

Dublin Business School

A Critical Review of the 1947 HUAC Hearings and the Hollywood Ten

1449707

By Emmet Kenny
5/25/2012

Acknowledgements

I first want to sincerely thank my supervisor for this dissertation, Doctor Barnaby Taylor whose superb guidance, really helpful input, encouragement and overall support were invaluable to the creation of this dissertation. From start to finish he pushed me and allowed me to gain a much greater understanding and appreciation for film in general.

I would also like to thank all the other lecturers I have had throughout my three years in DBS doing this course. Connor Murphy, Matt Nolan, Clare Dix, Kenny Leigh and Dave Gunning all played a huge part in helping me to fully experience the medium of film and all its aspects.

Finally, I would like to offer my best regards and blessings to all of those who have supported me in any respect, mainly my mother Maura and my two sisters, Sheena and Avril for their continued support throughout the years

This dissertation looks at how in the aftermath of the Second World War, Hollywood became a prime target for the government forces of the conservative right. It shows how these forces through the House committee for Un-American Activities used the heightened public fear of the growing power of communist Russia as an opportunity to take down their political enemies on the left side of American politics. It will also look at the individuals who became their prime targets and the reasons behind why each of them was targeted. Finally this dissertation will show how the 1947 hearings affected each of their lives and especially careers.

The 1940's were a decade of change on a global scale. World War 2 reordered the global balance of power. The colonial powers of Europe – France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, were left devastated by six years of war on the continent. The United States of America had replaced the dominant colonial nations of Europe as the strongest nation, both militarily and economically, on earth. Other changes including the working woman and technological and scientific advances meant the dawn of the modern age. In this new age America was booming, having largely been untouched by the ravages of war. The Second World War gave rise to another global power in the form of the Soviet Union under the rule of communism. During the war the two powers were allies in the face of a common enemy, Hitler and Nazi Germany, yet although they were allies each was suspicious of the other and considered them a potential threat to their own national security.

When the war ended and both the United States and the Soviet Union no longer had that common enemy to occupy their mutual interest they turned their focus on each other. The Cold War, as it became known, was not one based on military prowess on the battlefield but rather a war between the ideologies of capitalism represented by the United States and Communism represented by the Soviet Union. America which had been founded on the basis of freedom feared the communist system because it meant every aspect of a nation's security, economy and society was controlled by

a powerful central government controlled entirely by one group or organisation of people. This ran contrary to the philosophy of the American capitalist society where governmental power was limited and most people were recognised equally under the law of the land with the right to decide their own destinies.

“The sense of communist encroachment around the world led to an era of political suspicion in the United States. During the late 1940’s, intelligence agencies investigated individuals suspected of spying or subversion.”ⁱ

It is in this backdrop of fear and suspicion that the American government began to look within its own borders for potential communist threats. The rise of organisations like the CIA and the FBI were as a direct response to the rise in fear of the ‘Red Menace’ as it became known. Every industry, organisation and political entity came under the close scrutiny of the government and its security agencies. Thomas Jefferson is quoted as saying “When the people fear their government, there is tyranny; when the government fears the people, there is liberty.”ⁱⁱ Leftist Hollywood groups were about to experience the full force of the artistic tyranny of the conservative right who seen them as sympathisers and supporters of the communist system and who also considered to be radicals that needed to be crushed. For American conservatives, a hotbed of this leftist radicalism was Hollywood and the movie industry at large. Many on the right saw Hollywood as a bastion of liberalism in its political leanings. With the heightening of the national security threat of the Soviet Union and the newly elected republican conservative congress, these forces saw an opportunity to not only defeat the seeds of communism they believed to be growing within the industry but also to defeat their political foes within in the labour union movement who supported both politically and financially the Democratic party. The major Hollywood union of the 1930’s and 40’s was the

Screen Writers Guild. The conservatives found allies within Hollywood in the form of the studio executives who also had long wanted to break the power held within the entertainment industry by the unions. Organisations like the Motion Picture Alliance became partners of the zealous anti – communist forces within the government and together they conspired and plotted on how they could achieve their mutual goals of destroying both the perceived communist threat within Hollywood and breaking the power of the labour movement within the film industry.

By 1947 the right felt it now had the control it needed to achieve its goals in the era of post-war fear of communism.

“When an atmosphere of suspicion and hatred is established, you get people turning on each other, questioning their friends and even themselves, wondering if their thoughts run in the accepted ‘American’ channel, secretly asking whether somebody’s convictions are his own or those of the party line.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Together HUAC, the House Un – American Activities Committee, and the Motion Picture Alliance decided the time was right to strike. What would take place over the course of the year would be a mockery of civility and decency culminating in two weeks of staged drama that would bring about no resolutions and cost ten individuals their careers in the film industry. The 1947 HUAC trials were a part of the McCarthyism style witch hunts that would carry on through the late 40’s and 50’s. Although the infamous Senator Joe McCarthy was not a part of the hearings which took place in the house and not the senate, many of his traits were part of the overall investigation such as the lack of evidence against any of the ten who were convicted by the committee. The committee hearings in the end would turn out to be little more than a vanity exercise by the committee members in order to gain publicity for themselves rather than investigate whether there was in fact any actual

subversion being carried out by the communist members within the Hollywood entertainment industry.



