, Richard Macauley, Rupert Hughes, Sam Wood, Ayn Rand, James McGuinness—

It took a sharp-eared court clerk to winnow the last few names out of the "dread-bolted thunder" of the pounding gavel.

The Chairman. The request—

Mr. Crum. Howard Rushmore—[*The chairman pounding gavel.*]

Mr. Crum. Morrie Ryskind, Oliver Carlson—

The Chairman. The request is denied.

Mr. Crum. In order to show that these witnesses lied.

The Chairman. That request is denied. Mr. Stripling, the first witness.

Mr. Stripling. John Howard Lawson.

The Committee had its own effective sense of theater, and it was dramatically correct that John Howard Lawson should be the first of the unfriendly witnesses to be called. He was widely considered by Hollywood's politically aware to be the Party's number one man in the film industry. Many of the first week's witnesses had identified him as that on the basis of hearsay—which is nearly as dependable as the truth—and the communists in Hollywood knew of his position in the section on the basis of experience.

On the morning of October 27, 1947, I was a very nervous man. It was our red-letter day. The crowd that had been waiting for hours to get into the Caucus Room was larger than ever. It would still be SRO, though more so, but it could not be said that the presence of the VIPs representing the Hollywood Committee for the First Amendment was the only reason for the greater than usual show of interest. Those of the Nineteen who were to testify were also important performers on that day's playbill.

I had taken my usual place in the second row; the Hollywood observers occupied a fair-sized section of the seats behind me, and Dore

Schary, RKO's production chief, was seated at my right. Both of us were so tense we had barely said "Good morning." *Good* seemed hardly the word to characterize this day of the year.

At the first swing of the chairman's gavel, Robert Kenny and Bartley Crum had once again taken the floor to present more evidence of the hearing's illegality and, failing that, to ask for the right to cross-examine earlier witnesses. We all knew this was not a judicial trial, but a congressional hearing at which court precedents did not apply. Nevertheless, it had been decided to fight the Committee to the end, and (as the French warned Lyndon Johnson when he escalated the war in Vietnam) in an unequal battle, the end can be bitter indeed.

Those of us who had watched the members of the Committee take their places on the dais that morning noticed that it was one man short. Richard M. Nixon had been the producers' sympathetic ear while sitting through the first week's hearings. Whenever the going got rough for Hollywood's befuddled and intimidated executives, Nixon could be counted on to ask a question or two that could be answered in a self-serving fashion and that would give the respondents time to collect their wits and realign their defenses. It would be uncharitable, but not unjust, to suggest that he did so because they were, or could be, a source of support in his future campaigns. It was not often that Nixon failed to look ahead, and he had returned to California at this appropriate time to touch base with his constituents in Whittier. After all, he had little to gain and much to lose in being identified, if only geographically, with the unfriendly Nineteen.

Many of the previous week's witnesses had offered, and had been allowed to read, prepared position statements. John Howard Lawson now requested the same privilege. There was a brief hiatus as his statement was handed up to the chairman. With his colleagues on either side looking over his shoulders, Thomas flicked a quick peek at the typewritten sheets, then threw them down in disgust.

"I don't care to read any more of the statement," he said. "The statement will not be read."

Naturally, Lawson protested. But Thomas remained unshakable.

"I refuse you to make the statement [that's what he said], because of the first sentence in your statement." And that was that. With one surprising exception, Thomas refused to hear the statements of any of the nine men who followed.

Lawson's screed was not recorded in the Committee's proceedings,

but like those of the rest of the Hollywood Ten, it was released to the press. The first sentence, which had elicited such a painful reaction from the chairman, read as follows: "For a week, this Committee has conducted an illegal and indecent trial of American citizens whom the Committee has selected to be publicly pilloried and smeared."