The HUAC hearings taking place in 1947

HUAC or the House Committee on Un-American Activities had been around since the early years of the 20th century. It only became a standing committee in 1945 composed of nine representatives whose job it was to investigate threats to the form of government that the United States Constitution guaranteed including subversive acts such as the distribution of propaganda. Beginning almost immediately after the conclusion of World War II, the main threat that most believed faced the continent was the advancement of communism or the 'Red Threat'. Hollywood

and especially its guilds and unions became a major focus of HUAC's investigations into political sympathy felt for communism within the entertainment industry and those individuals who were responsible for it. The committee held two major investigations into the industries' so called radical leftist views; one took place in 1947 while the other took place in 1951. Earlier investigations had taken place, once in 1939 by HUAC and another in 1941 by the Senate Interstate Commerce Committee but had gone nowhere in the face of a major pushback by industry producers. The 1947 investigations conducted by HUAC into the subversion of the film industry were a renewed attempt by the newly empowered post – war conservative force's within the government to tackle what they saw as a militant encroaching communist infiltration movement within the entertainment industry and predominantly within the entertainment labour movement consisting mainly of the Screen Writers Guild, the most activist of the Guilds, and the Screen Actors Guild and in effect silence free speech within the film industry. Their main targets became a group of 19 individuals, 10 of whom who go down in history simply known as the 'Hollywood Ten', consisting of the screenwriters John Howard Lawson, Herbert Biberman, Alvah Bessie, Adrian Scott, Ring Lardner Jr., Lester Cole, Dalton Trumbo, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ornitz and the director Edward Dmytryk. Each of them held or had held leadership roles within the Screen Writers Guild and/or the communist party in Hollywood.

In its investigation in 1947, the committee had three main goals: First of all, its main goal was to prove that the Screen Writer's guild contained communist members. It wanted to expose these individuals and show an already fearful public the Guild's and its member's political affiliations with the American Communist Party. In doing so it would damage the credibility of the Screen Writers Guild and by association destroy the enormous amount of power it had built up within the Film Industry over the past few decades. The committee's second goal was to show the ways in which

these communist sympathisers had been using their films as a way to promote their political beliefs. HUAC wanted to convince the public that these individuals had been using subversive hidden messages within their films as a way of indoctrinating an unsuspecting public to conform to their ideals. In doing this the committee hoped to discredit their political opponents by creating fear among the general population about the Hollywood Guilds. The third and final goal of the committee and especially its chairman, J. Parnell Thomas (R) from New Jersey, wanted to use the publicity of the investigation to prove that President Roosevelt had encouraged and sought the production of pro-Soviet films during the war. None of these claims were based on facts the committee were able to obtain and therefore could never be substantiated. Thomas Schatz is of a similar view; -

“Although Thomas earlier indicated that the investigation would include the CSU strike and the jurisdictional dispute, he ruled that out after the initial sortie to Hollywood. He decided instead to pursue three premises: first, that Communists had attained positions of power in the Screen Writers Guild and in studio writing departments; second, that Communists were successfully introducing subversive propaganda into pictures; and third, that Roosevelt and his administration had pressured Hollywood to produce pro-Soviet pictures during World War II.”^{iv}

Yet this did not stop the conservative politicians in control of the committee from levelling these accusations at the guild members and at President Roosevelt who had died a year earlier while still in office. These goals in effect meant that the committee was less interested in defeating an internal threat to the security of the United States Government and its people than they were in defeating alternative views and ideals to their own political ideological causes. In reality the 1947 HUAC hearings were nothing more than a vanity display by the committee to gain publicity for itself and its members despite the stated goals. A sub - committee consisting of five members from the nine member HUAC committee were tasked with investigating the claims of communist infiltration.

This sub-committee included Representatives J Parnell Thomas of New Jersey who was the committee chairman, John McDowell from Pennsylvania, Richard M. Nixon from California, John S. Wood of Georgia and Richard B. Vail from Illinois. The ground work for these hearings had been laid earlier on in the spring of 1947 when many of the friendly witnesses who would appear before the sub – committee had invited the committee members out to Hollywood to begin a preliminary investigations into the communist threat. They were all part of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, a right wing organisation founded in 1944 and made up of Hollywood executives. Its stated goal was to combat the rise in Labour militancy that was going on in the post – war film industry. It was in these preliminary investigations that many of those suspected of being communists or former communists were named before the committee members.