Had Thomas found the patience to read further, he would have seen that the first sentence was mild compared to much of what followed. But, while not especially scurrilous, it was important in one way; it was the keynote of the raucous defense that came in its wake. The First Amendment, advertised as the basis for our contention that we need not answer the questions asked, was not evoked as often as the words, *illegal*, *indecent*, and *smeared*. Whenever the Committee's counsel asked one or both of the following questions

- (1) Are you a member of the Writers Guild?
- (2) Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party of the United States?³

the answer was usually some version of the first sentence of Lawson's statement. Although Thomas did not know that when he peeked at the paper, he would soon get more of it tossed his way than he could amiably support.

Before chronicling the more violent exchanges between the chairman and the members of the Hollywood Ten (the rest of the Nineteen were later excused from testifying but never forgiven for their sins), I would like to analyze the statements of some of the group, especially the statement of Lawson, which served as a model for most of the others, to further my contention that even if, as some apologists have claimed, we were forced to give tit for tat, our responses were, on the whole, dishon-

3. Since many people are unaware of the evolution of the phraseology of the Committee's main question, a short explanation will, I hope, be welcomed. In the early days of the Martin Dies Committee, a precursor of HUAC, the question had simply been, Are you a member of the Communist Party of the United States? As a countermeasure, the Party adopted a rule that automatically cancelled a Communist's membership the moment the question was asked. He could then answer "No" without perjuring himself. The final wording of what came to be called "the \$64 question" was adopted to circumvent the Party's tactic.

est and reproachable. And though I will always maintain that the Committee's behavior was more reprehensible than ours, the adage "Two wrongs don't make a right" allows no room for weighing the inequity of the iniquities.

In his statement, Lawson wrote in part: "The so-called 'evidence' comes from a parade of stool pigeons, neurotics, publicity-seeking clowns, Gestapo agents, paid informers, and a few ignorant and frightened Hollywood artists." Now that was more like it! Anyone who has ever read *The Daily Worker* will immediately recognize such vituperation as the hallmark of the doctrinaire communist's attitude toward anyone who might disagree with his or her vision.

Lawson further wrote: "They [the Committee] want to muzzle the great Voice of Democracy. Because they're conspiring against the American way of life. They want to cut living standards, introduce an economy of poverty, wipe out labor's rights, attack Negroes, Jews, and other minorities, drive us into a disastrous and unnecessary war." That, of course, is crude demagoguery, but it is interesting that Lawson implied that *some* wars are necessary.

As one can see, the strategy Lawson used was one at which the communists were past masters: construct your own straw man, then proceed to knock him down. Even a second-rank journalist could recognize that such arbitrary charges against the Committee, dealing with subjects not mentioned by anyone during the hearings, was a clear expression of the communist mode of attack. It was unnecessary for Lawson to identify himself as a communist; the answer was implicit in his position paper, not only to members of the press and the politically sophisticated but, sadly, to many of the representatives of the Hollywood Committee for the First Amendment.

In another section of his statement, Lawson wrote: "The writer has a special responsibility . . . to further the free exchange of ideas. I am proud to be singled out for attack by men who are obviously . . . out to stifle ideas and censor communication." This from the man who tried to stifle Budd Schulberg, to censor Adrian Scott and me and to control our film, *Cornered*, who crucified Albert Maltz, and who would shortly use the same tactics to try to discipline Robert Rossen is about as unprincipled, shameless, and devious as writing can be.

But there was enoughchutzpah left over to more than go around. "I am not going to touch," he wrote, "on the gross violations of the Constitution of the United States, and especially of its First and Fifth

Amendments, that is taking place here." In the aftermath of the hearings, neither Congress, the federal bench, nor the Supreme Court found that any of the Committee's actions had violated the Constitution. Legal purists may argue the correctness of the decisions, as do I, but even though justices often disagree, the Supreme Court's *majority* interpretation is still the "word" on what is or isn't a violation of the Constitution.

Finally, this statement of principle from the man who took orders from Moscow: "I am like most Americans in feeling that loyalty to the United States and pride in its traditions are the guiding principles of my life. I am like most Americans in believing that divided loyalty—which is another word for treason—is the most despicable crime of which any man or woman can be accused."

The second unfriendly witness to take the stand was Dalton Trumbo. Stacked under his chair at the witness table were some twenty scripts, each from 115 to 170 pages long; roughly 2,800 pages of difficult reading. Trumbo's stated purpose was to prove to the Committee that his work in no way attempted to impress un-American ideas on American moviegoers' minds. With a curt, "Too many pages," Thomas refused to accept the scripts as evidence, which surprised neither Trumbo nor any other occupant of the Caucus Room.

Dalton Trumbo was a puzzle—at least to me. Considered one of the most literate and articulate minds in Hollywood, his manner, understanding of people and situations, as well as his ultra-dry humor made him one of the town's most likable personalities. He had a fiercely independent intellect, and although he could wither an opponent in an ideological debate, he had an extremely broad tolerance for the other view (as his "only victims" speech at the Writers Guild after the fiasco dramatically illustrates).

Until the hearings, I had never considered him a communist, and to this day, I have not been able to understand how such an inner-directed and unfanatical man could have maintained a loyalty to an organization as doctrinaire as the Communist Party.

I must explain that I have no problem with his *joining* the Party. His very qualities made him, and many other brilliant persons, an easy mark for the Party's recruiters. As Stephen Spender put it, "The very virtues of love and pity and a passion for individual freedom which had brought me close to Communism" (*The God That Failed*, 272) were shared by many men and women of goodwill. But, though the times of awakening varied, men like Arthur Koestler, André Gide, Richard

Wright, Stephen Spender, and hundreds of other intellectuals opened their eyes to the Party's duplicity and got out.

But Trumbo, although mentally and morally the equal of these men, was apparently blinded by a long-held dream and an ideal that never was. And his loyalty to the Party is still a puzzle.

Trumbo asked to read his statement and was refused. As might be expected, it was one of the more reasoned statements of the week. In it, he identified the Committee as an enemy of labor and labor unions and accused it of attempting to establish a favorable climate for the policing of thought (a concept right out of prewar Japan). Here is a sample of an exchange, during the hearings on October 28, between Trumbo and the chairman, after that gentleman had repeatedly tried to elicit a positive "yes" or "no" from Dalton.

Mr. Trumbo. Mr. Chairman, this question is designed to a specific purpose. First—

The Chairman. [pounding gavel]. Do you—

Mr. Trumbo. First, to identify me with the Screen Writers Guild; secondly, to seek to identify me with the Communist Party and thereby destroy that guild . . .

The Chairman. [pounding gavel]. Excuse the witness—

Trumbo prepared to leave the stand, but with his usual presence of mind, Stripling stopped him by asking the \$64 question. After a bit of sparring, Dalton was excused.

Trumbo was correct when he accused the Committee of trying to establish him as a threat because of his membership in the Party, but his charge of the Screen Writers Guild destruction was simply another version of the straw man that each of the Ten had fabricated. I have always doubted that Dalton seriously believed his own accusation. It is true that, like most right-wing extremists, the chairman feared the iron control the Party exercised when they succeeded in capturing a union, and that fear was justified, but the destruction of the unions, per se, was not one of Thomas's aims, at least not at this time.

In quick rebuttal, Thomas called up Roy Brewer, the head of IATSE, that great conglomerate of film-craft unions. Brewer, a member of the Motion Picture Alliance and one of HUAC's strongest supporters, also feared the threat of communist penetration. In two hours of testimony,

which was largely a monologue, he left no doubt concerning the union's cooperative stance in relation to the Committee.

Paul McNutt, a former government VIP and, at the time, a legal representative for the Motion Picture Producers Association, had asked to be heard once more. His testimony, in which he gave the Committee a thorough going-over, served to dampen the procommittee atmosphere created by Brewer. "Insinuation and innuendo are never fair and are not facts," he said. But McNutt's words were water off a duck's back, as evidenced when Thomas called Maltz to the stand. After having been sworn in and identified, Maltz asked permission to read his statement.