J. Parnell Thomas, HUAC Chairman

The investigation opened at 9.00am on Monday October 20th 1947 and lasted two weeks. From the beginning as shown in the goals outlined above the committee was biased towards rooting out those they saw as a threat to the American way of life or the ‘Undesirables’, as they were known. The first week of the committee hearings revolved around the testimonies of people within the

industry as well as some who weren't, who had the same political views as the conservative forces that controlled the committee. People like Ayn Rand, a Russian-American novelist and screenwriter, Sam Wood, an American film director and producer, who was best known for directing films like *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1939) and *The Pride of the Yankees* (1942) and Jack L. Warner, a Canadian American film executive who was the president of Warner Bros. Studios in Hollywood, all testified before the committee in regards to the communist and radical leftist influences that had infiltrated the film industry. Called as friendly witnesses before the committee, they were given ample time to slander and vilify individuals they believed to be part of the non-existent communist threat. The committee indulged these 'witnesses' by allowing them to read prepared statements, refer to notes and even guaranteed them immunity from cross-examination and the threat being sued or prosecuted. In his address to the committee Jack Warner stated –

“Ideological termites have burrowed into many American industries, organizations, and societies. Wherever they may be, I say let us dig them out and get rid of them. My brothers and I will be happy to subscribe generously to a pest-removal fund. We are willing to establish such a fund to ship to Russia the people who don't like our American system of government and prefer the communistic system to ours. That's how strongly we feel about the subversives who want to overthrow our free American system”^v

What I find to be unbelievable about this statement is the hypocrisy of it. He talks about the removal of individuals with communist political leanings because they threaten a system of government that was founded on the belief that every person has the right to believe in whatever ideals and opinions they want to.



Jack Warner



Ayn Rand

In this way, Warner, Rand, and the committee members were becoming exactly that which the HUAC investigation was attempting to show, a threat to the founding constitutional principles of liberty and free speech. Warner, being the first witness before the committee, would go on to name the people he suspected of being subversive individuals. Warner had already testified earlier that spring when the committee members had travelled out to Hollywood to start preliminary investigations into the communist threat. Some of the original names he had given he removed from his original list such as Guy Endore and the Epstein twins Julius and Philip. But his list still contained most of the ten and other names including Emmet G. Lavery, a producer and the president of the SWG at the time of the hearings and Irwin Shaw who was a director. Another friendly witness called to testify was the MGM producer Louis B. Mayer. He had been born in Russia which added a bit of drama to the proceedings. He was very complimentary of the committee and even suggested the committee go so far as to pass legislation that would hinder any attempts by communists to gain gainful work within the United States. This is evidence of the extreme lengths the executives were willing to go to undermine the power of the labour movement they despised and were hoping to eviscerate with the hearings.

“When asked today why they decided to cooperate in their appearances as witnesses before HUAC, many people have cited grandiose historical and political reasons, ranging from wanting to do their bit to expose totalitarian thought-controllers to disillusion over the Nazi – Soviet pact and Soviet anti – Semitism.”^{vi}

These claims by former witnesses cannot cover over the not so well hidden agenda of those executives whose only real motive was greed and frustration with the success of the labour movement throughout the 30's and forties. Another aspect of the testimonies given by some of the friendly witnesses was the vitriolic nature of their testimonies –

“Most of the testimony was deadly serious, of course, and some of it quite vindictive – Walt Disney testified that Herb Sorrell was “a

Commie,” for instance and that the reds had tried to “ruin” him in the strike of 1940 – 1941.”^{vii}

In contrast to the friendly witnesses from the first week of testimonies before the committee who were given ample opportunity to express their views and slander their political opponents, the Hollywood ten were treated with complete and utter contempt by the members of HUAC. Were the friendly witness’s were allowed to read out prepared statements, the screenwriters were gavelled down by the chair of the committee when they attempted to do the same. Another difference was the attitude of the committee members questioning. The friendly witnesses received polite and simple questions that they could easily answer whereas the leftist screenwriters received accusatory and hostile questioning in the most obvious game of political partisanship that Congress had ever seen. The opening exchange between Robert E Stripling, who was the chief investigator of the committee, and John Howard Lawson, the first of the ten to be called before the committee began with Stripling inquiring about Lawson’s membership within the SWG and the communist party. Lawson having been refused to read out an opening statement responded; -

“In framing my answer to that question I must emphasis the points that I have raised before. The question of communism is in no way related to this inquiry, which is an attempt to get control of the screen and to invade the basic rights of American citizens in all fields.”^{viii}

The proceedings turned into a farce from then on with the chairman McDowell continually gavelling over Lawson as he tried to speak. The show ended with Lawson being forcibly removed by security guards to the sound of both booing and applause. In response to this blatant bias of the committee, all the other filmmakers followed the lead of Lawson and invoked their right to not answer any questions put to them by the committee. The coordinated effort of the Ten had been planned before the hearings had begun. I have to agree with the opinion of Paul V. McNutt, the lawyer hired to represent the Hollywood Ten, when he said –

“It became apparent by the chairman’s questions that the purpose of the Hearing was to try to dictate and control through the device of the hearings, what goes on in the screens of America. It does not require a law to cripple the right of free speech. Intimidation and coercion will do it. Freedom simply cannot live in an atmosphere of fear. The motion – picture industry cannot be a free medium of expression if it must live in fear of a damning epithet ‘Un-American!’ whenever it elects to introduce a new idea, produce a picture critical of the status quo, or point up through a picture some phase of our way of life that needs improving.”^x

The hearings had split opinions within Hollywood. There was however only limited organised support for the Ten in the form of the Committee for the First Amendment which included many of Hollywood’s leading liberal stars including Groucho Marx, Katherine Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart. Yet in the wake of the sentencing and blacklisting of the Ten this support vanished. It seems to me that once their supporters realised they could be the next targets, their own self interests rather than a principled stand in the face of the committee’s oppression became more important. The hearings came to an end with the hostile witnesses being charged with contempt of congress and imprisoned for varying terms between six and twelve months. By limiting the free speech rights of the Hollywood ten the committee became the very thing it feared, a threat to the constitutional order of the US governmental system. Yet the committee were blind to this truth because of their zealous ideological pursuit and conviction of their political enemies on the progressive side of the political spectrum. The hearings changed Hollywood; -

“An “atmosphere of fear” was indeed permeating the Landscape, and although the Hollywood producers accepted and even exploited that climate, they scarcely created it.”^x

That honour fell on the committee and its members who saw the opportunity to exploit the greater public fear of communism and turn it against their political enemies for their own vanity and personal gain. In this particular political battle between Washington and Hollywood, Washington

had come out on top yet it had not earned itself any great prestige or glory in doing so. Robert Vaughn also says; -

“The record clearly indicates that the inquisitors were primarily interested in forcing the unfriendly witnesses into contempt charges rather than investigating Communism in the American Cinema.”^{xi}

Why were the ten people who would become known as the ‘Hollywood ten’ targeted by the motion picture alliance and the house committee? Yes they were all or at least had been members of the communist party in the 1930’s and 40’s and yes they were all members of the Hollywood guilds but this description could have been placed on hundreds of others within the film making industry. What seems to have been the defining point about each of the Ten were their leadership roles within the communist party and the guilds. As Bernard F. Dick writes; -

“John Howard Lawson may have been the ideologue of the Ten, Herbert Biberman the Organizer, and Ring Lardner, Jr., the wit; but Samuel Badisch Ornitz was the patriarch.”^{xii}

Now I want to look at how each of the men that were blacklisted had come to represent such a threat to those executives and representatives who saw them as the head of a demon that needed to be destroyed politically speaking and how each man’s career was effected in the aftermath of the hearings.

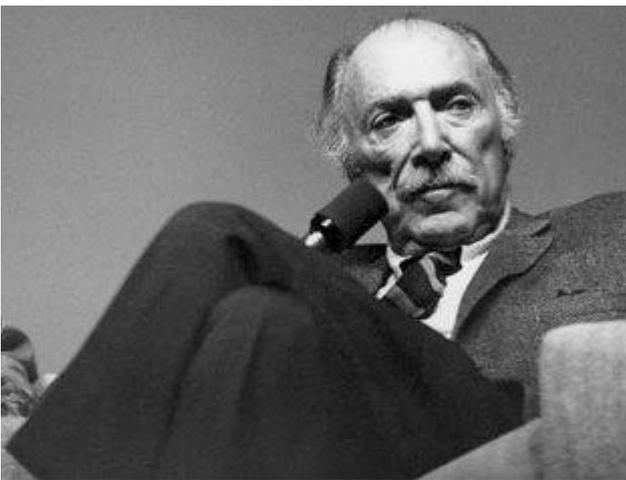


Samuel Ornitz (Left), John Howard Lawson (Right)

In the case of Samuel Ornitz, his political views were a contrast to his two brothers, both of whom found careers as business men in the capitalist system. Ornitz was a full blown socialist by the age of twelve, even getting up on a soapbox and preaching to the passer-bys on his home street in New York. He would bring this staunch socialist idealism to the lanes and roads of Hollywood in 1928 after gaining fame for his book *Haunch Paunch* in 1923. His first major break came when became one of the writers for the film *The Case of Lena Smith* (1929) directed by Josef von Sternberg. But despite other successful productions including *Army Girl* (1938), *Little Orphan Annie* (1938), and *They Live in Fear* (1944) he would not receive the same praise for his screenplays as he would for his books. Instead it was his role as one of the chief founders of the Writers guild along with Lawson and Cole that would be seen as his main crime in the hearings. Ornitz had been so vocal in his pursuit of communist system that he would not only enrage conservatives and studio executives with his extreme communist views but would also put off many liberals who were sympathetic to the cause especially when he denied that there was any persecution of Jews within the Soviet Union. After his confinement and blacklisting, Ornitz would return to writing books until he died in 1957 in Los Angeles.