The Chairman. May we see it, please?

Mr. Maltz. May I ask whether you asked Mr. Gerald L. K. Smith to see his statement before you allowed him to read it?⁴

The Chairman. I wasn't chairman at that time.

Mr. Maltz. Nevertheless, you were on the committee, Mr. Thomas, were you not?

The Chairman. I asked him a great many questions and he had a hard time answering some of them, too.

Mr. Maltz. I am interested in that, but I still would like to know whether he had his statement read before he was permitted to read it.

The Chairman. Well, we will look at yours.

And they did. To the complete surprise of Albert and the entire audience, the Committee unanimously agreed to permit Maltz to read his statement.

That statement was more of the same; after excoriating the Committee for its biased behavior, Maltz identified a number of his films, short stories, novels, and the awards they had won. He then accused the Committee of supporting the Ku Klux Klan. Near the end of his statement he wrote: "I insist upon my right to think freely and to speak freely . . . to publish whatever I please; to fix my mind or change my mind, without dictation from anyone; to offer any criticism I think fitting of any public official or policy."

4. Gerald L. K. Smith was a notorious American fascist at the time.

The sentiments are admirable, if not new or surprising. All statements of the Ten proclaimed the same ideals, so have such statements and speeches since the beginning of democracy. In truth, however, they are more often the refuge of demagogues than of honest men, and a demagogue of the extreme left is no more to be taken seriously, or at face value, than a demagogue of the right.

Maltz's words were straightforward, but to those of us who remembered how he buckled under the weight of the Party's undemocratic and censorious discipline, his defiant stance seemed merely the blowing of an arrant wind. We who were, or had been, party members, knew how easily honorable statements could be used to distort actuality. And we all knew we were doing just that in our statements and in our evasive speeches to the Committee. The old question "Do two wrongs make a right?" passed often through my mind that week; I found it impossible to deceive myself into a favorable response.

Soon after Maltz finished reading his statement, Stripling asked him the obligatory two questions, and we were back on familiar ground.

The fourth unfriendly witness, writer Alvah Bessie, was known in Hollywood film circles less as a screenwriter than as a veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, which fought at the side of the Republican troops in the Spanish civil war. What the heroes of the brigade refused to remember was that, in 1947, there was a body of evidence indicating that some of them, along with Spanish and Iron Curtain comrades, were more intent on killing Republican Socialists than Franco's fascist rebels. In the era of Stalin, that was not to be wondered at. Most Americans who have only a popular knowledge of Marxist political philosophy assume that socialism and communism are cut from the same cloth. That is by no means true; the mirror image of communism is fascism. To the Comintern, socialism was a far greater threat than capitalism, and it had to be eliminated.

It seemed the Committee was trying to make a record when, following the Maltz surprise, they allowed Bessie to read the first two paragraphs of his statement. It was, in essence, the by now familiar attack on the legality and activity of HUAC. However, Bessie carried it a couple of steps further by charging that the Committee's objective was to change or abolish *every* democratic element in our society, and that was the end of our position papers.

A short portion of Bessie's tussle with Stripling effectively demon-

strates the unfriendly witnesses' strategy of evasive response. The counsel had asked Bessie if he belonged to the Writers Guild.

Mr. Bessie. This is the same sort of question that was asked of other witnesses. It involves a question of my association.

Mr. Stripling. Do you refuse to answer the question?

Mr. Bessie. I have not refused . . . but I must answer the question in the only way in which I know how, and that is, that I believe that such a question violates my right of association and is not properly falling—I do not believe it falls properly within the scope of this committee's inquiry.

Mr. Stripling. We will move on to the \$64 question, Mr. Bessie. Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

Bessie's answer to that question invoked the right to a secret ballot and the propriety of General Eisenhower's right to secrecy of his voting procedures; a strictly modern version of Mom and apple pie.

On the morning of the eighth day, October 29, the Committee called Samuel Ornitz. But first, Thomas once more made it clear that "prominent Americans . . . all from the industry, are the ones who leveled the charges; it wasn't the committee." For a few hopeful minutes, it seemed that Thomas was trying to get out from under. Nobody wanted to put the onus of these particular hearings where it belonged and HUAC, which, God knows, had enough knavery to answer for, found itself stuck with this bit of villainy as well. It seemed for a moment as if the Committee were looking for a way out, but the Ten's behavior would help it get off the hook.

I had never heard of Sam Ornitz before the birth of the Nineteen. Later, I learned that he was a communist, but of so little importance in films that I still don't understand why he was selected as one of the Committee's targets. But there he was, the fifth unfriendly witness of the week. According to Ornitz, what kept him from cooperating with the Committee was his conscience. That struck Mr. Thomas as being irrelevant.

The Chairman. Conscience?

Mr. Ornitz. Conscience, sir, conscience.

Sam's statement, which he was not allowed to read, stressed what he called the anti-Semitic record of HUAC, and its position parallel to that of prewar Germany, Italy, and Japan. Stripling asked Ornitz the familiar questions, received the familiar replies, and Sam was summarily excused, his brief moment in the eye of the world wiped out.

Herbert Biberman came next. When asked his place of birth during the identification formality, he leaped at the opportunity.

"I was born," he said, "within a stone's throw of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, on the day when Mr. McKinley was inaugurated as President of the United States . . . on the second floor of a building at Sixth and South, over a grocery store."

Obviously, Herbert had the necessary credentials for an all-American patriot, but although he remained a loud and persistent adversary to the end, that first sentence was by far the longest he was to complete that day.

In his position paper, Biberman wrote at one point: "I have never been a stand patter." When read later by some of the Nineteen, that sentence brought smiles to a few faces. Among Hollywood's party members, Herbert had a reputation as a man who stood very pat when the party policy stood pat, but who changed with incredible speed and political agility when party policy took a new direction. His straw man was the Bill of Rights and Committee's "attempt to crush . . . the calm and security" of the country's citizens. His performance was the most obstreperous of the week. His statement, which, fortunately, he was not allowed to read, ended with a transcription of our old national anthem, "America," including verses that even its poet-author had forgotten. And when Thomas finally screamed, "Take him away!" he was giving a life-saving order.

The seventh and eighth unfriendlies were Adrian Scott and I. The two of us were so closely linked that Stripling, at one point, called Scott "Mr. Dmytryk." That verbal slip impelled Gordon Kahn to write in *Hollywood on Trial* that "Scott and Dmytryk were subpoenaed because they produced and directed *Crossfire*. That now celebrated film attacked anti-Semitism in particular and racial hatred and intolerance generally" (105).

It is true that *Crossfire* was breaking box-office records, garnering un-

usually high praise from critics, and winning a variety of awards, but all that makes it more logical to assume the reason for the Committee's harassment was not the film's message but the fact that its success had advanced our prestige in the industry and, coincidentally, our worth to the Party. In the Committee's eyes, this must have seemed a clear and present danger. Of course, its undercover operatives should have informed committee members that we were no longer members of the Party, and they should have left well enough alone. But fanatical zeal is a cataract of the mind that blinds reason and logical thought, and HUAC's sense of selection was correspondingly dim. Besides, were Thomas really intelligent, he wouldn't have been keeping Lester Cole and Ring Lardner company in a federal correction facility three years down the line.

Probably because we were no longer members, the Party's tactics repelled us, and neither Scott nor I spent much time or energy opposing Thomas or Stripling. Neither of us was allowed to read his statement, which paraded our straw men of choice. Scott's argument was that we were being persecuted because of *Crossfire* and our stand against racial prejudice. Mine was a brief but broad attack on what I considered to be HUAC's desire to blacklist all who disagreed with its narrow interpretation of Americanism. In a remarkably short time, each of us in turn was asked the usual question, the evasion of which brought the usual dismissals.