Probably the most activist of the ten was John Howard Lawson. He was a founding member and the first president of the Writers Guild of America (1933 – 1934) and the de facto communist cultural commissar in Hollywood having joined the party in 1934. It was the second highest position within the communist party of the United States behind the overall head of the party, Gerhart Eisler who was an agent for the communist regime in Russia. Lawson is better known for his affiliation with these organisations than he was for his filmmaking thus making him one of the top targets of the House committee's investigation. Part of his role as the 2nd highest ranked communist in Hollywood was to enforce the rules laid down by Eisler. I believe that the fact he was such a zealous

communist drove him as leader of the Writers Guild to make it the most aggressive of all the guilds and therefore the biggest thorn in the studio executive's side. They and the committee viewed him as the greatest threat of the ten. There was ample evidence to support the fact that many of his productions were filled with communist themes and ideals. He had come by these beliefs due to his early Marxist education at the hands of Edward Wilson, a critic and teacher at Wilson College in Massachusetts where Lawson studied. His most notable films were *Ship to Shanghai* (1930) which told the story of a group of sailor's revolt against their ships' captain, possibly a reference to the revolt of the Russian crew on the warship *Aurora* at the start of the 1917 October revolution in Russia that brought the communists to power there and *Counter-Attack* (1945) which celebrated the US – Russian Alliance during the Second World War. Lawson was unrepentant about his political beliefs after the hearings and being blacklisted. He moved to Mexico where he continued to write political themed interpretations of film-making such as *The Hidden Heritage* (1950) and *Film in the Battle of Ideas* (1953).



Lester Cole



Edward Dmytryk

As one of the founders of the Screen Writers Guild and an irrepressible left wing activist, Lester Cole was the most obvious target for both the Hollywood executives tired of having to deal with the labour militancy and the conservative representatives on the HUAC committee who saw him as an enemy of their ideological zealous right wing thinking. Unlike Trumbo or Dmytryk, Cole had long been a member of the communist party having joined it in 1934. Cole was well known for his left wing political views and thus an easy target for the committee. Many of his earliest films represented these views where the protagonist is someone who has to fight the resistance of powerful forces in order to achieve their goals. Films like *The Affairs of Cappy Ricks* (1937) and *Sinners in Paradise* (1938) were considered some of Cole's best because they contained qualities that he admired – Loyalty, co-operation and respect for the rights of the working man. After his 12 month prison stay and a \$1,000 fine for not co-operating with the committee, Cole was forced to work odd jobs. He then moved to England. He would later return to the United States and like others who were blacklisted return to writing screenplays, but under an assumed identity. Possibly one of the greatest films of all time, *Born Free* (1966), was written by him. The story of a married couple trying to reintroduce a tame lion back into the wild, it reminds us of his earlier works and showcases the qualities he stood for during the hearings were still part of his persona.

Edward Dmytryk, who was born in September 1908 in British Columbia, Canada, had grown up in the Hollywood Studio System rising from a messenger boy at Paramount Studios to being one of the leading directors of that era. Many of his wartime productions had been a part of the war motivational and propaganda effort including *Hitler's Children* (1943), a politically oriented, anti-fascist film about the experiences of an American born girl within the Nazi youth movement and *Crossfire* (1947) which won 4 Academy awards and was one of the first films from Hollywood to tackle the issue of anti-Semitism. Another wartime production directed by Dmytryk was *Murder*,

My Sweet (1944) which was one of the first films that was a new style of genre that would come to be known as 'film noir'. Dmytryk did not even become a member of the communist party until the spring of 1944 and left it in the autumn of that year, yet was still accused of subverting the war effort by the committee and its Friendly witnesses. After he had been blacklisted and imprisoned, Dmytryk found work in England directing two films there. But afterwards he tried to remove himself from the blacklist through an interview in 1951 with the *Saturday Evening Post*. In that interview he states; -

"I was a communist," I joined in the spring of 1944 and dropped out of the party late the next fall. And I never broke completely with them until I was in jail. Though I was no longer a party member, I stood with the Ten on my own personal convictions about civil liberties. And when we lost, I couldn't say anything until after I had served my time. I wouldn't have wanted it to appear that I was trying to escape any consequences of my original stand." ^{xiii}



Dalton Trumbo



Herbert Biberman

Unlike Dmytryk, Dalton Trumbo began his career as a journalist and then a novelist. He wrote his first screenplay in 1922. Trumbo was an interesting character. He could produce a 150 page script in a relatively short amount of time. Many of these scripts he wrote at night while sitting in his

bath. He had a special self that fit his tub and allowed him to use his typewriter. Trumbo like many of the ten convicted by HUAC was a supporter of the labour movement. He had supported labour strikes within the industry and had only joined the communist party in 1943. His support of the labour movement seems looks like it was the major motive behind his name being put forward as a possible communist infiltrator. After he was convicted and imprisoned for a year for contempt of congress, Trumbo was fired from MGM studios as a scriptwriter. In summing up the Ten's 1st amendment defence he declared that the Bill of rights "was not conceived for the powerful and popular who have no need of it"^{xiv} After his release, and being blacklisted he was forced to write under false identities in order to get his scripts produced; -

"In GUN CRAZY (1949), Millard Kaufman had served as a front for Trumbo. . . . Ian McLellan Hunter has said that Trumbo made the original story for William Wyler's film ROMAN HOLIDAY (1953), starring Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck."^{xv}

Even after he was blacklisted he was still able to gain credits on films like *Spartacus* (1960) and *Exodus* (1960). This was seen as a major embarrassment by the Hollywood studios. *Spartacus* was in a sense Trumbo relating his experience of the hearings. He saw the rebels as a representation of the ten convicted filmmakers. His last scene in the film where the rebels refuse to identify Spartacus to the Romans is a tribute to those who would not co-operate with the 1947 hearings. He was the first of the ten to produce a script in his own name after their blacklisting.

Herbert Biberman had come from a theatre background where he was a member of the theatre guild. He had directed many stage plays including the soviet play, *Red Rust*. During the thirties he directed many films including *One Way Ticket* (1935), *Meet Nero Wolfe* (1936) and *The Master Race* (1941), the story of the liberation by British and American troops of a small Belgian town and their efforts to return a bit of normality to the war weary residents of the town. Later he would write the

screenplays for *Together Again* (1944) and *New Orleans* (1947). Unlike Trumbo, Biberman was only sentenced to six months in prison for refusing to answer the questions of the committee members. Not only did he have to suffer the indignity of being blacklisted himself but he would also have to suffer the blacklisting of his wife, Gale Sondergaard who was an actress he had married in 1930, in the 50's. *Salt of the Earth* (1954) was the first film to be made by Biberman after he was released from prison. It was made independently due to his name being on the blacklist. The film faced a lot of pressure from Hollywood and the government based on the fact that it was being made by other blacklisted filmmakers including the writer Michael Wilson and the subject of the film was the terrible working conditions of miners in New Mexico. The film created a rift within the union movement. It had the support of the local miners union but other unions would not support it due to the blacklist cast and crewmembers. It only had one screening in New York before being banned in the US. It was however a success in Europe winning awards in both France and Czechoslovakia.



Adrian Scott



Albert Maltz



Ring Lardner Jr

Adrian Scott's leftist views had their roots in his Irish – Catholic, middle class upbringing in Arlington, New Jersey. He was one of the founding filmmakers who created the genre of 'Film noir' when he collaborated with Edward Dmytryk on the film *Crossfire*. He started out writing for various

magazines before heading to Hollywood to become a screenwriter and producer. He produced many films including *Cornered* (1945), the story of a Canadian pilot who returns to France after the war to investigate the shooting of a group of resistance fighters including his new bride, *Deadline at Dawn* (1946), a film about mistaken identity and a sailor trying to prove his innocence in a murder and *So Well Remembered* (1947). *Crossfire* would be the last film he ever produced due to his being jailed for 12 months and his name being blacklisted in the industry. Scott was immediately fired by his employers, RKO studios, one of the 'Big Five' Hollywood studios of the golden era of the studio system and also was subsequently divorced by his wife at the time; Anne Shirley, an actress who was upset by his refusal to cooperate with the committee. Of the ten, Scott suffered the most humiliation because of his wife's act. After he was released from prison Scott set out to sue the company for wrongful dismissal. The case continued on throughout the 1950's until the Supreme Court took up the case in 1957 and ruled against Scott and threw out his case against the studio. Afterwards Scott was forced to work under an assumed identity and found work in the television industry in the United Kingdom as a writer for shows like *Lassie*, *the Adventures of Robin Hood* and *Ironside*. Scott would die of lung cancer in December 1973 in Los Angeles having never been able to clear his name off the Blacklist.

Similarly to Biberman, Albert Maltz began his career in the 1930's as a playwright, having enrolled in the Yale school of drama, and a member of the theatre union writing many plays including the acclaimed *Peace on Earth* (1933). He started in Hollywood in 1932 writing his first screenplay out of a total of eighteen he would write during his time in Hollywood. He worked on several productions including most notably *Casablanca* (1942) starring Humphrey Bogart, one of the high profile members of the committee for the first amendment. He was one of the major writers involved the war time propagandist films produced in Hollywood. These included *Destination Tokyo* (1943),

Seeds of Freedom (1943) and *Pride of the Marines* (1945). However Maltz came under suspicion by HUAC for the Oscar winning wartime documentary and the role he played in writing the cues for the English version of *Moscow Strikes Back* (1942). The film shows the defeat of the invading German forces by the Russian Red army near Moscow. HUAC used this as evidence against him in order to show his communist sympathies. They conveniently left out the fact that at the time Russia and America were allies and the film was a documentary detailing an actual event that happened. With his name blacklisted Maltz also found work under an assumed name and outside of Hollywood. He received no credit for any of these films that included *The Robe* (1953). When the blacklist was lifted Maltz wrote *Two Mules for Sister Sara* (1970), *The Beguiled* (1971), *Hangup* (1973) and *Scalawag* (1973).