On October 30, 1947, a date that would unexpectedly turn out to be the last day of the hearings, the first witness, and the ninth of the group to testify, was Ring Lardner Jr. Ring, who stammered slightly when he talked, and who was rarely seen without a mildly cynical smile on his face, was a writer whose work helped people to laugh their way past some of life's afflictions and annoyances.

Thomas seemed in a good mood that morning, and he agreed to let Ring read his statement after he had concluded his testimony. But, when questioned about his membership in the Writers Guild, Ring's evasive answers were not to Thomas's taste.

The Chairman. Now, Mr. Lardner, don't do like the others, if I were you, or you will never read your statement. . . .

Mr. Lardner. But I understood you to say that I would be permitted to read the statement, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman. Yes; after you are finished with the questions and answers . . . but you certainly haven't answered the questions.

Odd Man Out

Mr. Lardner. ... I don't think you qualified in any way your statement that I would be allowed to read this statement.

The Chairman. Then I will qualify it now. If you refuse to answer the questions then you will not read your statement.

The puerile trap had been sprung, but the mouse had not been caught. Lardner, without apparent pain, sacrificed the reading of his paper. But he won the consolation prize; he got the biggest honest laugh of the hearings with a reply that captured the world's attention. When Thomas, no longer jovial, sneeringly suggested that a "real American" would be proud to answer the \$64 question, Lardner replied: "It depends on the circumstances. I could answer it, but if I did I would hate myself in the morning." A cliché's effectiveness also depends on the circumstances, and Ring chose just the right time to eloquently revive the power of one of the most hackneyed bromides in the book.

At least one of the Committee smiled, but Thomas did not join in the fun. Banging his gavel, he shouted, "Sergeant, take the witness away." And one of the hearing's most placid witnesses was ushered off the stand.

"Will Mr. Larry Parks please come forward!"

Bodies straightened and necks were craned as Larry's name was called, but he was not to be seen. He had just left for the men's room. A few quick whispered words from Crum to Stripling, then Stripling to Thomas, and a substitute was promptly summoned to the stand.

Lester Cole, who, after John Howard Lawson, was probably the most dedicated communist of the group, was run through the Committee's wringer in a hurry. On hearing Cole's evasive responses to the question about his membership in the Writers Guild, Thomas erupted.

The Chairman. No, No, No, No, No.

Mr. Cole. I hear you, Mr. Chairman. I hear you. ...

The Chairman. You will hear some more. ... It is a very simple question.

Mr. Cole. What I have to say is a very simple answer.

The Chairman. Yes; but answer it "Yes" or "No."

Mr. Cole. It isn't necessarily that simple.

Cole was not permitted to read his statement, which, like most of the others, attacked the Committee as an enemy of Hollywood and its

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guilds and unions. Cole was dismissed, but it was still early in the day. There was time before the clock struck lunch for one more witness. This time the expression "unfriendly witness" turned out to be a complete misnomer.

In the morning press, Thomas had promised the world a "revelation," an all-star surprise witness. In his book, *Hollywood on Trial*, Gordon Kahn wrote that "even the 'unfriendly witnesses' were caught in the mounting tension of excitement. Who, indeed, was the Committee's Mystery Witness, and what earth-heaving disclosures would he make?" (121). Those sentences must be regarded as literary license. All of the Nineteen, including Kahn, knew quite well who the mystery witness was to be and what earth-heaving disclosures he would make.

He was a small, shy man who displayed little of the energy that lends so much vitality to his plays. He spoke English with difficulty, and like most people with a language problem, he preferred to say little and listen a lot. But Bertholdt Brecht's appearance on the stand gave Thomas his only victory of the hearings, though the extent of the victory was debatable. I considered it a large win for the Nineteen.