The strong leftist views of Ring Lardner Jr made him raise money in the 1930's for the Spanish Popular Front who fought the Spanish civil war against the fascist forces of Franco. He also lost his younger brother who went over to Spain and died near the end of the war. He was a very active member of the guild organizing many of its anti – fascist rallies. Lardner was possibly the most famous of the ten due to fact he was the son of the famous humorist Ring Lardner Sr. When he was brought before the committee and refused to cooperate many saw that as a portrayal of not only his country but also of his upbringing; -

“Here is an American citizen who enjoyed advantages far beyond those which are the lot of the average young man; he came from a talented family and showed unusual talents himself; he received the best possible education and used it to acquire profitable jobs; he had every reason for following the political philosophy shared by the vast majority of American citizens. But like a few others of his generation, young Ring decided that this philosophy was not for him.”^{xvi}

I disagree with this view of Craig Thompson in his original article for the March edition of *Coronet* in 1951 because it suggests that because of his comfortable lifestyle growing up; Lardner should have

shunned the workers agenda of the left. Yet the American political left has a history of richer populist crusaders; F.D.R. and the Kennedy's being the most famous of these. It seems the main motivation for the committee's investigation of Lardner would have been to bring greater publicity to the hearings due to the familiarity of his family name with the public at large. Lardner would go on to restore his name after being taken off the blacklist with films like *The Cincinnati Kid* (1965), the Academy award winning *MASH* (1970) and *The Greatest* (1977).



Alvah Bessie

Having fought in the Spanish Civil War as part of the International Brigades, Alvah Bessie was probably the most militant activist out of the blacklisted group. Like many of the ten, Bessie started off his career as a theatre writer and sometimes even acting on stage. Yet unlike the rest of them he did not have a great interest in writing screenplays but rather saw himself more as an author and literature writer having written a war novel "Men in Battle", that gave an account of his experiences while he was fighting in Spain. It seems the biggest draw Hollywood had for Bessie was the amount of money he could earn. This is backed up by the volume of his Hollywood works totalling four scripts and only one original screenplay which he wrote between 1943 and 1945. The paradoxical thing about Bessie's involvement in the HUAC hearings is that he was hired by Warner

Bros. Studios with their full knowledge that he was a member of the communist party. By the start of the hearings in 1947, Bessie was no longer even employed by the studio; his employment was terminated when he was fired in 1945 by Jack Warner for supporting the CSU (Conference of Studio Unions) strike that took place in October of that year. However he was still a member of the communist party in 1947 and would continue to be a part of it until he finally left it 1954. So it could be argued that the blacklisting of Bessie was a uniquely redundant exercise of power by the committee and executives. It seems the only damage done to Bessie was financial when the cost of the legal fees he incurred for his defence sent him severely into debt. He never returned to Hollywood, instead concentrating on writing novels including *Un-Americans* (1957), *The Symbol* (1966) and *Inquisition in Eden* (1965) which tells his own account of the hearings.

From my study of the HUAC hearings and the fates of the Hollywood ten I have to agree with David Cook's assessment of the committee's actions and the consequences it had afterwards; -

“The committee's action was scandalous, but its meaning was crystal; HUAC wished to purge Hollywood and, if possible the entire country of any and all liberal tendencies by creating and then exploiting anti – communist hysteria. The threat of state censorship loomed, and panic broke out in the nation's most image-conscious industry, which was already plagued by antitrust actions, unemployment, and rapidly declining profits.”^{xvii}

The resulting era was one was in my opinion the darkest in the richness of Hollywood history. The 1947 hearings were just the beginning. Throughout the 1950's, beginning in 1951, HUAC would hold more hearings into communist subversion within Hollywood in a sustained effort to root out communists. Hundreds more screenwriters, directors, producers and actors would be added to the blacklist rolls with their only chance of getting off them to return and inform on the people they believed to be members of the communist party or to have committed acts that were to be considered Un-American. Robert Vaughn sums up the process; -

“If a man was a Communist and denied it before the committee, he went to jail for perjury. If he admitted he was a Communist, he was then asked to inform on his friends; if he refused, he went to jail for contempt because he had already waived protection of the Bill of Rights when he answered in the affirmative to the first question.”^{xviii}

Notable names on the list included Elia Kazan, Anne Revere, Howard De Silva, Jules Dassin, Michael Gordon, Waldo Salt and Dorothy Parker. In a time when film was facing the emerging medium of television it purged itself of some of its top talent. The golden era of Hollywood was ended. The members of this small town were about to enter a very different period.

“The HUAC hearings had left a legacy of distrust and wasted talent. The resentment felt toward those who had given names during the hearings lingered for decades, resurfacing when Kazan was given a lifetime – achievement Oscar in 2000.”^{xix}

Neither side really benefitted from the show that was Washington vs. Hollywood. The public was split on the actions of both sides. The blacklist would end around 1960. Afterwards Hollywood would revisit the legacy of the blacklisting era with films like *The Front* (1976), a film that critically examines the effects of being blacklisted on the lives of the victims.

“Hollywood eventually directly examined the legacy and fallout of HUAC’s hearings and the blacklisting of artists in the poignant dark comedy *The Front* (1976). Directed by blacklisted director Martin Ritt, written by blacklisted screenwriter Walter Bernstein, and starring a host of blacklisted actors including Zero Mostel (Hecky Brown/Herschel Brownstein) and Herschel Bernardi (Phil Sussman). The film stands as a major achievement: it is the first studio film to directly criticize the blacklist and address its myriad effect on writers, actors, producers, and their families.”^{xx}

Even today the HUAC hearings are a tough subject for many. That was a very different time with very different issues. The greatest difference between that era and modern times is the atmosphere surrounding the industry. In the cold war atmosphere in which the hearings took place, they represented the darker side of the fear and mistrust caused by the geopolitical situation.