Brecht was sworn in with some difficulty. He was offered, and accepted, the help of an interpreter who, as it developed, had as much trouble pronouncing English words as Brecht did, but who probably understood them better. It made for a halting but often amusing session. The world-famous playwright was not allowed to read his statement, which deprived the *Congressional Record* of a rare touch of class. It was rejected on the grounds that it dealt largely with Brecht's career in Germany, and his troubles with the Nazis. Instead, Stripling immediately went for the jugular.

Mr. Stripling. Mr. Brecht, are you a member of the Communist Party or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party? ...

Mr. Brecht. Mr. Chairman, I have heard my colleagues when they considered this question not as proper, but I am a guest in this country and do not want to enter into any legal arguments, so I will answer your question fully as well as I can. I was not a member or am not a member of any Communist Party.

The Chairman. Your answer is, then, that you have never been a member of the Communist Party?

Odd Man Out

- Mr. Brecht. That is correct.
 Mr. Stripling. You were not a member of the Communist Party in Germany?
 Mr. Brecht. No; I was not.

Stripling had been disarmed. Since his main line of questioning showed little promise, he took a detour. He quoted, and misquoted, a number of Brecht's poems about Nazism, which had nothing to do with the United States. Then, hoping to trap him into guilt by association, Stripling questioned Brecht about his friends. This elicited a startling admission. Yes, Brecht said, he did know Hanns and Gerhardt Eisler (who were well-known communists); in fact, they were very close friends; often they played chess and talked politics. That made the members of the Committee sit up, but this detour soon reached a dead end, and Stripling got back to the main line.

- Mr. Stripling. Mr. Brecht, did you ever make application to join the Communist Party? . . .
 Mr. Brecht. No, no, no, no, never.

And though the sparrows pecked at the hawk for an inexcusable length of time, Brecht finally received the chairman's benediction.

- Mr. Thomas. Thank you very much, Mr. Brecht. You are a good example to the witnesses of Mr. Kenny and Mr. Crum.

Those of us who knew how Brecht had got there smiled at Thomas's remark. With a tired sigh, Bertholdt Brecht left the witness table, escaped from Washington, and was soon on his way to East Germany, a democracy he must have admired. But to the Nineteen and their lawyers, the scene played out in the Caucus Room was purely an anticlimax.

Like Howard Koch, Brecht knew he had no American record, and he saw no harm to the Nineteen in cooperating with the Committee. At this particular time, he cared little what happened to free speech in the United States. Like the alien in the movie *E.T.*, he wanted to go h-o-o-me! And since home was outside the limits of this country, he couldn't do that with a contempt charge hanging over his head. Brecht

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knew that every decision of the Nineteen had to be unanimously approved, so he asked for a meeting of the group as a whole.

Eighteen film men and six lawyers listened to Brecht's plea. I will never forget the touching climax. "I had attacked war and the people's enemies who now marched under the swastika of Adolf Hitler," he said. "Practically overnight my writings had become treasonable, so the day after the Reichstag fire I left Germany. First, I went to Denmark, but there were many Nazi sympathizers there, and I fled to Sweden. Within a year I had to leave Sweden, and I went to Finland, where I waited for a United States visa. When I left Finland, the Nazis were swarming over the land. By train, I crossed Russia and Siberia to Vladivostok, then by ship to Manila. Finally I reached the United States—and here they caught me."

To this great man, even the party hard-liners dared not say no. Unanimously, Brecht received our permission to appear and testify before the Committee. But later, when the force of Brecht's rhetoric had dissipated, some of us wondered if he had told Thomas the truth, the *whole* truth, and nothing but the truth.

In the late afternoon, on October 30, 1947, without any previous notice to our attorneys, Thomas brought the hearings to a halt. In his final speech to those assembled, he said:

Ten prominent figures in Hollywood whom the Committee had evidence were members of the Communist Party were brought before us and refused to deny that they were Communists. It is not necessary for the Chair to emphasize the harm which the motion-picture industry suffers from the presence within its ranks of known Communists who do not have the best interests of the United States at heart. The industry should set about immediately to clear its own house and not wait for public opinion to force it to do so.

The hearings are adjourned.