However in his book, *The Art and Politics of Film*, John Orr talks about what Hollywood should be thankful for.

“In the West, The Cold War produced two kinds of movie genre: James Bond plus the spy thriller, and the irresistible rise of science fiction. In Soviet Cinema, too, were to be found equivalents for popular consumption, with the nationalities of heroes and villains reversed. Yet there is a richer legacy. As we have seen, comparisons between *2001* and *Solaris*, or *Stalker* and *Blade Runner* continue to fascinate.”^{xxi}

I would say that in the end the right legacy of the cold war era was carried on and while we should be mindful of the hearings and the blacklist, we should keep them as an academic pursuit of the history of the film industry where we can learn the lessons of them lest they ever be unfortunately repeated.

Endnotes:

- ⁱ Kristen Thompson & David Bordwell, *Film History an Introduction 3rd Ed.*, (New York, McGraw-Hill, 2010) Pg 298
- ⁱⁱ <http://jpetrie.myweb.uga.edu/TJ.html>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Reynold Humphries, *Hollywood's Blacklists: A political and cultural history*, (UK, Edinburgh University Press, 2008) Pg 90
- ^{iv} Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust, American Cinema in the 1940's*, (USA, University of California, 1999) Pg 308
- ^v <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6442>
- ^{vi} Victo S. Navasky, *Naming Names*, (USA, Penguin Books, 1981) Pg 97
- ^{vii} Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust, American Cinema in the 1940's*, (USA, University of California, 1999) Pg 310
- ^{viii} Robert Vaughn, *Only Victims*, (USA, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972) Pg 93/94
- ^{ix} Tino Balio, *The American Film Industry Rev. Ed.* (USA, University of Wisconsin, 1985) 410
- ^x Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust, American Cinema in the 1940's*, (USA, University of California, 1999) Pg 313
- ^{xi} Robert Vaughn, *Only Victims*, (USA, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972) Pg 112
- ^{xii} Bernard F. Dick, *Radical Innocence: A Critical Study of the Hollywood Ten*, (USA, University of Kentucky Press, 1989) Pg 12
- ^{xiii} <http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2009/10/17/archives/then-and-now/communism-hollywood.html>
- ^{xiv} Robert Vaughn, *Only Victims*, (USA, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972) Pg 114
- ^{xv} <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/trumbo.htm>
- ^{xvi} Bernard F. Dick, *Radical Innocence: A Critical Study of the Hollywood Ten*, (USA, University of Kentucky Press, 1989) Pg 166, 167
- ^{xvii} David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film 4th Ed.*, (USA, W. W. Norton and Company, 2004) Pg 382
- ^{xviii} Robert Vaughn, *Only Victims*, (USA, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972) Pg 114
- ^{xix} Kristen Thompson & David Bordwell, *Film History an Introduction 3rd Ed.*, (New York, McGraw-Hill, 2010) Pg 298
- ^{xx} Mark Sachleben & Kevin M. Yenerall, *Seeing the Bigger Picture: Understanding Politics Through Film and Television*, (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 2008) Pg 67
- ^{xxi} John Orr, *The Art and Politics of Film*, (UK, Edinburgh University Press, 2000) Pg 50

Bibliography:

Kristen Thompson & David Bordwell, *Film History an Introduction 3rd Ed.*, (New York, McGraw-Hill, 2010)

John Petrie, <http://jpetrie.myweb.uga.edu/TJ.html>, last accessed 22/05/2012

Reynold Humphries, *Hollywood's Blacklists: A political and cultural history*, (UK, Edinburgh University Press, 2008)

Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust, American Cinema in the 1940's*, (USA, University of California, 1999)

William Bruce Wheeler and Susan D. Becker, *Discovering the American Past: A Look at the Evidence, Volume II: Since 1865*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990), <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6442>, last accessed 21/05/2012

Spartacus Educational Publishers Ltd, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/>, last accessed 23/05/24

Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names*, (USA, Penguin Books, 1981)

Robert Vaughn, *Only Victims*, (USA, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972)

Tino Balio, *The American Film Industry Rev. Ed.* (USA, University of Wisconsin, 1985)

Bernard F. Dick, *Radical Innocence: A Critical Study of the Hollywood Ten*, (USA, University of Kentucky Press, 1989)

Jeff Nilsson, <http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2009/10/17/archives/then-and-now/communism-hollywood.html>, 2011, accessed 18/05/2012

Michael Mills, <http://www.moderntimes.com/huac/>, 2007, last accessed 15/05/2012

Petri Liukkonen, <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/trumbo.htm>, 2008, last accessed 21/05/2012

David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film 4th Ed.*, (USA, W. W. Norton and Company, 2004)

Mark Sachleben & Kevin M. Yenerall, *Seeing the Bigger Picture: Understanding Politics Through Film and Television*, (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 2008)

John Orr, *The Art and Politics of Film*, (UK, Edinburgh University Press, 2000)

Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema 2nd Ed.*, (UK, Blackwell Publishing, 2003)